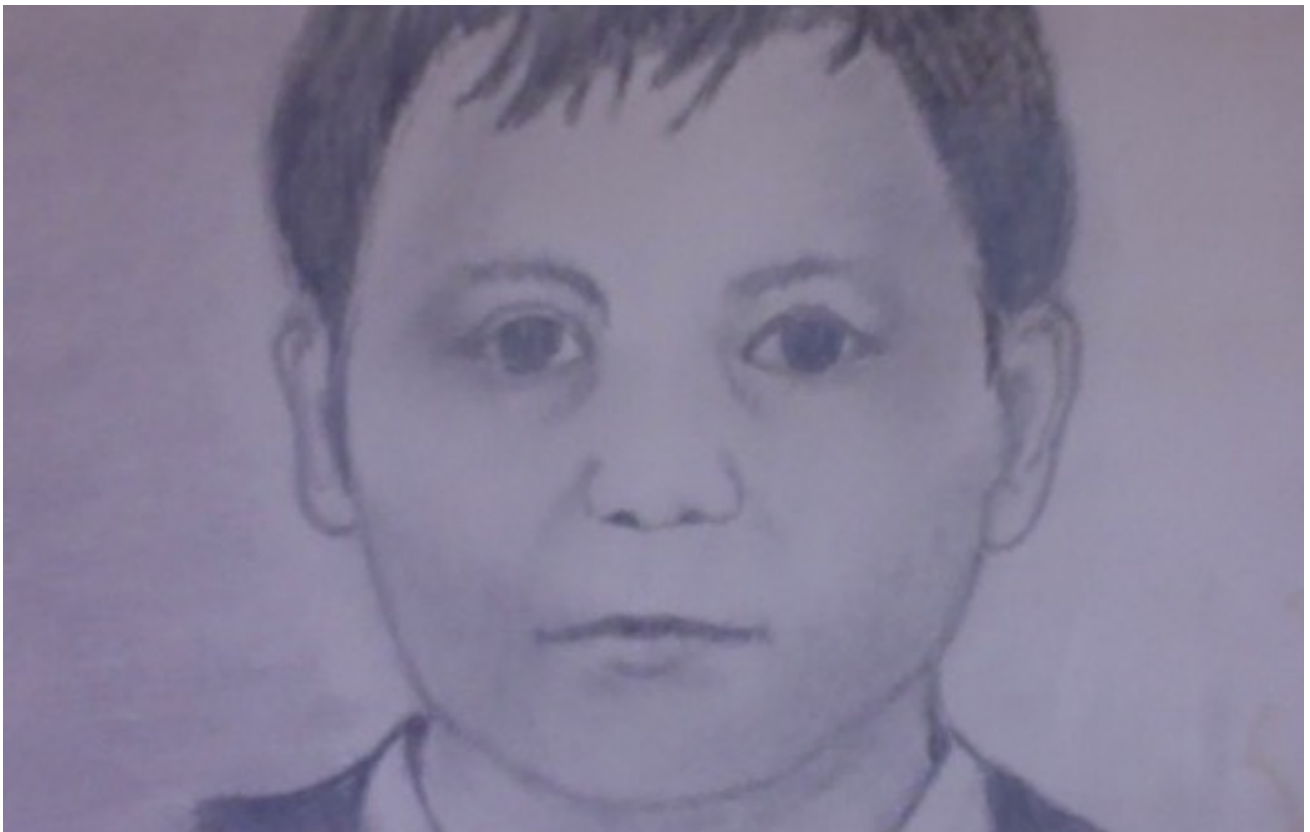


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# LIFE WITH DANIEL

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After Adoption



Julie Anne Armstrong

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# A Brief History

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## *Life with Daniel*

Daniel was placed for adoption in September 1997.

Prior to the placement he had spent five years in foster care.

In 1994 a Nurse therapist had, by this time, been seeing Daniel inconsistently for two and a half years for behavioural management, following the death of his sister.

Rehabilitation of Daniel with his birth father was explored, his father withdrew – partly due to his difficulties in dealing with Daniel’s behaviour, and due to the tension/conflict that existed between him and his former wife.

