

Life With Autism: Hunter's Story of Hope, New Friends, and Fun.

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This publication is meant as a source of valuable information for the reader. However, it is not meant as a substitute for direct expert assistance. If such a level of assistance is required, the services of an expert professional should be sought. Some information about autism was received from www.kidshealth.org.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to families of children diagnosed with
Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Although you may have difficulties and are still learning to navigate the behavioral challenges and concerns with your child, be encouraged. With the right tools, hard work, and hands-on communication skills, your child will begin to thrive and meet their developmental milestones.

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INTRODUCTION

Hello.

My name is Hunter Reed.

I am eight years old, and I am in the second grade.

I love to read and do math, but I do not like to be around a lot of people.

I've never been able to talk, so sometimes I have to scream to get people to pay attention to me. Sometimes, I even kick things or throw things to get their attention when they are not looking at me.

I have bad days at school.

One day, my parents took me to a brown building. After that, a lot of things started to change.

This is my story...



THE BROWN BUILDING

“Hunter, don’t be afraid,” his dad said. He smiled as they pulled into the parking lot of the brown building. “We are going to meet with some people here and find out why you have not spoken words yet.”

Hunter smiled back at his dad. His mom held his hand as they walked into the office. A lady wearing glasses and a green-and-yellow dress was sitting at the front desk.

Hunter’s dad introduced himself. “Good morning, I am Mr. Reed. We have an appointment with Mrs. Jones. My wife and I are here to have our son, Hunter, tested today.”

“Yes,” she replied. “We were expecting you. I’ll let her know you are here.”

“Thank you,” he said.

Mrs. Jones came out of the office and introduced herself to everyone. She told Hunter's parents it would take about three hours to complete the testing, and they could go get some breakfast or wait in the lobby area.

"Alright," his parents replied.

"Come on, Hunter," said Mrs. Jones.

Hunter looked back at his parents. His dad nodded and pointed at Mrs. Jones, so Hunter followed her. She walked Hunter to a classroom. She began asking him questions, but he did not care about answering her. He could not speak and did not want to look at her face. He walked away from her and looked at the colors on the wall instead.

The room had a giraffe, monkey, tree, and butterflies painted on the walls. It was amazing to him. He wished his bedroom walls were like that. It was like a zoo or a forest.



Mrs. Jones asked, "Hunter, will you please come to the table? I want to see if you can solve these math and spelling problems."

Hunter walked back to the table and sat down. This is what his teacher always wanted him to do in class—sit, sit, sit. Mrs. Jones gave him a pencil and a paper with math problems on it. He saw $5+17$, $21+6$, $31+10$, and $10+17$. Then she gave him about ten subtraction problems, and those were much harder. He liked addition more than subtraction.

After completing the math problems, Mrs. Jones asked Hunter to write his name on the paper. He printed his name but had some problems with the H and the r. She helped him correct his letters and then asked him to write some other words: *kitten, computer, dance, card, and saw.*

"Good job, Hunter." Mrs. Jones smiled. "Now I want you to draw a line and match pictures with words."

Hunter looked at the paper. He was tired of doing work, so he stood up and walked away from her. The lines on the ceiling kind of looked like the animals that were painted on the wall, so he imagined different animals on the ceiling.

"Hunter, are you okay?" Mrs. Jones asked. Hunter continued to focus on the ceiling. She asked, "Would you like to play with the puzzle?"

Puzzle? He really liked puzzles, so he walked back to her table and sat down. It was a dinosaur puzzle with buildings and rainbow colors. Hunter took the puzzle apart and started putting the parts back together.

Mrs. Jones cheered, "Great job!"

Hunter smiled. *She was being silly. This puzzle was easy.*

"Hunter, I want you to try to sound out your alphabet letters.
Take your time. Just watch the alphabet video and
sound them out."

