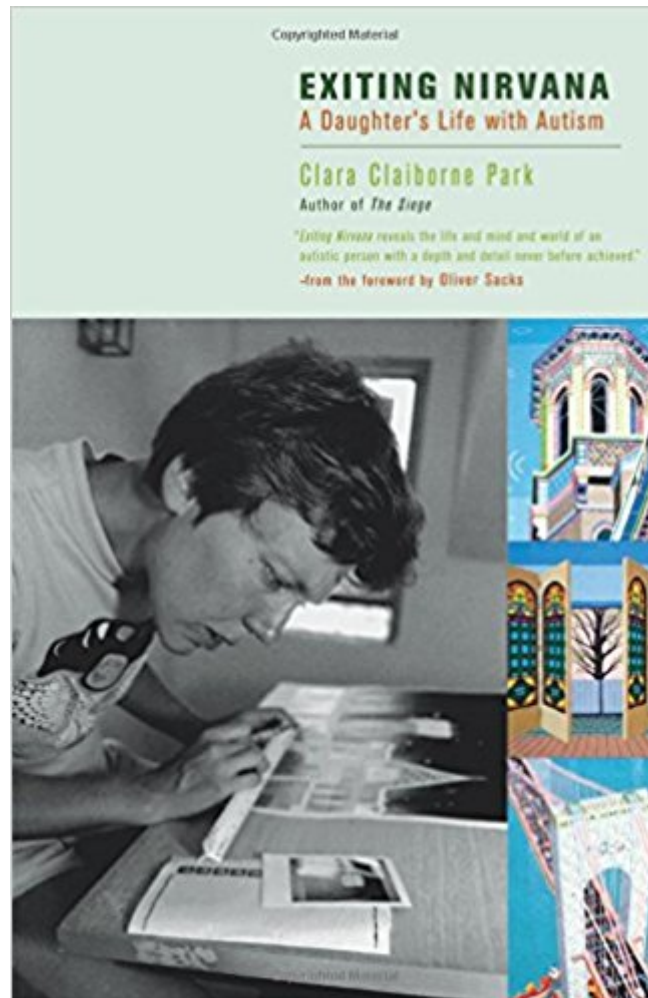




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# Exiting Nirvana: A Daughter's Life With Autism



## Synopsis

Exiting Nirvana" is a strong and affecting profile of an artist with autism, beautifully written by her mother. . . . Skillfully weaving in theories of autism with the experience of raising an autistic child, Park goes beyond individual history to address the wider question of what it means to be human".--from the National Magazine Awards presentation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Thirty-four years after *The Siege*, Park's account of her autistic daughter's first eight years, she delineates Jessy's journey from being a barely verbal child to an adult fascinated with language and the mind. According to Park, Jessy exhibits many of the idiosyncratic mathematical obsessions associated with autism, but has fewer verbal skills than other autistic people. A superb artist, she stuns viewers with her dynamic paintings, which sell well. Her stable and happy life consists of painting; working in the mailroom at Williams College, where until recently her mother taught English; cooking; and doing most of the housework in the home she shares with her aging parents. Though a blessing, these achievements are fragile; Jessy can never live alone, she speaks English as if it were a second language and, equipped with even less understanding of emotions than most of us, cannot truly grasp nuanced human interaction. Park has been both mother and anthropologist, recording verbal and social breakthroughs and setbacks, administering praise and succor. She describes the serene insularity of the autistic's "Nirvana," and observes collisions between the autistic and external worlds. She's urged Jessy to enter, "yet never entirely," the