Daniel is the first born child of both his parents.

His mother brought him up from birth to four and a half years, since which time other than two very brief periods with her in 1994, he has been in foster care.

His parents were living together when he was born in February 1989, and married in September 1989.

They separated in December of that year, thus Daniel has only lived with his father a very brief period.

In April 1993 his mother made a referral to Social Services department stating that her brother had tied Daniel up. In November 1993 a referral was made by Dr. Syed, a Psychiatrist from Manchester that Daniel needed a foster placement.

Daniel’s mother was born and brought up in the Ashton area of Manchester, and attended local mainstream schools. His father also comes from a local Tameside family.

Since leaving school he has had long spells of unemployment, with placements on training schemes, working in sport shops and running local pubs.

“Daniel is a lively, talkative, cheerful boy, interested in everything. He is full of questions about everything in his environment and is a pleasure to talk with or take out. He has blue eyes and mid-brown, a fair complexion and is quite stocky in build.”

# Early Life

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## *Life with Daniel*

### **Birth: it's a miracle. A rite of passage. A natural part of life.**

Each year about 500,000 women die due to pregnancy and childbirth, 7 million have serious long term complications, and 50 million have negative outcomes following delivery.

We've long been told our genes are our destiny.

It's now thought they can be changed by habit, lifestyle, and even personal finances.

After all, for decades we've all been told: you are what you eat.

You are what you drink. You are how much, or how little, you exercise; you are whatever toxins you imbibe or inhale.

Your genes may have destined you to a little baldness, or an increased susceptibility to some vulgar tumour, as health experts have cautioned repeatedly: you are a product of your own lifestyle.

Early Life for me started in Ashton-U-Lyne, a market town in Tameside, Greater Manchester. Manchester is a major city in the northwest of England with a rich industrial heritage.

The Castlefield Conservation Area's 18th-century canal system harks back to the city's days as a textile powerhouse, and you can trace this history at the interactive Museum of Science & Industry.

The revitalised Salford Quays dockyards now houses the Daniel Libeskind-designed Imperial War Museum North and The Lowry cultural centre.

Evidence of Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Viking activity has been discovered in Ashton-under-Lyne.

The "Ashton" part of the town's name probably dates from the Anglo-Saxon period, and derives from Old English meaning "settlement by ash trees". The origin of the "under-Lyne" suffix is less clear; it possibly derives from the British *lemo* meaning elm or from Ashton's proximity to the Pennines.

In the Middle Ages, Ashton-under-Lyne was a parish and township and Ashton Old Hall was held by the de Asshetons, lords of the manor. Granted a Royal Charter in 1414, the manor spanned a rural area consisting of marshland, moorland, and a number of villages and hamlets. It was not until the introduction of the cotton trade in 1769, Ashton was considered "bare, wet, and almost worthless".

The factory system, and textile manufacture during the Industrial Revolution triggered a process of unplanned urbanisation in the area, and by the mid-19th century Ashton had emerged as an important mill town at a convergence of newly constructed canals and railways.

Ashton-under-Lyne's transport network allowed for an economic boom in cotton spinning, weaving, and coal mining, which led to the granting of municipal borough status in 1847.

In the mid-20th century, imports of cheaper foreign goods led to the decline of Ashton's heavy industries but the town has continued to thrive as a centre of commerce and Ashton Market is one of the largest outdoor markets in the United Kingdom.

I was born on one Wednesday the 15th February 1989, according to speculation, 396000 babies were born on that day around the world.

I guess not everything was bad about my birth, I was born in an industrial era in an area stricken with poverty and it does have an upside, I was born.

I came into this world full of joy, a blonde hair blue eyed baby from a master race, not that I believe in Nazi ideology.

My own delusions manifest into the thought that I am of a superior DNA and that I come from a far greater previous race, such as the Nibiru or Annunaki.

The Egyptians were an intelligence race, the giant pyramids were carefully aligned towards the pole star, they are so accurately aligned with the points of the compass that only superior humans could have achieved this all those thousands of years ago.

You, probably think that I am delusional.