He tried to sound out the letters for Mrs. Jones, but no sound came out of his mouth. He pushed the puzzle off the table, jumped up from his chair, and went back to look at the animals on the wall.

After the meeting, Mrs. Jones met with Hunter's parents. He played with a truck on the floor as they talked.



"Mr. and Mrs. Reed, Hunter shows signs of having autism," she told his parents. Autism can be explained as a difference in the way a child's brain develops.

Hunter continued to play with the truck, and he listened.

"He has not spoken and enjoys playing alone because he has not developed speech skills or the comfort he needs to interact with others," she said. "Hunter is shy. He does not know how to express himself.

Children with autism may have trouble making friends or fitting in. It takes time, but he may eventually say words and play with other children."

Hunter noticed his mom's face looked sad. He went back to playing with the truck.

His dad asked, "How do we get Hunter to talk?"

"It may take time for children with autism to speak," Mrs. Jones replied. "Some children never speak but are taught sign language to communicate. Hunter may need speech therapy, and there may be other ways to help him communicate."

"How do I get this help for him?" Mr. Reed asked.

"I will give you a list of resources to help," Mrs. Jones said. "Some other signs of autism, which you may have noticed in Hunter, are things like not eating certain foods, being upset by loud noises, turning off lights, or closing doors. Some children may stare at objects for a long time, and some may flap their hands or arms."

“Wow! I did not know all that,” Hunter’s dad said. “Yes, Hunter likes to stare at the ceiling for a long time, even after I call his name. He screams and kicks things for no reason. Also, he refuses to eat some foods, but he loves bread. Sometimes he turns the bathroom light off and on, even when he isn’t using it. I just thought he might be afraid of the dark.”

“Each child with autism is different, but with the right tools, Hunter will be fine,” Mrs. Jones added.

Hunter’s mom said nothing.

As he continued to play with the truck, Hunter felt as if he really *would* talk one day, since Mrs. Jones told his dad he would be fine.

After the meeting, his parents shook hands with Mrs. Jones and thanked her for her help. Hunter gathered all the toys and put them back where Mrs. Jones had them, and then they left her office.

His parents started talking about him and the meeting as soon as they got into the car. The more they talked, the more upset they sounded.



Hunter thought, *I guess they don't think I understand what they're saying.* Soon, his mom was crying. His dad was very quiet. Hunter could tell they both thought it was their fault that he could not speak. He could not say anything, so he focused on playing with his Lego toy and listened to them argue.

After they got home, Hunter's mom went straight to her bedroom and packed her clothes in a suitcase. She gave him a hug, and he yelled because she squeezed a little too tightly. She went out the door and walked to the corner.

Hunter went to the window. A few minutes later, he watched as his mom got on a bus. He watched the bus drive away.



His dad slowly closed the door. He took Hunter's hand and led him away from the window. "It's alright, Buddy," he said. "Let's go have dinner. Grandpa is waiting in the kitchen." Hunter followed his dad, wondering where his mom had gone.

For many days, when the bus stopped near their house, Hunter looked out the window to see if his mom would get off the bus and come home. It did not happen.

He never saw his mom again.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

In September, it was time for Hunter to attend a new school, South Creek Elementary. He felt afraid and nervous as he and his dad walked through the school doors. Hunter had to start at this new school because he had bitten someone at his last school. He had also thrown a chair at a teacher.

Mr. Reed straightened the front of Hunter's shirt. He said, "Try to have a good day, Son, and *no* fighting." Hunter nodded.

A lady walked up to them. "Hi, I'm Mrs. Camps," she said. "It looks like you are lost."

Hunter's dad smiled. "I'm Mr. Reed. We are new to the school. I am looking for Mrs. Santrock's room."

"Welcome! I can take you to Mrs. Santrock," Mrs. Camps replied.

"What is this handsome little fellow's name?"



"This is Hunter. He doesn't speak."

