



## ODE TO THE "AUTISM DADS"

You

With the stern eyes, tightened lips,  
Hands always working on one thing or the next

Maybe you're the breadwinner  
Spending long hours at the office  
Or in the field

Or wherever your strengths and talents may take you;

Maybe you're overseas in a uniform

Or on a plane to meet an executive

Or in the backyard with a till in hand

Planting seeds today so that tomorrow's mouths may be filled

Or maybe you're the one

Helping little hands move littler Legos onto a castle of plastic

Rocking in chairs and reading bedtime stories

Gently placing kisses on warm foreheads;

Maybe you're all of these,  
Maybe you're none of these, but  
I see you.

I see you in a world that undervalues fathers  
Because we stereotypically don't associate "man" with "nurturing"  
Especially when it comes to those of us

Who need nurturing the most;

We live in a society where "autistic" is seen as "vulnerable"  
And "vulnerable" is left to soft hands and high-pitched voices  
To flower-scented perfume and curved hips and small frames



**BY COMMENTS FROM  
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But I see you  
Sitting across from our teachers in IEP meetings  
Stern eyes, tightened lips,  
Hands tapping on tables, demanding  
That your child be given every ounce of chance that the school can  
squeeze out;  
I see you  
Sitting across from doctors and psychologists  
Listening, waiting,  
Trying to understand diagnoses and labels  
In the context of that seed you planted  
That you won't let their axe of low expectations  
Put so much as a chip in;

I see you  
Standing in doorways  
Watching worriedly but with great hopes;  
You've built cars out of scrap metal  
And swingsets without the instruction manual  
So you know  
That the things you build stay built  
So long as you put the right maintenance into it  
And you know  
That gears don't turn without sufficient lubrication  
So your pour sweat and tears  
And saliva from forehead kisses  
And apple juice and Pedialite  
And your own blood and soul  
Into your best project to date



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And you've been told  
That this isn't the usual model  
That it won't run in the usual way  
But you see potential  
You see that it's yours  
And that however it runs, however it looks in the end,  
However other people appraise it,  
That kid is yours and you love us  
And we see that  
And we see you,

You  
With the stern eyes and tightened lips  
Hands always working on one thing or another  
You've built me in your own image  
And maybe I'm not all that good of a mirror  
But I am who and what I am because of all that you've done  
And I love you.



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