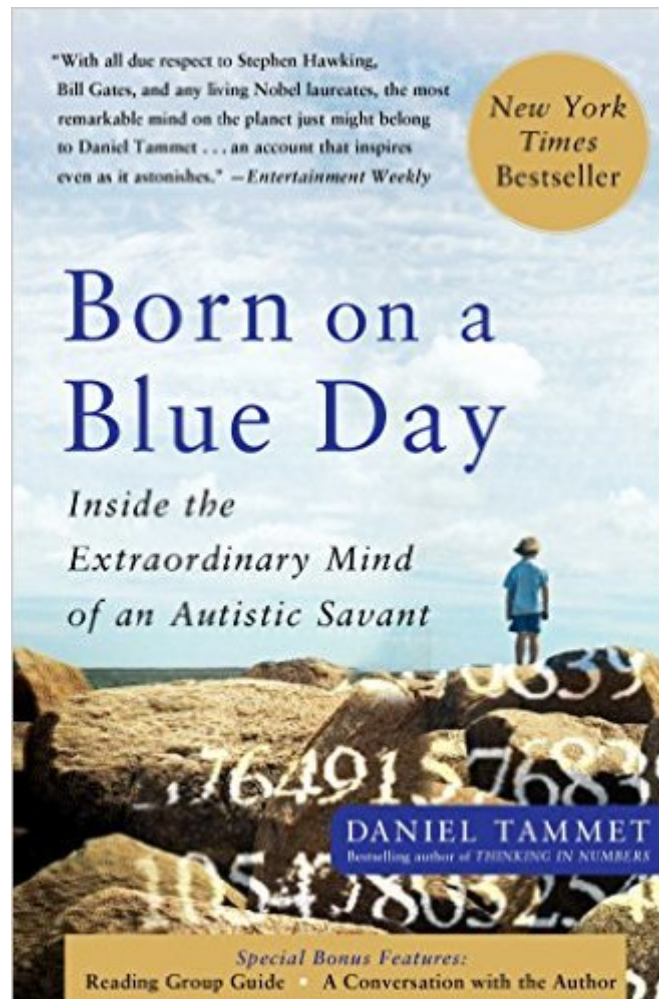


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Born On A Blue Day: Inside The Extraordinary Mind Of An Autistic Savant



Synopsis

A journey into one of the most fascinating minds alive todayâguided by the owner himself. Bestselling author Daniel Tammet (*Thinking in Numbers*) is virtually unique among people who have severe autistic disorders in that he is capable of living a fully independent life and able to explain what is happening inside his head. He sees numbers as shapes, colors, and textures, and he can perform extraordinary calculations in his head. He can learn to speak new languages fluently, from scratch, in a week. In 2004, he memorized and recited more than 22,000 digits of pi, setting a record. He has savant syndrome, an extremely rare condition that gives him the most unimaginable mental powers, much like those portrayed by Dustin Hoffman in the film *Rain Man*. Fascinating and inspiring, *Born on a Blue Day* explores what itâs like to be special and gives us an insight into what makes us all humanâour minds.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Free Press; Reprint edition (October 16, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416549013

ISBN-13: 978-1416549017

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (368 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #38,281 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in [Books > Biographies &](#)

[Memoirs > Specific Groups > Special Needs](#) #42 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting >](#)

[Children's Health > Autism & Asperger's Syndrome](#) #43 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting >](#)

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Customer Reviews

This is an astonishing book, written in first person. It is a memoir of the author's life with the "synaesthesia and savant syndrome", a rare form of Asperger's syndrome. People with synaesthesia see numbers as forms with color and texture, and days as vivid colors, and so Daniel Tammet has the ability to see in his mind numbers and days as colors, each number and day having its own distinct color as an attribute. A day with a color, like a flower with a scent! The blue day of the title of this book refers to Wednesday, which, like the number nine, he sees in his mind as blue. "I know it was a Wednesday," narrates Tammet, "because the date is blue in my mind and Wednesdays are

always blue, like the number nine or the sound of loud voices arguing."Daniel is also a savant, with a remarkable ability to multiply and divide given numbers with astonishing speed. He can recite from memory the number pi, 22 divided by 7, or 3.1428571 to 22,514 decimal places, a feat which will take him a little over five hours! He says numbers are beautiful things, and that pi is as beautiful as Mona Lisa. Like Christopher John Francis Boone, the fifteen year old hero of Mark Haddon's novel, "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time", Daniel, too, is very fond of prime numbers. "Prime numbers feel smooth, like pebbles," he says. He can recognize every prime number up to 9,973. He can speak in ten languages, including Icelandic, Lithuanian and Welsh, and he has the ability to learn a new language within a few days. He learnt Icelandic, for example, within a week; a most remarkable feat for any human being. He doesn't understand jokes easily, and the expressions on human faces he finds baffling. And like Christopher, he doesn't like to be touched.

Over the last couple of years there has been an explosion of new and valuable material written on the experience of autism, much of it written from the points of view of either how to deal with an autistic child or a more medical explanation of symptoms. Reading about what it actually feels like to live with autism is very rare. Daniel's ability to so carefully describe to us how he experiences life is highly unusual and must be incredibly valuable to researchers. Daniel Tammet is still a very young man, and his autobiography is necessarily not going to be very long. Moreover, due to the nature of his condition it was not until very recently that he has had much by way of dealings with the outside world. Much of the book takes place in his own mind, his relationships with numbers, logic, mathematics, chess and puzzles, essentially how his mind organizes its thought. One also finds how the tiniest irregularities in his routines - a dropped spoon, perhaps, or the ring of a cell phone - can not only disrupt his thought but can set him off on a 'meltdown' psychologically and physically, from which recovery may take minutes or hours. Order, quiet, routine, predictability and an internal logic assume incredible importance. The part of his personality dealing with events outside his own mind is very fragile and stunted. Although Daniel comes across in his writing as a giving, kind and basically generous person, there is a lack of understanding, of feeling, what love, empathy, and interpersonal relations are all about. His discovery of another kind man in Neil, his partner, must have been an inestimable blessing, but no doubt a very rare one for a person with autism, and it has helped him slowly grow.

If a picture is truly worth a thousand words, then the savant gifts of Daniel Tammet are all the more startling because he has an ability to meld his senses together seamlessly to see things nobody

else can. It's an impressive, even daunting prowess that comes at a high price since he has Asperger's syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes him to be limited in his ability to fit in with the larger culture, as well as synaesthesia, a condition where sounds, words or numbers can translate into colors, shapes or textures. In fact, the latter condition is reflected in the book's title as he associates the color blue with Wednesdays. What makes this book so thoroughly unique is that the book is not a treatise of a subject by a medical professional but a memoir by the subject himself. As such, there are no grand conclusions drawn about either medical condition, or scientific assumptions of how Tammet came to his gifts. What the author does quite plainly is share how he approaches such astonishing feats as reciting pi to over 22,000 decimal points over the course of five hours. We get a palpable sense of how he perceives theorems and automatically develops strategies based on his innate sense with numbers and images. But before you can say Rain Man, you also see a young man who is actually functioning in the world on his own, which illustrates perfectly the spectrum of severity with autism. Tammet's affliction has mild enough for him to be relatively self-sufficient, even though his struggles to gain societal acceptance have been a traumatizing road. Raised by loving parents, he spent most of his childhood alone and could only relate to fellow outsiders like immigrants and exchange students, people who heightened his facility for foreign languages.

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