Hunter smiled, but turned his head away as Mrs. Camps tried to shake his hand. Hands were sweaty, and he did not like that. She led Mr. Reed and Hunter into the cafeteria and stopped at a table where students and a few adults were seated.

"Hi. Mrs. Santrock. This is Mr. Reed and his son, your new student. His name is Hunter," Mrs. Camps said. She smiled, and then she walked back toward the front of the school.

"Hi, Mr. Reed. How are you doing?" Mrs. Santrock shook Mr. Reed's hand and turned to Hunter. "Hello, Hunter," she said. She held her hand out.

Hunter turned away.

"We're fine. Thanks for asking," Mr. Reed said. "Hunter doesn't like to shake hands."

"It's okay, Hunter," Mrs. Santrock said. "We are going to have a wonderful day today."

“Mr. Reed, we have a great team in our class. This is Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm. They are awesome teachers who work with our children.”

Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm said, “Nice to meet you,” to his dad. They both smiled at Hunter.



“Welcome to our class, Hunter,” Ms. Walker said. “The students are just getting their breakfast, so I’ll grab one for you, too.”

Hunter’s dad gave him a hug. He walked away, turned back and waved, and then left the cafeteria.

"It's time to line up, children," Mrs. Santrock announced. The students formed a line between Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm. Hunter followed the line to the classroom.



“Great job, everyone!” Ms. Malcolm said.

On their way, Mrs. Santrock clapped her hands. “Ms. Walker, will you get Lizzy? She is walking slower than a turtle and taking her sweet time. Kelvin, come back over here! Connor, stay in line. Ethan and Zavier, you are doing great. Hunter, you are doing very well with following directions.”

In the classroom, the students hung their coats and backpacks beside their names.

Mrs. Santrock said, “Hunter, you can take this seat next to Kelvin.”

Kelvin had braided hair. He liked to get out of his seat and grab things off Mrs. Santrock’s desk. He grabbed some cards and gave them to Hunter. Hunter walked away with the cards.

Ms. Walker played a video as everyone sat down to eat their breakfast.



While they were eating, a behavioral assistant, Ms. Hans, brought Joshua, Susie, and Jared into the class. Having more kids in the classroom made Hunter a little more nervous. There were a lot of kids in his last classroom, and he did not like it.

About fifteen minutes later, Mrs. Santrock played the *cleanup* song. The students placed their trash in the garbage can.

Then she announced, "Children, bring your chairs to the circle.
It is time to work."

They all gathered their chairs and came to the circle. Mrs. Santrock played some songs: the *feelings* song, the *weather* song, the *alphabet* song, and the *counting* song.



"Hunter, come to the board and point to what type of weather is outside," she said.

He looked at the floor as he walked to the board.

"Tell me, Hunter, is it cold outside? Is it warm? Is it sunny, or is it snowing?"

Hunter pointed to the sunshine on the board.

"Fantastic job, Hunter! You get a gummi bear!"

Kelvin walked away from the circle.

"Come sit down, Kelvin," Mrs. Santrock told him. "You are not following the rules. No snacks for you."

Kelvin stood up in his chair.

Mrs. Santrock said, "Kelvin, sit down in your chair!"

"Kelvin. There will be no snacks for you because you are not doing what you were told. You are not sitting down."

Kelvin smiled and yelled, "Looney Mo!"

He walked around the room and then grabbed a toy off
Mrs. Santrock's desk.

Ms. Walker took Kelvin to his chair. He sat down, but then stood back up.

"Do not pay any attention to him, and he will stop," Ms. Walker told Mrs. Santrock.

Kelvin sat down. Then Susie stood up and walked to the board. She took her shoes off and stood there.

Connor yelled, "Move, Susie!"

"Yes, Susie, please move," Mrs. Santrock added.

Susie would not move. She stared at the board. Then she fell to the floor.

Ms. Malcom said, “Susie, get up off the floor, and sit in your seat.”

Susie stood up, but she walked around the classroom instead of following directions. Finally, she stopped and sat on Ms. Malcolm’s lap.

