

Ann Colin '87

WILLIE: Raising and Loving a Child with Attention Deficit Disorder

Viking / 248 pages

As Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) emerges as the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric illness among children, it is accompanied by increased media coverage and numerous books. Ann Colin's new release, *WILLIE: Raising and Loving a Child with Attention Deficit Disorder*, holds its own among them as a personal account of her family's struggle with her ADD son, Willie.

Told entirely through Colin's journal entries during Willie's first five years, the book traces her journey from the fear and confusion of not knowing what was wrong, to the quest for a proper diagnosis, and on to the commitment to finding a path to minimize ADD's effects on Willie's life. It is intensely personal and honest, as Colin shares the gamut of emotions she feels about her son's illness as it evolves over time.

She writes of her fury at Willie's first nursery school director, who suggests that Willie be examined for brain damage after a series of unmanageable situations at the school, from which he is later expelled. She describes thwarted attempts at playdates with other children, which, unless continually supervised, inevitably result in anger and tears.

Colin's portrayals of some of young Willie's worst moments are wrenching: "Willie shouts from inside his room, 'I'm going to escape. I'm going to get a match and set the house on fire...' ... I can't believe how awful this scene is ..." And shortly after, "I still hold the door closed, wishing I would wake up in an instant to find this has all been a bad dream. How do I get out of this? And more important, how do I help Willie get out of this?"

The nightmare continues as Willie is given drug therapy — first Ritalin and then Dexedrine, both of which only seem to enhance his already excitable and distractible nature, and neither of which ultimately works.

Finally, the family is referred to a sympathetic child psychologist who gradually helps Willie make the small but significant changes that enable him to achieve a greater degree of self-confidence and self-control. At the same time, they discover a special school designed for students who, though all learning-impaired, are encouraged to aspire to the highest academic goals.

For parents of ADD children, *WILLIE* offers both comfort and enlightenment. Through Colin's details of the ups and downs of day-to-day life with Willie, the

book stands as a diagnostic aid and treatment guide, as well as a story of hope in the face of a potentially devastating disorder.

For the general reader, Colin's journal has universal appeal as the inspirational portrait of a mother's battle to save her son's life — one with which any parent who has struggled to overcome a child's problem of any type can identify. It is proof that the strength of a parent's love, her commitment to help her child, and her unrelenting faith in her child's potential can carry her through to a future that is not only acceptable, but perhaps even bright.

— *Susan Rubin Hodara '75 is editor of Big Apple Parent newspaper in New York City, and writes a monthly column about parenting in the nineties.*