

**Note from Thomas:** Here is the published Foreword to *Light on the Horizon*, as written by Jan Serak. Whoever she is talking about here, I am glad I am not that person anymore.

## **Foreword**

"May I sit next to you?" I asked. Thomas McKean nodded his head.

It was my first ASA meeting in 1993 in Chicago. Thomas was wearing the same green sweat suit he had worn when I heard him speak at the 1992 ASA National Conference. As the meeting progressed, he made little moaning sounds. When I shuffled my papers or shifted in my chair, more moaning sounds. He left the room for a while. When he returned, I whispered, "Are you OK?" Another nod.

Thomas and I have become good friends since then. I now know that when he disappears it is that it is usually to swim or sleep with his bears. I also know that he's not a morning person, that eating is low on his priority list (he throws up when he eats certain foods), and that he does great impressions (especially Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, Katherine Hepburn, and Agent 86; Maxwell Smart). I know he has a way of cocking his head and scrunching his nose and eyebrows when uncertain about something or is trying to "read" someone's reaction. He still makes those little moaning sounds when his pain threshold is too challenged. I also know that he can be amazingly perceptive, candid, and sometimes even very stubborn.

Thomas and I have maintained our friendship mostly by phone, but we also see each other several times a year - at autism conferences and other events. I went to his thirtieth birthday party, given by his friend, Lee Werner, in Illinois. Thomas was not thrilled with the idea of turning thirty, nor with the shirt I gave him with the big #30 on the front (though he did like my home made bear). Now he writes of "being in his thirties," so he appears to be adjusting to the idea of his advancing age!

When I reached the end of his first book, *Soon Will Come The Light: A View From Inside The Autism Puzzle*, I had tears streaming down my face. I didn't want the book to end. I needed more information. I was thinking of my own son with autism, Benjamin, then sixteen, as I read the last page. "We must work to treat (people with autism) with the caring, the dignity, and the respect we would give anyone else. Because they deserve it." Yes, Thomas. How true!

Before I opened my draft copy of *Light On The Horizon: A Deeper View From Inside The Autism Puzzle*, my heart silently thanked Thomas for giving me another chance to to absorb autism from his viewpoint. Like most other parents, I crave reflections from those who have autism, so I could not believe my great good fortune to be one of the first to read it. I was not disappointed. When I finished reading *Light On The Horizon*, tears were once again running down my

cheeks. The second book in Thomas' planned trilogy easily passed my "tear test."

Knowing Thomas as I do, I know he loves receiving gifts, particularly bears. I must admit, however, that I chuckled to read about his misplaced Toronto presentation tape. I now have this vision of Thomas sitting in his condo amidst the avalanche of 5000+ tapes, with cocked head and scrunched nose and eyebrows, wondering where they all came from!

Light On The Horizon is written in a casual, chatty, and intimate style leaving the reader to feel as if the conversation would easily continue when meeting Thomas in person. I find it interesting that Thomas often refers to himself in the third person, as in, "The New Age looks at Thomas as a guru." He also likes to toy with big words, such as "Salubrious." I know Thomas enjoys imagining readers might need a dictionary now and then to keep up with him.

Some of the sub-topics in this book are expanded information first introduced in *Soon Will Come The Light*, and provide parents with many concrete strategies to try, such as bears, wrist bracelets, exercise, telephone modifications, round-handled tableware, prism and/or Irlen lenses, wrap around sunglasses, soothing sound machines, teething rings, Melatonin, oil in bath water, water filters, and the martial arts.

A number of topics are introduced in the book which are evidence of Thomas' matured ability for introspection. I have watched that same now-classic cocked head expression appear when asked questions during question/answer periods of his conference presentations which required him to think about how he felt in order to answer. The difficulty, as he explains in this book, is having "no emotional barometer." He encourages parents to share personal experience stories to help their children acquire a valid foundation for easier processing of emotions. I know in my heart that this and other information shared in this book will help me better understand ways to help my son.

Some of the real gut-wrenching parts of the book for me were Thomas' comments on the less tangible topics: "I have had more than my share of loneliness...silently searching for answers not to be found...great suffering in silence...constant state of fear...pain that is stronger than most people can possibly imagine." All of these are hard for a mother to read with her son in mind, and yet it all needs to be acknowledged. More comforting to me was chapter six, the elaborate description of the "Alternate Reality" (A/R). It made me hope that my son has an alternate reality for relief when life becomes too painful.

There is evidence of Thomas' acceptance of his advocacy responsibility as generated by his notoriety. "By helping each other improve, we ultimately improve ourselves," he writes. He urges us to join in waving the banner of caring, dignity and respect for those with autism. I know that he is generous with

his time and money, talking with people from all over the country and other parts of the world.

He helps with possible solutions for problems with their child, client, or student. He attends meetings with parents to help explain autism to professionals and educators, and to advocate for more effective supports. The thick Appendix of his many other writings and essays (published and unpublished) on various aspects of autism shows his continued advocacy efforts.

Light On The Horizon helped me to appreciate the struggles my son must face on a daily basis to be "the Phoenix and rise again." I am still eager for more information, and look forward to the third book in the trilogy!

Jan Serak  
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