“No, Susie,” Ms. Malcolm said. She helped Susie stand up. “Sit down in your own chair, please.”



Susie ran around the room while pushing chairs and pulling papers from the wall before sitting down in a corner. Kelvin walked over and sat on the floor beside her.

"Kelvin loves being around Susie," Mrs. Santrock said. She smiled and shook her head. "Kelvin, take your seat."

Kelvin rushed to his seat. Susie stood up and went to get her bookbag. She took out a book and walked over to Ms. Walker's desk with it.

"Susie, come pick up the chairs you knocked down," Ms. Walker told her. "And you must pick up these pictures before we read your book."

Susie picked up the chairs and placed them under the table. Next, she picked up the pictures.

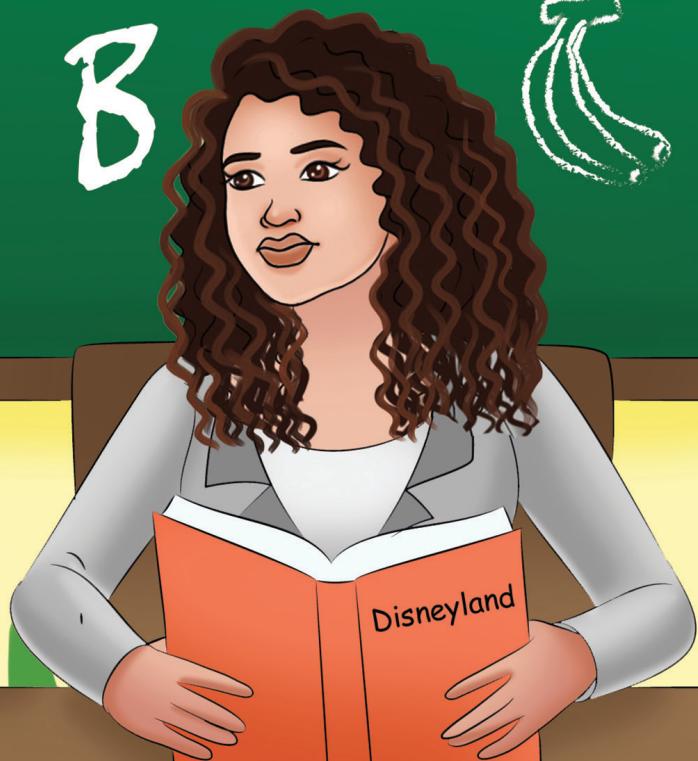
"Now be sure to tell Mrs. Santrock, Ms. Malcolm, and the rest of the class that you are sorry," Ms. Walker said. She helped Susie place the pictures back on the wall with tape.

Susie walked to the front of the class and softly said, "Sorry."



1 2 - 4 5 - 7 - 9 10

A -  B - 



Susie and Ms. Walker read her book. Afterward, circle time was over. Everyone returned to their seats at the tables.

Hunter liked Ms. Walker. *She is very kind*, he thought.

TIME TO ACT OUT DURING ART CLASS

Ms. Minks entered the class with a tote bag full of art supplies. She passed out paper, crayons, and cotton balls to all the students. Kelvin walked over to Hunter and gave him a toy he had taken without Mrs. Santrock knowing it.

It was a colorful toy with a spinning Mickey on top. Hunter started playing with it, but Mrs. Santrock saw him and asked, "Hunter, where did you get that Mickey toy from? Did you come to my desk and take it?"

He shook his head.

"Hand it over. It is art time." She held out her hand. "You may play with it later."

Hunter handed the toy to Mrs. Santrock and sat down next to Kelvin and Tavion, who were busy tracing and coloring pictures of Superman and Batman. Hunter liked superheroes. He reached for the crayons and began coloring along with the other students. For a while, all was calm.

