

Autism Hits Home

Karl Taro Greenfeld spent much of his youth helping care for his autistic brother Noah, who attracted media attention after their dad profiled him in three books. Greenfeld, now 44 and the father of two, tells the story of his own upbringing in a new book, 'Boy Alone.' "Somehow my parents and I found a way to accommodate Noah and live our lives," he says. "But it's a daily challenge." —KATE WARD

Your father wrote about Noah. Now you are. Why?

I really didn't want to write about him for most of my life. Part of that is because until I had daughters of my own and observed their relationship, I didn't understand how my relationship with Noah had been normal—and how it had been abnormal. And the other thing is, I never read anything about adult autistics.

It's like they vanish when they turn 16. And the low-functioning kids are going to need lifelong supervision. Believe me, that care is not out there in the way we like to think it is. And I felt like, well, this is an issue that needs to be more broadly discussed.

How is Noah doing now?

He remains a handful. But we take the small incremental improvements when we can get them.

You must look at parenting differently because of what you went through as a boy.

I started out with a very low bar for what I wanted from my kids. I wanted them to be able to talk. That was my great ambition in the beginning. And now I'm just like any other parent. I want my older daughter to nail down her times tables, and I want them doing all the stuff they're supposed to be doing. But I am able to step back and remind myself, you know, I've really come out ahead here. "Normal" is a wonderful thing for a parent.

