



EDITORIAL REVIEW LETTER



Thank you again for trusting me with your manuscript and for sharing your story. I know how vulnerable it can feel to let someone critique your writing when you've put so much of your story into it. Way to be brave!

As I mentioned during our initial meeting, all of my comments below and within the manuscript are suggestions that you can choose to take or leave – it's up to you! I hope they will be helpful to you in making your book the best that it can be. If you choose to take my suggestions, now is when your work begins. Don't be discouraged – you've already come so far and this is just part of the process 😊.

MANUSCRIPT STRENGTHS

These are some of the things that I love about your story:

- ❖ I like your title – it's perfect! (I encourage you to come up with a subtitle too).
- ❖ You write with an encouraging tone, showing so much grace for your sons and always looking for the positive in them.
- ❖ I love how authentic you are in sharing your story. You're not afraid to show the mistakes you made. You show the mess, and it's real.
- ❖ I enjoy the humor that comes out in your "voice" when you write. It's as if I can almost hear you saying it and it brings lightness to a tough season of parenting.
- ❖ You show a lot of wisdom in your story about choosing your battles with your sons. It's here that your parenting experience really shows.
- ❖ That story about how God gave you perspective by seeing other children with more difficult life challenges was a beautiful moment.
- ❖ Your perseverance and endurance shines throughout. You are an inspiration!

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

1. OVERALL LENGTH

Your manuscript, not including chapters 17-21 (more on that later) is currently at 18,587 words. In self-publishing, you can publish just about anything at any length, [but to be marketable I suggest that you aim for 40,000-50,000 words](#). Before you get totally overwhelmed by the thought of doubling your word count, keep in mind that a good portion of that can come from “beefing-up” what you’ve already written (see the separate “sample scene” attachment). You’ll find more suggestions for how to go about doing that in my following comments.

2. CHAPTERS

With a word count of 40-50k, you’ll want to shoot for chapters that are 2,000-2,500 words in length. This would give you 20-25 chapters. Currently, your chapters have a large variance in length. I’ve noted the word count of each chapter in the “Current Chapter Outline” attachment. I recommend that each chapter be 3-5 scenes with some narrative connections. Scenes should move the story along and support the narrative arc. Choose your scenes to best capture your point. For example – instead of writing multiple scenes that essentially make the same point (i.e. hyperactive kids don’t process what they’re doing until later), write one scene to represent that point. If you had similar experiences with both Michael and Jason, just choose one to write about.

Not all of your chapters have titles. Choose a title that is catchy, interesting, and represents the content of that chapter. Should you choose to do some restructuring based on my other comments, you may want to re-title your chapters.

3. EMOTIONAL CONTENT

In my opinion, your story needs more of you in it – your thoughts, emotions, and reactions. Your readers are probably going to be parents of children with special needs, and they are going to want not just an explanation of what your sons did and how you handled the situation; they will want to relate to the rawness of your emotions so they feel they are not alone in feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, etc. Show the reader how you felt when you were judged by others, when you saw that mess in the kitchen, when you feared for your son’s safety. Who did you lean on? Who encouraged you along the way? Who did you go to for advice? Did you question

yourself as a parent? Did you ever feel like a failure and how did you deal with those feelings? These will be your strongest points of connection to the reader.

4. SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

I know you are a woman of faith and you write openly in your story about church, Christian schools, etc. You also acknowledge up front that it was largely due to your Christian beliefs that you were able to persevere. Unless you are specifically trying to appeal to a secular audience, I encourage you to weave more of your spiritual journey into your narrative. Write out one of your desperate prayers to God when you felt like you were at the end of yourself. How did He fill you with love and grace for your sons? How did you feel about the church when you discovered that “the church would be the first place my child was not accepted”?

5. SHOW VS. TELL

There is a phrase often used in the writing and editing world – “show not tell.” In writing a memoir, you need to employ fiction techniques to create scenes that draw your reader into your story. For example:

- ❖ Create the setting. What cultural elements from the 1970’s can you weave in (popular toys, music, fashion, etc.)? What was the climate in Oregon and California? How big was the church?
- ❖ Employ sensory details. What color and texture were those drapes Jason cut up? What did the food in the special diet taste like? What kind of roof did Michael climb on at church?
- ❖ Use dialogue. You don’t have to remember exactly what was said, so long as you stay true to the meaning/outcome of it.

In the same way, I encourage you to also show-not-tell your “lessons learned.” There are a couple reasons for this. First, your tone changes as soon as you start “telling” your reader something. It’s a bit blunt and off-putting to have an author say, “You need to do this...” or “this is how it is...” That’s more suited for a how-to book. As you yourself pointed out, each child is unique, and your parent readers – though they will be encouraged by your story – are on a different journey and what worked for you may not work for them.