It was not long before Kelvin was tired of coloring. He reached inside Ms. Mink's bag when she wasn't looking, and he took out a plastic glue bottle. He removed the top and squeezed, giggling as the glue spilled over the edges and dripped onto the floor. Before the teachers noticed, Kelvin handed glue to Hunter, Tavion, Joshua, and Jared. They copied him, spilling the glue and making a huge mess on the table. Kelvin opened another one, turned it upside down, and emptied the whole bottle onto the floor. Jared did it too.

Suddenly, Susie screamed. That got everyone's attention! She stood there, screaming loudly and pointing at the boys with the glue.

Ms. Minks and Mrs. Santrock spun around and saw what was happening. They both rushed to grab the glue from the boys as quickly as possible. Ms. Malcolm had been working with the other students. When she heard Susie scream, she jumped up from the table and ran to her to quiet her down.

She bent down and softly repeated, "It's okay, Susie. Calm down. It's okay."

Susie stopped pointing, but she kept on screaming.

Kelvin hollered, "Okay, everybody, let's scream too!"

Some students listened to him. They screamed.
They screamed loudly!

Kelvin crawled under Mrs. Santrock's desk, and Jared and Joshua joined him.

Hunter covered his ears and started screaming along with the others. It seemed like fun, just like at his old school.

The students were so loud that no one could hear Mrs. Santrock's instructions for them to stop screaming and return to their seats. She clapped her hands and repeated her instructions. No one paid any attention to her.

She rang the bell for help from the office.

Ms. Walker had heard the noise from the hall, and she hurried back to the classroom. She saw Kelvin, Jared, and Joshua under the desk. Tavion and Hunter were still seated at the art table, but they were still screaming.

Ethan was lying quietly on the floor with his shoes off. Susie had stopped screaming, but was still standing. She was pointing again.



"Kelvin, Joshua, Jared, come out from under that desk and walk to your seats right now!" Mrs. Walker said sharply. "Tavion and Hunter, be quiet."

Ms. Malcolm said, "Ethan, get up off the floor. Put your shoes back on and walk to your seat." She turned back to Susie. "Let's go, Susie. Let's return to our seats."

The students all responded. They returned to their seats and sat down quietly.

"I have to leave," Ms. Minks said as she packed up her art supplies. "It just got too wild in here for me! I hope it will be better next time."

"I'm sorry, Ms. Minks," said Mrs. Santrock as she watched her leave in a hurry.

“Ms. Walker, our students were out of control when you stepped out of the classroom. They followed Kelvin’s lead and refused to listen to me.”



“These children need structure,” Ms. Walker said. “They are just like regular kids, Mrs. Santrock. They misbehave. They know what they are doing.”

Mrs. Santrock sighed. "I am going to have to call Kelvin's mom."

Hunter hoped Mrs. Santrock would not call his dad and tell about his screaming. If she did, he knew he would not get to play his video games.

Maybe I shouldn't have screamed, he thought.

Hunter looked at the sticky mess on the table and floor. He turned, faced the wall, and began rocking.

LIZZY AT LUNCH TIME

At lunchtime, Ms. Walker took Lizzy, Joshua, Connor, Jared, and Hunter to the cafeteria so the students could get their lunches. Afterward, they returned to the classroom to eat at their desks.

A student from another class brought Susie's lunch to the classroom. Her mom had dropped it off at the school. It was chicken fingers and fries in a box.

The students were sitting and eating their lunches. Susie stood up and walked away because she wanted to sit next to Ms. Malcolm.

Lizzy quickly got up and went to Susie's desk. She grabbed some of Susie's fries.

"Lizzy, give that to me," Ms. Walker said. She held out her hand.

"No stealing."



Lizzy stared.

Ms. Walker said, "Lizzie... don't do it."

A few of the other students were watching. Susie still had not noticed.

Lizzy quickly opened her mouth, stuffed the fries into it, and rushed back to her seat. When she sat down and looked up, her cheeks were stuffed and poking out on the sides like a chipmunk. She was chewing the fries as fast as she could.

