

Book Review

IQ of 63 – So What! Going Beyond Everybody Else's Expectations by Ben D. Anderson

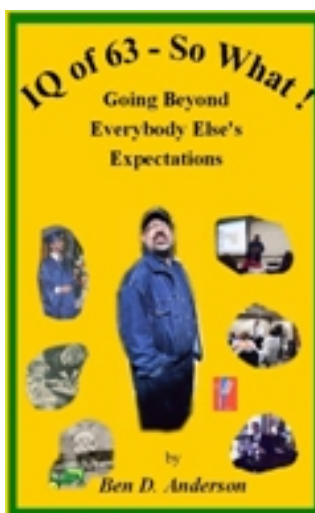
Reviewed by Debbie Einhorn

I met and chatted with Ben D. Anderson and his wife during the statewide Transition Conference in October 2010. I bought a copy of his book then and had a chance to hear his story personally. Ben is a passionate and dogmatic advocate promoting the competencies of people with disabilities wherever and whenever he can. He shares his life story in order to educate others about the consequences of lowering expectations for a person with a disability based upon assumptions about their physical limitations or the number they obtained on an IQ test. Ben is living proof that an IQ score should not determine one's destiny.

As was typical for people with cerebral palsy who were born in the 1950's, it was assumed that Ben could not participate in his regular school classes with his peers but instead needed to attend a "special" school with other children who had disabilities.

Because Ben's family lived in a small community in very rural North Dakota, it meant that Ben's "special" school was 250 miles away from home. Imagine the trauma for a 5 year old to leave his parents to go live in a school so far from home and the pain his parents endured in making the decision that Ben needed to be there in order to get appropriate services.

Ben describes his loneliness and how deeply he missed his parents, grandparents and sister during those early years at the therapeutic school and the extraordinary efforts his family made to communicate and stay in touch during years that were without computers, email, and cell phones. Ben spent 8 years of his early childhood away from his family before he was able to return home and enter a special education classroom in his home school. He describes the excitement of being back home as unbelievable" and he was very happy until he came to realize that he was different from the other kids. Because he had been attending school only with other children who had disabilities he had not experienced the teasing, taunting, and the feelings of not belonging that were happening in the local school. But, this is when Ben's experience as a child with a disability became not so typical. His indomitable spirit and unwavering perseverance helped him to adapt to this new environment, to immerse his self in school activities and to make himself part of the school community. Ben says that people just got used to him and began to accept him and he found a mentor.



In his book Ben reflects on his thoughts during his high school years: "The special education experience was frustrating for me. I had dreams; I had ideas. I wanted to go beyond my disability but I felt trapped inside. I was always haunted by my low IQ label and struggled with everything related to that label. Why did I need to go through this crap? I wanted to go to college, to be someone great. I wanted to be a writer, or a minister. I wanted to be recognized. I don't belong in this special education class! Why don't people understand that I have a lot more ahead of me than they can see?"

Adversity had become a normal part of Ben's life and he met each new roadblock with determination and fortitude. So, he applied and reapplied to colleges and kept on even when they denied him admission. He did attend college and explained how difficult that was since he didn't get adequate preparation for college while in high school because he had spent all his time in the special education classrooms. During this period of his life, Ben focused on his three dreams and goals: to complete college, to develop an organization that would advocate for persons with disabilities, and to write a book.

It wasn't easy and many people would have given up when faced with all the adversity that Ben managed to overcome, but Ben

achieved all three of his dreams and goals. Plus, he developed many relationships and friendships and married the love of his life. Today, Ben travels and speaks to groups about his experiences and promotes the abilities of people with disabilities. He seeks to educate others to have a better understanding of disability and the importance of inclusion of people with disabilities in general education, in community and in families. The mission of Ben's organization, Break Through, is to bring people to an awareness so they look beyond the disability of a person and see the assets the person brings to the situation.

At the end of his book, Ben includes open letters to parents, to teachers and professionals, to the general public, to businesses, and to students who will become teachers. These letters contain important insights from Ben's life experiences and they are words of wisdom that should be remembered and valued.

This book is available from the Family Matters lending library. You can check it out online through our website or by calling our office.