I don't think anyone can remember their own early years, not from birth at least, maybe four or five years old onwards.

What I do remember, from what I have been told from family members, is that I grew up on a dangerous council estate with my parents who married the same year I was born.

I had a sister called Chantelle a year or two later and the marriage broke down.

It was unfortunate as unbeknown to my mother, my father was having an affair with another women, and whilst my sister was still developing in the uterus, a women involved with my father apparently had her assaulted, receiving blows to the stomach.

Luckily the birth of my sister went without difficulty, yet the birth came with many difficulties, one illness the doctors were unaware of is that Chantelle was not gaining weight, they could not understand why, and one cold night my mother walked into our room, looked in to the cot, where I was laying with my sister, and she was blue, lifeless, and dead.

Apparently, when Chantelle was born, her stomach lining was so soft, like tissue paper, every time she was fed, it caused a tear, a rip in her stomach, that grew bigger and bigger, eventually causing her to die of starvation.

I think the death of my sister played an important role in the health of my mother, she became paranoid and psychotic, depressed and unwell, yet the doctors did not understand that it was a mental illness at that time, and for some years she looked after me, to the best of her abilities.

I know young children can't remember much from their past, I have one vivid memory of climbing up on the kitchen bench and getting cereal from the cupboard, pouring the milk into the bowl and making myself some breakfast, another time I tried to make myself a glass of coke, smashing the coffee table.

I remember an awful lot about my foster years, growing up with other foster children, being unloved and mistreated, I know I moved around a lot, at one point it was 5 different foster homes, in five years.

Life was difficult, I remember one family I lived with had a son and he thought it would be a great idea to blow air in a balloon, put my name and a short message on a piece of paper, something similar to "I am new here, looking for friends", and tie it to the balloon.

The other boy blew the balloon out of the window, and a gust of wind sent it spiralling down the street.

What I did not know until many years later, is that the balloon we sent out the window, actually landed in a garden down the cul-de-sac, a little Jack Russell managed to get a hold of it, and the balloon popped in his mouth, the dog died of shock.

I spent many of my days visiting this garden, the old man teaching me how to grow plants, little did I know I killed his dog, and that he read my note.

I remember another time, I was naughty in school, apparently I stabbed a kid with a pencil in the hand, and we would be smashing glass milk bottles off other children during playtime, so my foster carers wanted me to move to another school, closer to the home.

The other foster boy I was living with at the time, thought it would be a great idea to go down to the new school, I would just call it peer pressure, and they pushed me to pick a brick up and throw it through the window of the school, BANG.

The window went through, with a giant smash, a gaping large hole in the window, the police were called, and I got into trouble.

From then on, I never trusted these boys.

I remember one night they came in my room and asked me for money, they wanted to raid my piggy jar, they were "running away".

I was so happy that day, it got really late, and it was really dark, I was in bed and I heard vans outside slamming doors outside, a big bang at the door, "knock, knock, knock", they had been caught and returned.

I think back now and I can't recall them ever getting into trouble again.

I heard one of the boys grew up and where he lived in Manchester they had to put locks on the fridges and cupboards, and found a stash of weapons under his bed, that was all I ever heard, I don't know what happened to him after that.

One day in September 1997 I moved in with my new adopted parents, I unpacked my socks and underpants, placed them in my new set of drawers in my brand new bedroom.

I was welcomed into my new world by a league of new friends and new family, they came bearing gifts and the words "Has he settled in yet?" and "Does he like school?"

Of course I settled in, I had unpacked my pants.

I did like my new school, I took the education system by the throat, swallowed it whole and spat it out.

The education system could not spit as far as I could, I was more experienced.

# Has he Settled in Yet?

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## *Life with Daniel*

I have only had Daniel for a week and today he fell out of a tree, his new best friend, Barney, was well impressed

He said that Daniel should be on News at Ten, I said that he should not have been up the tree in the first place.

Glad that he was not hurt. I treated the situation with a light touch. After all, no harm done and no reason to report it to the social workers.

Social workers like to have something to latch on to, to discuss, to face head on. It gives them a purpose in life and it keeps children safe.