Lizzy looked hilarious! The other students started laughing.
Hunter was laughing too!

Ms. Walker tried her best not to laugh! She quickly turned her back so the students wouldn't see her face. She covered her mouth and thought, *sometimes, these kids are just too funny.*

Ms. Walker giggled.

Oh, well. She would have to teach them a quick lesson about taking other people's things later.

TIME TO ACT OUT IN MUSIC CLASS

Ms. Walker, Tavion, and Connor walked to the cafeteria to take the trays back and pick up snacks from the front office.

Mr. Brian, the music teacher, entered the classroom with his guitar and suitcase full of instruments.

"It's time for music, everyone," Mrs. Santrock said.

Jared whispered to Kelvin, "Watch Mrs. Santrock push the bell for help."

Jared threw several puzzle pieces at the board. He yelled, "Grab the drumsticks, Kelvin!"



Then he knocked over some chairs. He told Joshua to take cards from Mrs. Santrock's desk. Joshua and Kelvin did what Jared told them to do and then began running around the classroom.

Jared was laughing, dancing, and jumping. They all ignored Mrs. Santrock and Ms. Malcolm as they instructed them to return to their seats.

When Mrs. Santrock saw Kelvin climb onto the table and start to stand, she shouted, "No, Kelvin! That is dangerous! Do not stand on the table!"

Kelvin stopped. He sat in the middle of the table instead. Mrs. Santrock said, "Good, Kelvin. Now please come down off the table."



Kelvin shook his head and said, "No."

Hunter was not sure what to do. He knew Mrs. Santrock was not happy during art class when they had listened to Kelvin, and now Jared, Joshua, and Kelvin were misbehaving again. Hunter did not want Mrs. Santrock to call his dad. He sat in his chair, covered his ears, and rocked from side to side.

Susie also became upset. She lay on the floor and put her feet up against the board. She covered her face.

Just as Jared had said, Mrs. Santrock rang the bell for help when the three boys would not listen to instructions.

Within five minutes, several adults came into the classroom.



They stood at the side of the room and quietly watched what was happening. Hunter and some of the other students watched them, wondering what they were going to do. Hunter didn't know they were the school principals, Mrs. Nells, Mrs. Gims, and Dr. Braxton. The behavioral assistants, Ms. Hans and Ms. Weals were with them.

Ms. Walker and the other students returned from getting the snacks. She pointed at Kelvin and Joshua and then at their chairs. They both ran to sit down. Susie returned to her seat without being told.

Ms. Hans, Ms. Weals, and Dr. Braxton left the classroom. They took Jared with them.

The music teacher began to play a song on his guitar, and they sang, "If you're happy and you know it." Susie, Lizzy, Ethan, Zavier, and Hunter smiled and laughed as they clapped their hands with the music teacher. Kelvin and Joshua were seated next to Ms. Malcolm because of their misbehavior.

They still enjoyed the music, though, and they clapped along with the others.

Principal Nells and Principal Gims left the classroom, glad to see things had settled down.

Zavier walked over to Ms. Malcolm and Ms. Walker and said, "Amazing. Awesome. Are you okay?"

Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm looked at each other. Zavier laughed. He walked back over to the group, flapping his hands.

Ms. Malcolm smiled and shook her head. "Our babies..." she said. Ms. Walker chuckled.

Mrs. Santrock sat down next to them. "Ladies, we have had a challenging day. Our students were a bit out of control at times today."

"They just need structure," Ms. Walker said.

“Yes, and parents to work with them and discipline them,”
added Ms. Malcolm.

“It is *all* good. You just teach, and we will handle the behaviors,”
said Ms. Walker.

“You two are lifesavers. Thank you,” Mrs. Santrock said. “Now, I’m going to get these IEPs together before the day is over.”

