

Preface

What would you think of a little boy who beat another child with a broomstick, exposed his private parts to his kindergarten class, shot a spear onto power lines and blew up the electrical circuits of a camp ground, went to school dressed up in metal armor, never read books from cover to cover, got into more trouble than any ten boys usually do, disregarded most rules and the people who enforce them, was a freak (according to his sister), and set many teachers' teeth on edge at the mere mention of his name?

Let me tell you what I think of him: He is a hero. I have never met Ben Polis, but I have read the unflinching account of his growing-up years that is this unique and exuberant book, a tale from Australia in which one good guy (Ben) gets labeled "bad guy" by many clueless guys (and gals) who don't get what he is about and know only what they want him to be and do.

Ben is a hero in my eyes because he does not cow-tow to the narrow demands of society, nor does he give up his love of life, the life he knows and lives. Reading his saga, I found myself cheering as he ignored a finger-wagging elementary school teacher and left her spitting mad as he foiled her attempts to break his spirit. I howled with laughter as I read how he got even with another teacher who had driven him to thoughts of suicide in the fifth grade. I beamed with joy as I read of his eventual victory when he hit his stride at the university.

Ben has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. His account of growing up with this condition is spellbinding, as well as immensely useful in its practical advice.

It offers a window into the world of ADHD as vividly as any account I have ever read. Read this book and you will see that ADHD is not so much a disorder as a conglomeration of symptoms—some powerfully positive, others disruptive and difficult to manage, but all containing within them the germ of an ultimate joy of life and purposefulness.

But this is much more than a book of advice, or a book about ADHD. It is a book about how spunk can conquer superior force; how humor can prevail against those who will not laugh; how creativity trumps conventionality sooner or later; and how a team that works together can overcome any obstacle.

The reason I love Ben Polis and his team, his whiz-bang band of a family and the select enlightened teachers and other adults who saw the best in him and helped bring it out, is that they beat the big odds. It's easy to love kids who do everything right and never cause problems. But the ones who stand out as difficult, impulsive, wayward, or just plain bad are the ones who change the world—if only we don't destroy them before they get the chance.

Thanks to his mum, dad, various uncles and aunties, teachers, a doctor, and even a dog, Ben rose up and beat the Goliath of the conventional, one-size-fits-all world that children confront in school. He took his little pebble and nailed the hairy monster right between the eyes.

He won. He is winning still. Read this book and let him tell you how.

—DR. EDWARD M. HALLOWELL, M.D.