I tend to sweep things under the carpet, or let them go away by themselves. I like life to be happy and peaceful and I like to retain my credibility, I am like that.

I am glad that Daniel has found Barney. Actually they found each other. The meeting of minds took place outside the post office last Friday and by Saturday Barney had more or less moved in.

Daniel says that Barney has a terrible home life and would we consider adopting him because he has got a cat. It seems that they come as a pair.

Barney has brightened up Daniel's life, It needed brightening up. We spent the weekend unpacking Daniel's stuff, buying school clothes and watching Princess Diana's funeral.

Last Thursday we took Daniel to visit his new school. The head teacher welcomed us into his office. It was a busy little room, full of books and children's paintings. I had my eye on a lovely little pen and ink drawing.

Daniel had his eye on a bottle of wine, "I thought teachers weren't suppose to drink, Sir".

Then we met Daniel's new teacher, It was almost play time and she suggested that Daniel should go into the yard with his new class so that we could have a little chat.



We told her as much as we could about Daniel's past. She said that she did not think that it would be a problem and that he would soon settle in. I expect that she is right, I worry too much.

By the end of play time I was confident that the teacher was well experienced in these matters. She had no reason to lie. Daniel returned with some of his class, one boy was rubbing his fingers.

They had all been most impressed that Daniel had invented a new game. It involved bending each others fingers back. The ones who cried were the losers.

As we left the school I felt a tingling sensation at the back of my neck. It happened once before, three years ago when my old dog bit the window cleaner.

Our social worker rang last night. As soon as a child is placed with a new family social workers go on red alert. They are at my beck and call twenty four – seven. I love it. There is no small talk, we get straight in, our shared knowledge goes back and forth and jargon is at a premium. We are both highly impressed with ourselves and with each other. I told her about Daniel's fall, I told her about Barney and I told her about the new dog.

I did not tell her about school. No point in us both worrying.

Daniel's teacher says that his behaviour has been bad. I asked her what she meant by bad but she did not know. It had been second hand information from a dinner lady. She said that she would find out.

After three days of finding out she finally found out that Daniel had been swearing at the school cook. Daniel said why would he swear at the school cook, he likes her. I said I did not know and he did not know either. I have never heard him swear.

A few days later Daniel was bad again. Nothing to worry about, not specifically bad, just generally bad. It was nothing that his teacher could actually put her finger on, a series of incidents loosely connected by bad attitude. I told him to change his attitude. He said he would, then he went upstairs to change his shoes. He had plans to go up another tree with Barney.

I have just returned from a meeting at school. We do not have little chats anymore, we have meetings. The purpose of the meeting was to put my neck into a strangle hold while persons with a sour face accused me of throwing

crayons into a waste paper bin and swearing at the school cook again. Why would I swear at the school cook? I like her.

Two months ago the people who sat before me thought that I was doing a great job. One month ago they thought that I had taken a lot on. Now they think that I am doing something wrong. They said that they hate to admit it but they do not think Daniel has settled in yet.

Daniel's behaviour is getting worse at school. He no longer has play time and he spends lunchtime sitting outside the staff room. He does not seem to mind. Says it keeps him out of trouble. I asked him to think of other ways to keep out of trouble. He did try but he could not come up with anything. I tried and I could not come up with anything either, however, his teacher had a good idea.

When I collected Daniel from school today, she was bursting with enthusiasm. I was quickly ushered into the classroom and offered a child-sized chair. The teacher sat on the big chair, which is only right. She smiled down at me and adopting a conspiratorial tone, mouthed the words "Daily Diary".

The technicalities of the diary involve daily entries by the teaching outlining Daniel's bad behaviour. Daniel brings the diary home for me to read and sign to say that I have read it. Oh, and I can comment if I wish to.

The purpose of the diary is for me to be fully informed of his misdemeanours so that Daniel can be in trouble at school and at home all at the same time. A sort of duel purpose, no-hiding-place approach. The teacher is sure that it will work and so am I. She is pleased that I agree because she has already chosen an appropriate exercise book and written his name on the front. Daniel was called in, she patiently explained the new procedure and showed the book to him. Daniel thought that it was a great idea and asked if he could write in it too. The teacher did not know what to say.