Hunter remembered hearing the teacher at his old school talking about an IEP, but he was not sure what it meant. The teachers all knew it meant an Individualized Education Plan.

It was a plan to make sure each student got the help they needed to do their best in school.

A few minutes later, music time ended, and Mr. Brian left the classroom. Then it was time for outside recess. Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm had everyone line up to go outside.

RECESS TIME

On the playground, there were sliding boards, monkey bars, a rock-climbing wall, a sandbox area, and a kickball field.

Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm walked around the playground, watching the students play.

"Hunter, do you want to slide?" Ms. Walker asked.

He nodded.

"Come on." She waved him over to the slide. "You can do it."

Hunter walked up the stairs, sat down, and slid down the sliding board.

Ms. Walker smiled and put her hand up. She said, "High five!"



Hunter smiled at her and gave her a high five. He liked Ms. Walker. *She is nice*, he thought.

THE RIDE HOME

When it was time to go home, Hunter saw lots of kids getting into lots of school buses. He thought about his mom. He did not want to ride a bus because he never saw his mom again after *she* got on a bus. Some of his new friends were getting on the bus. It made him sad because he thought maybe he would never see *them* again, either. Hunter shook his head.

"Hunter, your dad is here," Ms. Walker called. She and Ms. Malcolm were waiting with the students as their parents came to pick them up.

Mr. Reed got out of the car and opened the door for Hunter. He got in, closed the door himself, and buckled his seatbelt.

His dad asked Mrs. Walker if everything had gone well since it was Hunter's first day.

"We had no problems with Hunter," she said. "We enjoyed having him in our class."

Ms. Malcolm added, "Yes, I believe Hunter had a good day today, and there will be many more good days ahead."

Hunter saw a huge smile spread across his dad's face. "Oh, I'm so glad to hear that," he said.

He was still smiling when he got back into the car. He checked Hunter's seatbelt.

"I'm proud of you, Hunter," he said.

As they drove away, Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm waved goodbye and called, "See you tomorrow!"



Hunter did not wave back, but... he smiled.

A lot of things are different now, but I feel okay about it.

The lady at the brown building is helping Dad understand more things about me. I think that is good.

I enjoyed my first day at my new school. That is good, too.

When we sat down at the table for dinner, Dad asked, "How was school today, Buddy?"

I smiled. I nodded my head and thought about all the funny things my classmates did. Mrs. Santrock was so silly. She always pushed the button to call for help. But she was also nice to me. I didn't like it when the kids made her upset.

Ms. Walker and Ms. Malcolm were kind to everyone, and I liked that. They didn't yell or get mad, even when the kids were misbehaving or not listening.

I made new friends today.

I can't wait to see them all tomorrow.

THE END

MAKE A FRIEND. BE A FRIEND

Hey there! If you want to be friends with an autistic child, that is super cool! Here are five tips that can help you be an awesome friend:

- 1. Be Kind and Patient:** Being friends with someone who is autistic means you might need to be a bit more patient sometimes. They might do things differently or need some extra time to understand things. Just remember to be kind and understanding, and you'll make a great friend.
- 2. Be Clear with What You Say:** Autistic friends might have trouble with gestures or understanding jokes. So, it's a good idea to use clear words and sentences when you talk. Don't worry, they'll really appreciate it.
- 3. Share Your Interests:** Everyone has things they love, right? Share your favorite games, hobbies, or toys with your autistic friend. They might have cool interests too, so you can learn new things together.
- 4. Respect Their Sensory Needs:** Sometimes, autistic kids might be sensitive to certain sounds, lights, or textures. If you notice that something bothers them, try to be understanding and find a way to make them feel comfortable.
- 5. Include Them in Activities:** Include your autistic friend in fun activities, like games, art, or outdoor adventures. It's a great way to bond and have a blast together.

Remember, being a good friend is all about kindness, understanding, and having fun together.

So go ahead and make an amazing friend!

