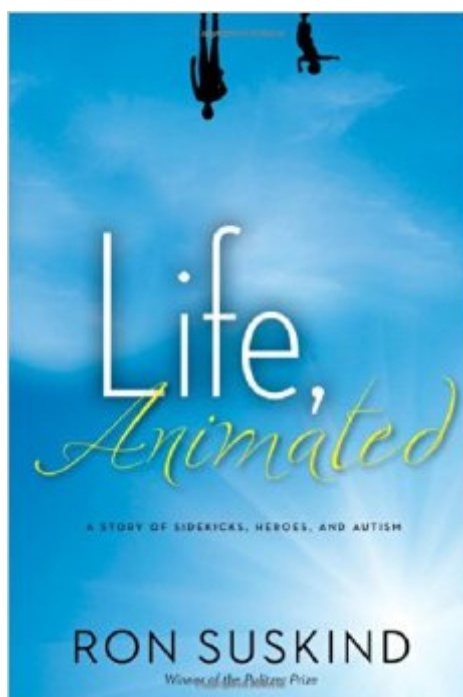


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# Life, Animated: A Story Of Sidekicks, Heroes, And Autism



## Synopsis

Imagine being trapped inside a Disney movie and having to learn about life mostly from animated characters dancing across a screen of color. A fantasy? A nightmare? This is the real-life story of Owen Suskind, the son of the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind and his wife, Cornelia. An autistic boy who couldn't speak for years, Owen memorized dozens of Disney movies, turned them into a language to express love and loss, kinship, brotherhood. The family was forced to become animated characters, communicating with him in Disney dialogue and song; until they all emerge, together, revealing how, in darkness, we all literally need stories to survive.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Because Ron Suskind and his family have opened up their lives to scrutiny and done unbelievable work reconstructing Owen's life course with impeccable detail, I hesitate to even write a review. How can one review a family's struggle with heartache and the direction they take to help their child succeed? If I could give the book 4.5 stars, I would. 5 for the story and, unfortunately, 4 for the writing. Ron Suskind is perhaps my favorite writer. And, I had the wonderful opportunity to see him speak. It was something I will always remember. I downloaded the Kindle edition in the middle of the night when I saw that he had written a book on a topic that has dominated my life for at least the last 30 years. Unfortunately, the writing is repetitive and overly detailed in Disney phenomena and quotes, It also has way too much philosophizing and overly bold assertions about stages of childhood development. It could be cut by a third and be a more captivating and powerful book. I felt

that perhaps the author was so personally invested in the story that he got lost in the weeds. I was also wondering what happened to all the editors who had a hand in the book. Despite my hesitation, I would still like to address the content. I have raised 2 high functioning autistic sons. I also discovered in my 50s that I, too, had some form of autism from birth. There is so much written about the manifestations of autism. Some of it is so inconsistent that it is often difficult to see how it holds together as a single phenomenon. I am impressed that Mr. Suskind clearly captured the quintessential agony of autism, loneliness and yearning for friends. I have never seen this sadness expressed clearly in the vast literature I have embraced over the years. It is like finding a friend who gets it.

Even though several friends sent me the link to the NYTimes article excerpt of this book, I didn't want to read another book about autism. I've read so many since my son regressed into autism 12 years ago; what more could there be to learn from yet another story? What may be "uplifting and inspiring" to some makes some of us feel even more depressed that we haven't managed that same level of success. But then I saw the author: Ron Suskind. Ron is a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist/story teller, and I love his other books. For him [a former classmate (UVA, Class of '81)], I was curious to learn about his son who disappears into autism by age three. I was interested in learning how his parents coped (&/or helped him &/or made peace with his condition). Maybe I could learn some clues to help me better parent my own son. And the NYTimes excerpt was intriguing, though I was already jealous that Owen could understand Disney plots. But it was interesting how Ron and Cornelia figured out how to use Owen's Disney video obsession to reach him, building on Disney stories to help him express his feelings and navigate similar difficult situations in "the real world." Or, as we say in therapy-speak, help him "generalize" the Disney lessons. Personally, I'm often out of energy to do the sort of work they've done; my son has quit noticeably progressing and puberty has created a whole new set of challenges. I went back to work full-time to create a college fund for our typical daughter (We've already spent more than 5 years' of college tuition on therapies, doctors, special diet, etc. for our son; but for all our efforts, we are still unable to hold a real conversation with him--not the kind Ron can have with Owen.

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