Matthew Dicks: *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend*

MacMillan, New York, 2012. 10 hours 57 minutes (Unabridged), \$27.99 (Audio)

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Max Delaney is an elementary school aged boy. Budo, Max's friend, thinks he is the bravest boy in the world. Max is a boy who is "somewhere on the autism spectrum" possibly diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. Budo thinks Max is brave because he goes to school every day. Max navigates through a world that is unpredictable and he does not understand. Budo is Max's imaginary friend. Budo helps Max decode the neurotypical world, make decisions, and recognize danger. Unlike other imaginary friends who die when their children grow up and no longer need them, Budo is an old timer. Most imaginary friends disappear in kindergarten or early elementary school. Budo wonders when he will die. He wonders when Max will no longer need him.

Max and Budo's world is turned upside down when Max is kidnapped by a well-known and trusted figure in his life. Here the story is reminiscent of Donoghue (2010) *Room: A novel* where the story is told from the vantage point of a five year old boy whose mother was held captive and raped. The boy is conceived as a result and knows no other world other than the four walls of his captivity. The vantage point in *Memoirs* is through the eyes of Max's eight year old imaginary friend.

The imaginary friend literary vehicle is a valuable technique or approach the author uses to explain how Max perceives the world, and how Max's teachers, peers, and parents feel about him. Budo articulates the thoughts and feelings of people who care for, work with, and love individuals on the autism spectrum. Budo also explains Max's unique perspective that many of us would not understand. This

description is the most valuable aspect of the book. This fictional account of a boy with autism may reach more readers than any academic tome on ASDs. Stories often are more instructive and stay with a reader longer than merely reading dry facts. In other cultures such as in Japan, the public is taught about autism through fictional manga stories such as Keiko Tobe's (2007). *With the light: Raising an autistic child. Memoirs of an imaginary friend* is a story of hope, courage and acceptance. However, some readers might find the story trite, sappy and predictable.

Central to the story is Max's favorite teacher; Mrs. Gauss. This teacher accepts Max unconditionally and uses his strengths and interests to teach him. A bonus feature of the audio book is an interview with the author, Matthew Dicks, as well as his fellow teacher who inspired the character. Matthew Dicks, and the real life, Mrs. Gauss, are the ordinary heroes who dedicate themselves to teaching all children including those on the autism spectrum. Their love of teaching is readily apparent in their interview. Our children on the autism spectrum need more teachers like Mr. Dicks and Mrs. Gauss. We also need more stories of hope. Perhaps, *Memoirs of an imaginary friend* should be thought of a parable or fable rather than a sweeping novel about life on the autism spectrum for a young boy.

References

- Donoghue, E. (2010). *Room: A novel*. New York: Hachette Audio.
Tobe, K. (2007). *With the light: Raising an autistic child*. New York: Yen Press. Hachette Book Group.

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