extraordinary dailiness inhabited by nonautistic people. In incisive, often exquisite prose, Park affords entry into Jessy's and her own remarkable journey between the two. Illus. (Mar. 8) Forecast: Oliver Sacks, who featured Jessy in his PBS series *The Mind Traveller*, has contributed an enthusiastic introduction to this deserving book, which will appeal to readers of Karyn Seroussi and Bernard Rimland's *Unraveling the Mystery of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder* (2000) and Temple Grandin and Oliver Sacks's *Thinking in Pictures* (1996); expect healthy sales. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Park's earlier work, *The Siege* (LJ 11/1/67), was one of the first accounts by a mother of a family's attempts to communicate with an autistic child. In this sequel, Park, a former professor of English at Williams College and a well-known speaker on autism, reviews her daughter Jessy's development over 40 years, recording achievements as well as setbacks. Jessy, now middle-aged, keeps house for her elderly parents, works as a mail clerk, and is a successful artist. Park describes Jessy's ecstatic delight in numerical systems, colors, and categories and the ways that she has channeled these obsessions into her paintings and into routines for daily living. Yet Jessy's social and verbal skills remain incomplete; she continues to have difficulty putting herself in others' situations, understanding different points of view, and expressing feelings. For Park, Jessy's "real achievements are in the realm of the practical, the necessary, the unromanticizable the things that make her employable in the community and useful at home." This beautifully crafted portrait of an autistic adult artist includes color reproductions of Jessy's paintings, with descriptions in her own handwriting. Recommended for all libraries. [Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 11/15/00; Park's essay of the same name appeared in the *American Scholar* and won the Feature Writing category at the 1999 National Magazine Awards. Ed.] Lucille M. Boone, San Jose P.L., C.- Lucille M. Boone, San Jose P.L., CA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read an excerpt of this book in Harper's magazine before I found the book itself and was mesmerized by the account of living with an autistic child - written by of the parent of one. It is clear that Clara Claiborne Park, the mother of Jessy Park, has also tried to understand her daughter's perceptions of the world, at least as much as any non-autistic person can, and to reveal that world to "outsiders" (those with no first-hand experience being with an autistic person). She has done an admirable job. I've read quite a bit about autism and autistic children and this book ranks among the

best. In addition to her own feelings, Jessy's mother uses Jessy's own quotations and poems to try and help others understand her daughter's world. Like another relatively well-known autistic, Temple Grandin, Jessy is a "high-functioning" autistic. She can hold down a job, she has had art exhibitions of her drawings and she attended school for many years. Still, her world is far from what most of us would call normal and her social interactions with people outside her family are still rather limited. She has trouble with unexpected changes in her usual routine and she has never fallen in love, at least not with another person. She sees the world in minute detail in some areas, creating drawings that are extremely precise and accurate, and yet fails to grasp the subtle nuances of social give and take, the emotional vocabulary so many of us take for granted. What I found particularly fascinating about this book was the way it changed my perspective about what normalcy is. If you read this book, I would strongly recommend getting a look at Jessy's drawings sometime, whether at an exhibition or however else you may find them (perhaps searching down that back issue of Harpers; wish I remembered the issue off the top of my head). Her drawings of routine objects, particularly houses, are striking for their attention to detail and a shimmering vibrant sense of color that goes beyond simple copying of what is in front of her eyes. I wish I could see the world as she does for just one day, not because it would be better than the way I see the world now, not because I have any romantic illusions that the autistic leads a charmed life (no one reading this book could feel that way) but because I would like to know what that world was like, in all its beauty, pain and alienation.

Good job. Gets bogged down at times, but Ms. Park does an excellent job of recognizing this. She often explains that if we feel a little lost in the explanation, it is a normal experience. Great insight into an unusual perspective on life.

was ok not like her daughters book

Cannot recommend this book highly enough. So well written, well-described and interesting. Such a fine objective, yet sympathetic observations. I just loved this book.

I really enjoyed this story and would recommend it to anyone who is interested in autism or aspergers syndrome. Read this one after you've read Temple Grandin's autobiography.

Good to read! It is a good story about a girl who has autism. And how fantastic her mom is!

The Siege was better.

Very disappointed in purchase as halfway through the book part over a dozen pages were 3/4 cut out throughout the remaining book.

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