Secondly, the “lessons learned” disrupt your memoir style and storytelling. Your readers can pick-up how-to books about parenting and the science of medications. What makes your story unique is that it’s *your experience*. You lose that when you

start switching into teaching mode. Your reader is smart – they will conclude many of those lessons learned simply by reading your story. If you do want to write directly about what you learned, weave it into your story using “I” instead of “you.” To help you see where you switch back and forth, I have **highlighted** in yellow the sections where you start teaching the reader.

That being said, I think the “lessons learned” could be helpful in structuring your book and organizing your chapters (see “proposed structure” attachment).

6. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Though Michael and Jason are the stars of this story, I encourage you to develop your other characters (yourself included!). Terri gets only a few mentions in your story, yet “normal” children are profoundly impacted by their siblings with special needs. Show more of Terri’s interactions with her brothers and how you all operated as a family unit. Did she get ignored because you had to focus so much on her brothers? Was there a special, one-on-one memory you have with her?

Your husband Ron could also benefit from more airtime. You may have had more responsibility for the boys and more involvement in their schooling, but you weren’t a single parent. How did you and Ron parent together? How did he respond differently from you to the boys? Did you ever disagree on discipline? How did you both handle the inevitable strain on your marriage?

Pick a few supporting characters to develop – one of the boys’ friends, a teacher, or one of your friends. Name them and include them in a scene with some description.

7. ON BEGINNINGS & ENDINGS

Beginnings and endings are difficult! Your beginning needs to hook the reader. Autobiographical starters, such as “We got married in 1960” are not strong or effective. Start with an action or a “day-in-the-life” scene that jumps the reader right into the story. Here are some suggested beginnings for your book:

- ❖ Open with the scene of you babysitting for those “terrible parents.” It’s slightly shocking and foreshadows what your own experience will be. It will show the change in your beliefs and judgements later on too. This could work as a prologue or as chapter 1.
- ❖ Open with a scene of young Michael or Jason doing something that demonstrates a characteristic of ADHD. The story about Jason walking down

the street with his harness and bed rail would be great, and right off the bat shows: this is life as a parent of a hyperactive child.

Chapters 18-20, your children's narratives, would be best suited for an epilogue, instead of being in the story itself. I recommend that you choose a few of their quotes and combine it with the "where are they now?" section for a short epilogue. Chapter 21 is also not part of the story – that should be your acknowledgements section. I recommend that you incorporate the glossary of terms into the story at the relevant times. Try ending with a poignant moment, a summary reflection, or a tie-in to your beginning. Where you end will be based on the narrative arc of your whole book. What do you want to leave your reader with? What is your takeaway message?

Here are some suggestions for endings:

- ❖ You could end with a celebration like graduation that represents the end of childhood and thus your season of parenting (you made it!).
- ❖ You could end with a reflection of your parenting years – what made it all worth it? What did God teach you?

NARRATIVE ARC

"Narrative arc" refers to the chronological construction of plot in a novel or story. Typically, a narrative arc looks something like a pyramid, made up of the following components: exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. A good story will have an overall narrative arc, as well as mini arcs within each chapter. Here is a sample overall arc:

Exposition – introducing hyperactivity, setting, family life

Rising Action/Conflict – the young boys' escapades, struggles in school, judgements of others

Climax – the toughest moments: rages, dropping out of school, etc.

Resolution – Graduating, turning out ok, reflections

8. CHRONOLOGY

In memoir, it is perfectly acceptable to be non-linear in your chronology. Flashbacks, foreshadowing, and backstory all add interest to the story, so long as you do it well in a way that is not confusing. You start your story chronologically – marriage, Terri's birth, Michael's birth, Michael's schooling, etc. After Jason is born, your chronology starts to get a bit messy as you jump around in time. The first half of the book focuses on Michael; the second half on Jason (with a little bit of Michael mixed in still). I'd like

to see you integrate Michael and Jason's chronologies together. Many of the things they (and you) struggled with were the same, so you can eliminate redundancy while still highlighting their differences. Instead of organizing your memoir chronologically, I suggest you organize it by topic – grouping related stories together. See the "Proposed Chapter Outline" attachment.

9. COPYEDIT SUMMARY

I noticed a few overused phrases. We all do this, and sometimes it just takes a second set of eyes to point out the trend! In the manuscript I have used a teal highlight to note the overuse of the following:

"You can imagine"

"Very" (use superlatives sparingly)

"It was about this time/it wasn't too long after that"

I recommend that you review capitalization rules and apostrophe usage as well. Apostrophes are used to show possession, not plurality. For example:

"The two little cherub-looking boys were in their blue wooly bear sleeper's." In this case, the sleepers are plural, not possessive, so there should be no apostrophe.

I noticed that many of your sentences have two or three spaces at the beginning instead of one. I changed all the sentences that I found to one space, for consistency.

I also changed the formatting so that all your chapters start on a new page.

So, there it is! It's been a privilege working on your story and I look forward to discussing all this with you in person soon.