I have been in an agitated state all day, I could not work, could not relax, could not wait to see the diary. When I collected Daniel from school he jumped into the car and stuck the diary into my hand. He smiled at me, hoping that I would be pleased.

I was not pleased, two pages detailed Daniel's day from talking in assembly to shuffling in circle time, calling a nice child a moron, refusing to pick up his rubber and refusing to do P.E. properly.

The power of the pen had given his teacher a new lease of life in her determination to heap pain and suffering upon us.

This is it. I have had enough. He must stop and he must stop now, I told him. He cried, I have never seen Daniel cry before.

Daniel went to school the next morning as if nothing had happened, he wore an old wooly hat, a tatty jacket, over sized trousers and muddy Wellingtons. I felt so proud of him as he carried his spade.

He was going to be a farmer in assembly.

I eagerly await his dad collecting him from school and can't wait to see his diary. A parent had complained because Daniel threatened to knock her sons teeth down his throat.

His teacher would like me to comment.

"I am grateful to you for communicating this to me in Daniel's diary and I can completely understand why the parent is upset. By the way, I hate the bloody diary, I hate the parent and I hate Daniel. I also hate myself for thinking that I could help a hurt child to make his way in the world.

Clearly, I am making a crap job of it. Is that 'comment' enough?"

I have just been summoned. I wait in the play ground for the bell to go. My head aches and my hands are sweaty. I am the lower fifth waiting to be told off for illegal use of Players Number Six.

I want to go and hide in a nice, warm, safe place and I want to take Daniel with me.

His teacher has had a good idea. It is a development of the diary, from now on we are to outline all positive behaviour as well as negative. If Daniel has a really good day he will be awarded a star and five stars will mean a reward from us and from his teacher.

The diary will be weekly rather than daily because she is a bit pushed at present. Daniel is sure that it will work. He wants a goldfish.

There is no desperate rush to buy a fish tank. Daniel's teacher says that, try as she might, she cannot think of anything positive to say.

She wishes us all a very merry Christmas and hopes that things will improve in the new year.

I have had a meeting with Daniel's teacher today. The meeting was called because she had a good idea. She thinks that Daniel's behaviour may improve

if he ceases to play with Barney. Apparently there is nothing wrong with Barney but his family is some what questionable.

I have met Barney's family and I have been to their home. They have five children, a cat and a brand new kitchen with a laminated floor and a double oven. In my book that makes them posh but please excuse me if I am being judgmental.

The teacher asked me if we had a nice Christmas and she wanted to know what had happened to Daniel's diary. I told her we had a lovely Christmas, I did not tell her that I had thrown the diary out with the Christmas tree.

Today is your birthday, my beautiful son, I fell in love with you. You were sitting on your dad's chair, I was ironing and we were watching cartoons on the new television. You smiled at me with your clear blue eyes and said "Mum, can I have the telly when you die?".

I will love you forever.

Optimism is not just a quality, it is also a skill. I work hard trying to see the brighter side of life. The rewards have been a thousand fold.

The sad demise of my late husband, the old dog and a much loved Fiat Panda, was in quick succession. On each occasion I stormed and shouted, moaned and groaned and I cried real tears.

However, somewhere deep inside me I knew that all three would be happy in a heavenly Heaven with my Nan. The fact that she never really liked any of the afore mentioned was immaterial. She would rise like a phoenix in her fur coat and red hat. They would sit at her right hand and she would show them all the stairs in the sky.

Being an optimist takes its toll. Today, Daniel's teacher told me that, on reflection, the school does not feel that they can provide appropriate supervision for Daniel at lunch time. If Daniel does not get his act together within two weeks he will have to come home for lunch. Since he is too young for self catering it seems that one of us will have to pack in work. There is no other option.

The credit card company is a bit more understanding. They have given me a variety of options ranging from sending a cheque by return of post to re mortgaging the house.

