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# Boy Alone: A Brother's Memoir



## Synopsis

“Extraordinary” | Greenfeld details what it is like to grow up next to a “beautiful” boy with whom he can never play and never connect and who never returns his love, but who, nonetheless, is the most important fact of his life. • “Michael Thompson, Ph.D., co-author of *Raising Cain* “Beautiful and powerful” | A masterpiece of literature and memory. • “Walter Isaacson, author of *Einstein: His Life and Universe* “Gripping.” Washington Post A WASHINGTON POST BOOK WORLD BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR In this literary tour de force, Karl Taro Greenfeld, the acclaimed journalist and author of *China Syndrome*, tells the story of his life growing up with his brother, chronicling the hopes, dreams, and realities of life with an autistic sibling. Fans of Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking* and David Sheff’s *Beautiful Boy* will find many poignant, moving moments in *Boy Alone*.

## Book Information

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Memoirs

## Customer Reviews

Greenfeld has written a powerful, maddening book, pitting sentences that are a joy to read against a raw honesty that is almost impossible to accept. It is a work of philosophy as endurance contest. The story of his profoundly autistic younger brother, Noah, is a descent by degrees, the deterioration of a child who begins with all the ordinary promise of his big brother but then slides irrevocably to become a mute and sometimes violent and possibly insane adult. In the burgeoning field of works on autism, this book is like a hatchet thrown at the canon door. The idea that the best parents cannot save a child is rejected with a kind of violence by the prevailing talk-show culture,

but that is exactly what happens here. Noah walks into a relentlessly upbeat field of miracle cures and made-for-TV empowerment and overly moralistic breakthroughs with a terrifying defiance. Most of the growing number of new books on this subject are written by celebrated doctors and celebrities and shamen-dudes who address the uplifting and fascinating cases of high-functioning children who just need the right push to find a grip on reality and rise up to lead satisfying lives. As desperately as Karl seems to want this, growing up stoned and alienated in 1970s and '80s Pacific Palisades, it refuses to materialize. Instead, Karl's memoir addresses the ineffable, the humanity that inhabits a well-educated and successful family whose child does not get better.

"Time keeps on slipping, slipping, slipping, Into the future. I want to fly like an eagle, till I'm free. Fly like an eagle, let my spirit carry me."----Steve Miller Band, 1976  
At last! For years I have hoped Karl Greenfeld would share his experiences of growing up with his younger brother, Noah, whom Karl describes as "the most famous autistic child in the United States." Karl's father, Josh Greenfeld wrote a trilogy of brutally honest books about life raising his boys. The Noah Trilogy, as "A Child Called Noah," "A Place For Noah" and "A Client Called Noah" have been called have helped unmask the myth of saintly families who cheerfully sacrifice all for a member with multiple challenges. Josh Greenfeld's books are refreshingly brutal in their unabashed honesty. Before and After Zachariah: A Family Story About a Different Kind of Courage, which began as an article in the January 1980 issue of "Redbook" and was later expanded into book form mentions "A Place For Noah" by describing the "patchwork after school programs of the day care center." This book also describes the plight of the multiply challenged and the dire need for good placements. Karl, long relegated to the background because of his younger brother's great needs has finally taken his turn at bat. Born in Japan on November 26 1964, some 18 months before Noah's birth on July 1, 1966, Karl describes his life in the New York suburb of Croton, unaware of a life before and without Noah. He describes his life with Noah; as boys he said he and Noah did not grow up together; they grew apart.

As a mom to a 7 year old who has autism, I've read dozens of books on the subject, but never one like this. It is an incredibly important book, told from a perspective which is not often given voice, and crafted by a writer with an astonishing gift. The book provides a history of the development of autism treatments through the eyes of someone who lived it through his brother. Today, in the midst of a baffling array of treatments, it is all too easy to forget this history. Like many books written before it but set later in time, this one chronicles in brutal detail what it's like when a family becomes

centered around rescuing a child with autism. And it provides a much needed acknowledgement that no matter how hard parents and siblings try, it may not work. For the most part the book respects the importance of holding onto hope, at least until that becomes impossible. It is much needed because those books that now gain the most notoriety are mainly miracle stories. They too are critically important, but they do not provide the whole story. Living with autism is beyond difficult for everyone in the family, and this author's point of view as a sibling should be heard. He goes out of his way to point out that his problems are not his brother's fault, that he is "perfectly capable of [his] own f\*\*\*-ups." He has no more anger at his brother than many people harbor toward their typically developing siblings. But the device the author uses near the end of the book is just too cruel for readers who are still working and hoping for their autistic children. If you are a family member actively engaged in trying to give an autistic child a chance at the best life he or she can have, I suggest you read this book, but only at a time when you feel you can handle yet another kick in the gut.

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