

From **Kim Sigafus. Nowhere to Hide**

... Remember that it's okay to be different. Being different makes you unique

[...]

"I hear you might be trying out for the play," said Sydney ... "With the way you talk, you've got to be kidding. You can't even pronounce the name of the play. It comes out sounding stupid ..."

Autumn tried to ignore her by taking a side hall to the parking lot. Sydney caught up to her and gave her a push. [...] Autumn caught a glimpse of a couple of kids coming down the hall toward her. She swung her backpack around and held it in her arms for protection.

Two girls rushed toward [them] ...

[...] "You know that we try out for the fall play every year," said Jayden. "What makes you think you have a chance to get a part?"

"She's so stupid," Sydney whispered loudly to her friends. "I mean, not only does she talk weird, but she's too stupid to get her homework done ... She hasn't turned any homework in all week."

"It's none of your business," Autumn shot back, struggling as always with the s sounds in the word. She pushed the door open and stepped outside.

[...]

... Her parents divorced, and her father moved to Minneapolis, several hours away. She hadn't seen him in a long time. ... She was born in the early hours of October and her father gave her the name "Autumn Dawn." [...]

[One day her mother said:] "I just called your aunt and asked her to come and stay with us for a while... I'm having a hard time with things right now ... I need some help."

... Autumn didn't know what to say. [...] She was having trouble with her schoolwork. She studied when she could, but she just couldn't seem to understand the material... Aunt Jessie would surely pick up on the homework situation and then her mother would find out.

[...] Half the time she didn't understand the questions, and the other half of the time the answers she wrote down were wrong or misspelled. She also hated to read out loud. She was a slow reader and sometimes mispronounced words. Some of the kids made fun of her, making jokes about her...

[...] As her mother left the room, Autumn opened her book again. She started to read the chapter, but some of the words made no sense to her. She pulled out a sheet of paper and wrote her name at the top. It was going to be a long night

[...]

“What’s all that stuff for?” Autumn asked [her aunt], reaching out to pick up the box of colorful beads.

“These are my craft supplies,” said Jessie. “I’m working on several projects at the moment... I could teach you while I’m here... Your father did beadwork as well....

[Now] show me your homework ..., and I will see what I can do.”

“Okay.”

[...] Jessie took the history book and started looking over the chapter. It was a long one that included facts about the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

[...] "Okay, so the question is, What year did it happen?"

Autumn flipped through her book, scanning the pages. When she thought she had found the answer, she replied, “1867.”

Jessie pulled the book over to her to find where Autumn had found the answer. “You mean 1876.”

Autumn looked down on the page again. It looked like 1867 to her.

[...]

Jessie ... sat back in her chair.

“Autumn, did you know your father was dyslexic? ... Let me tell you a story. When your father was a little boy, he was having trouble in school. No matter how much he studied, he almost always flunked tests. [...]

One day, the teacher asked him to stand up and read a paragraph out of a book. As he fumbled through it, the teacher noticed he was making consistent mistakes. After class she pulled him aside and talked to him. Then she called Mom and Dad, and they went down to the school for a conference. They were told Tom probably had dyslexia... People who have this look at words and numbers on a page but see them differently than everyone else... A *b* can become a *d*. For them, reading ‘*a drive to the park*’ might become ‘*the park drive to*’.” Jessie stopped for a moment and then added, “And ‘*little*’ can become ‘*title*’, and ‘*1876*’ can become ‘*1867*’.”

[...]

It was decided that Autumn would be tested the following week. In the meantime, the teacher would be paying close attention to Autumn's work in class and the homework that was sent home every night.

[Next day her mother said:] "... I didn't know your dad was dyslexic until Aunt Jessie told me yesterday."

"Oh."

"Your father never mentioned it. I had a hard time believing it myself until Jessie explained that he had years to master a way to deal with it. He still messed things up once in awhile, but I chalked it up to him reading something too fast or not paying attention. [...] And I've been so unhappy about your father leaving, I couldn't see what was going on around me.

... Jessie is a good person. She's your dad's sister and knows about the Ojibwa side of your family ... Don't you want to know about your Native American heritage?.."

Autumn gave it some thought and then replied with a shrug. "I guess so. I'm not sure I want to learn how to sew and stuff like that, though."

[...]

After some testing at school and another parent-teacher conference ... it was determined that Autumn was dyslexic. An Individualized Education Plan was set into place for her, and she went back to classes with a renewed sense of hope for her future.

[...] "Everyone learns things differently," her aunt had told her the other day. "In some cases, it doesn't matter how you get from point A to point B; it just matters that you get there," she had said.

The following week, things were going better at home and at school ...

"Come talk with me," said Jessie ... "How would you like to help me sew some beadwork on something?"

Autumn shook her head. "I don't sew very well."

"You don't sew very well yet," corrected Jessie. "You just need practice [...] I'm making ... a Jingle Dress for you."

Autumn's breath caught in her throat. "A Jingle Dress? Like the one in the play at school? You know, the one I was going to try out for but changed my mind?"

"Yes."

[...]

[Next day] Autumn nervously approached her teacher to ask her about auditioning for the play...

"I think that's great that you want to audition," her teacher said. "I think you would do a wonderful job."

Autumn looked down at her feet. "What about my speech problems? I can't say an s right. And with my dyslexia, I will have problems reading the script and memorizing." She sighed. "Maybe I should just forget about it."

"Now, Autumn, you can do anything you set your mind to. I believe in you."

[...] "Do you know the story of the Jingle Dress?" [Jessie asked Autumn when she came back.]

... Around the time of the First World War, a young Ojibwa girl became very sick. It was thought she might have had Spanish influenza. Her father was afraid she was going to die, so he looked for a vision that would save her. He had a dream in which he saw the dress and ... how to sew it ... He sewed the dress and then asked his daughter to dance in it. She kept dancing until she started to feel better and was no longer sick."

"What happened after she got better?"

"Others were shown the dance ... The dress represents ... how we can help heal the spirits"

"So, it's a healing dress?"

"Yes."

[...]

... The jingles sounded like Santa's sleigh as she bounced and danced When she was finished, there was thunderous applause ... When the play ended, Autumn took her place in the curtain call. She was really happy with her performance. She had hesitated in a few places but managed to get the words out without calling too much attention to the fact that she couldn't say her s's correctly. She had not missed any lines.

... Her father sat next to her mother ... [who] was smiling up at him ...

[...] Autumn looked at her family. Things weren't ever going to be perfect, she thought, but maybe they weren't meant to be. She would always have her speech issues, and not everyone was going to like her ... Nope, things were never going to be perfect. But she was okay with that.