Last week Daniel put the cheque book down the toilet in a fit of pique and the house is involved in a very negative equity trap. My immediate response to the school and to Visa is "Tough shit".

Daniel has a more constructive approach. He has heard about home tuition. Daniel is sure that his dad can effectively intrust him in all areas of the National Curriculum while driving his taxi. I am not even in the running.

Our social worker has offered to come to the next meeting at school with me. To be perfectly honest I would prefer her to go instead of me whilst I sit in the school toilets with a bottle of Strong bow and a fag.

It saw me through my sixth form and I can see no reason to change now.

Daniel is well aware of the situation. He says its all a big fuss about nothing. He is still into home tuition. His dad is more into crosswords than junior calculus. They both agree that I would make a rubbish teacher.

I spent three years at a teacher training college. I agree with them.

I decided to take the whole day off work. The meeting at school was scheduled for 11:30am. That would give me the rest of the day to languish in self pity and persuade my husband to give in his notice at work. Then I could find cheap rented accommodation in a sleazy area and make it nice and cosy for when our house is repossessed.

It should not be too much of a problem. The big problem will be trying to cope with all of the changes while, at the same time, helping Daniel to believe that he is the best kid in the world.

A child needs to know the truth.

After the initial introductions the head teacher opened a big book which logged Daniel's acts of disobedience and belligerence. The delaying tactics worked. I was sweating from my furrowed brow to my lucky red socks. Suddenly our social worker confidently asked the head teacher what strategies were in place to help Daniel, particularly in the playground. Without stopping to draw breath she announced that Daniel could not possibly come home at lunch time.

The social worker explained that it would put unnecessary pressure on the family. Apart from that Daniel needs to be helped not banished. Our social worker then sat back and watched the ripples in a gob-smacked pond. After a lot of huffing and puffing it was decided that they would put their heads together and come up with something.

I really do not know why I was so worried. I should have realised that our social worker and my lucky red socks are a force to be reckoned with. Daniel will be helped, no one will lose their job and we won't lose the house. I think we will go out for tea with all the money we have saved.

Whenever I am supposed to be listening to a teacher I tend to stare out of the window a lot. I have always done it. Apparently Daniel does it too. He must take after me. Daniel's teacher is not a happy teacher. Daniel told her that we went out for tea. She made a veiled comment about rewarding bad behaviour. I made a less veiled comment about force feeding Brussel sprouts. Daniel said that I had a sarcastic look in my eyes. He saw it last week when I interrogated him about a jammy dodger in the washing machine.

Very quickly the tone of the conversation went downhill. The lost diary was chucked in for good measure. To score points I mentioned my experience and qualifications. It was all said with stiff smiles as we pawed the ground between us. I was fully aware that nothing would be achieved. Our social worker would be sitting in her office and my lucky red socks would be lying on our bedroom floor. I stood alone with Daniel. As we left the classroom I asked Daniel in a loud whisper if he would like a Big Mac.

Unfortunately when we got home from McDonald's my husband said sadly, the goldfish have died, but don't worry, I have a friend from work dropping us off a chocolate surprise!

Daniel's face was gleaming with anticipation.

He is a big sloppy dog brownish-black Labrador called Duster. He was a bargain. We got him for free. His owner gave us Duster's toys, bed and two tins of Chum. We are allowed to borrow Duster's lead if we promise to return it within one calendar month. Duster's birth parents are moving house and, apart from that, he is not very good with children. Daniel is not very impressed with Duster. He says that he looks nicer than he actually is. I told Daniel that perhaps Duster, has not settled in yet.

I love the dog. I have found a way to meet his needs and my own simultaneously. If I walk Duster to school to meet Daniel the dog benefits from the exercise and I benefit from not being able to enter the school grounds. Dogs are not allowed. Things are going seemingly. I still show an interest in how Daniel is doing at school.

Yesterday Daniel got a star for refusing to fight. He thinks that if he carries on like this he might be made head boy. Fancy me being the mum of the head boy. I can't wait.

It is late morning and the post man has arrived, Daniel's teacher has sent a letter to me by post. It lay on the door mat whole and undamaged. Duster chewed up my pay slip instead. I have been invited to meet with her after school today. Apparently she has not seen me for a while and she thinks it is time for a little chat.

