

BEST SELLING AUTHOR TO TALK AUTISM IN WILMETTE

It isn't every day that a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author comes to the Village of Wilmette to speak. But that's just what will happen on November 19, when Ron Suskind, author of his recently published memoir "Life, Animated" speaks at the Community Recreation Center. Suskind will be speaking along with his wife Cornelia about the book, their son Owen and their lives parenting a child with autism.

"We were interested in his writing and we were interested in the subject," said Amy Barrow, Reference Librarian of the Wilmette Public Library, which is sponsoring the highly anticipated event, "I thought it was a wonderful book. I could not turn the pages fast enough."

Suskind's son was diagnosed with a regressive form of autism at age three. He didn't respond to Ron's or Cornelia's attempts to reach him. It wasn't until they overheard Owen quoting dialogue from the Disney movie "The Little Mermaid" that the Suskinds found a way to break through to him. Owen was saying the word "Juicervose", which made the Suskinds think that he wanted juice. But they were wrong.

After Owen reworded the scene over and over again, the Suskinds realized that he was quoting the line "just your voice" from a musical number. They'd found their breakthrough. It's through this line they realized his love of Disney and how it could help him communicate. A later trip to a doctor and then Disney World confirmed their hunch.

"I think that was a big part of Owen's life for many years," said Ron, "As it is, I think the life of many folks on the spectrum who are saying, 'hey, you know, look inside here. Help me to express my essence, who I am, even if I don't have words, I don't have speech, there's always a way'."

Suskind wrote "Life, Animated" to express not only how Owen has grown, but also how his family has grown as a result of their experience. "I wrote the book because when Owen turned about 19 years old, he started to arrive at a point of self-awareness where he was feeling proud of who he was," Suskind said. "He said to me and Cornelia, 'I want people to know who I am and the way I am.'"

Owen watched other movies like "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (quoting the character Laverne saying how life is not a spectator sport) and the famous "The Lion King" quote that went viral of Owen using a line from that movie to explain who he was to Ron. He used the movie quotes to create, as Ron put it, an emotional language for himself. It also led Ron to help develop what he called "Affinity Therapy", a way to help people with autism through their affinities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 68 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism or a related disorder. And, according to Dr. Denise Thrasher, Administrator of Student and Special Services for School District 39, 8% of students who receive special education services in the District have been diagnosed with autism. These staggering statistics, and increased general interest in the disorder makes Suskind's visit timely. "We have a display set up and lots of the material books and videos have gone out," Barrow said.

"We love the Wilmette Library's program," said Suskind, "We've been out there before, and we are excited about coming to Chicago."

Ron Suskind will speak on November 19 at 7PM at the Wilmette Community Recreation Center, 3000 Glenview Rd. For more information visit lifeanimated.net.



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Ron Suskind