

Anything but Typical

Nora Raleigh Baskin

And this is what someone would say, if they looked at me and could only hear in their own language.

That kid is weird (he's in SPED, you know). He blinks his eyes, sometimes one at a time. Sometimes both together. They open and close, open and close, letting the light in, shutting it out. The world blinks on and off.

And he flaps his hands, like when he is excited or just before he is going to say something, or when he is thinking. He does that the most when he's on the computer or reading a book. When his mind is focused on the words, it separates from his body, his body that almost becomes a burden, a weight.

Weight.

Wait.

Only his fingers don't stand still while they wait. They flap at the ends of his hands, at the ends of his wrists.

Like insects stuck on a string, stuck in a net. Like maybe they want to fly away. Maybe he does too.

In first grade they put a thick, purple rubber band across the bottom bar of his desk chair, so Jason would have something to jiggle with his feet when he was supposed to be sitting still. In second grade Matthew Iverson sent around a note saying, If you think Jason Blake is a retard, sign this, and Matthew go sent to the principal's office, which only made things worse for Jason.

In third grade Jason Blake was diagnosed with ASD, autistic spectrum disorder. But his mother will never use that term. She prefers three different letters: NLD, nonverbal learning disorder. Or these letters:

PDD-NOS, pervasive developmental disorder- nonspecific. When letters are put together, they can mean so much, and they can mean nothing at all.

From third grade until this year, sixth grade, Jason had a one-on-one aide who followed him around school all day. She weighed two hundred and three pounds. (Jason asked her once, and she told him.) You couldn't miss seeing her.

But the thing people see the most is his silence, because some kinds of silence are actually visible.