I was welcomed with a warm smile. Daniel was sent to Sir's room to fetch a big chair specially for me. He was then asked if he would like to read a nice book in the library while we had a little chat. Daniel's teacher has been talking to a friend who teaches at another school.

The teacher's friend teaches a little boy who has spent most of his life in care.

The little boy is violent and aggressive towards everyone in his contact including himself.

His foster carers can not cope and the little boy is being moved on again.

Daniel's teacher said that Daniel is not violent or aggressive. He can be a bit cheeky and unruly at times but, basically, he is a lovely, bright lad who needs a bit more time and attention. The teacher explained that Daniel has a stable home life and he is a credit to us.

She will personally make sure that Daniel is given all the help he needs. He will be given opportunities to express his fears and to develop a positive self image. He will be accepted as an effective member of the school.

Dear Deirdre, I think I have a crush on a teacher.

It is late July and I sent a letter to Daniel's teacher asking if I can see her.

It was good of her to fit me in at lunch time. Daniel has had a bad week and I thought she should know. Daniel has been swearing.

He went on to swear at Barney's next door neighbour only to return home and swear at his dad. Daniel is now suffering the consequences. He is permanently banned from cubs, must not darken Barney's door again and he is grounded for a fixed term by his dad.

Daniel's teacher thinks that his confidence needs a bit of a boost. He has had a few problems at play time too and a parent has complained about him. We

both agree that Daniel is most likely to have problems when he is with a large group of children at a time when there is minimal supervision.

Daniel's teacher has a suggestion. She thinks that he will make an ideal register monitor. Instead of going into the playground at the beginning of the school day he will collect the registers from the office and return them after registration. At morning break Daniel could make the solo journey across the playground to collect their registers. The teacher thinks it might work. I expressed a major concern about lunch times. She was one step ahead of me. There is a dinner lady who is a kindly soul and who has taken a bit of a shine to Daniel.

Daniel's teacher is sure that she will take him under her wing.

We told Daniel together. He thinks it is a great idea. School registers are legal documents which need a high level of security. Dinner ladies are nice ladies who need a high level of protection. Daniel thinks he is just the man for the job. So do I.

Daniel loves his job. He has adopted a very professional attitude. A few weeks ago Daniel always tried to avoid breakfast. Now, he is up early and enjoys a bowl of Coco Pops. Daniel eats them with a bare chest in case he spills any chocolate milk.

Shirts have to be washed. Chests don't.

Daniel inspects his shoes for shininess and carefully picks dog hairs off his jumper. I wonder if all register monitors are snappy dressers.

Daniel and his dinner lady are a match made in Heaven. She is a strong and determined woman with a gentle voice and kind eyes.

Daniel says that she is just like me. Apparently she goes to the library and the Spar shop a lot.

Daniel's teacher has told me that the change in Daniel is incredible.

Throughout the school Daniel is known as The Register Monitor.

Daniel has developed his own style. As a vital service provider, Daniel is friendly and polite. He collects registers efficiently and he wishes everyone a nice day. Everyone looks forward to seeing him.

At lunch time Daniel eats his lunch without any fuss and then seeks out his dinner lady. She is always waiting for him in the playground.



If I win the lottery, I would like to give Daniel's new dinner lady a mansion, a huge car and a cruise holiday.

Today, Daniel gave her half of his Kitkat. She had a tear in her eye.

The last day of term arrives and I have seen Daniel's teacher today.

It is strange to think that this will be our last little chat. We have been through a lot together.

In the new term Daniel will be in Sir's class. Daniel really likes Sir and Sir has a wealth of experience with children who have behaviour difficulties. He has taken a special interest in Daniel and he is sure that Daniel will continue to improve.

So, here we are, then. Almost one year on. Some problems and many, many pleasures. It is early evening. I am sitting in the garden with a glass of wine. The sun is still shining. Daniel is sleeping on a sun bed and Duster is beside him. The long summer is ahead.

Even register monitors need a holiday.

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