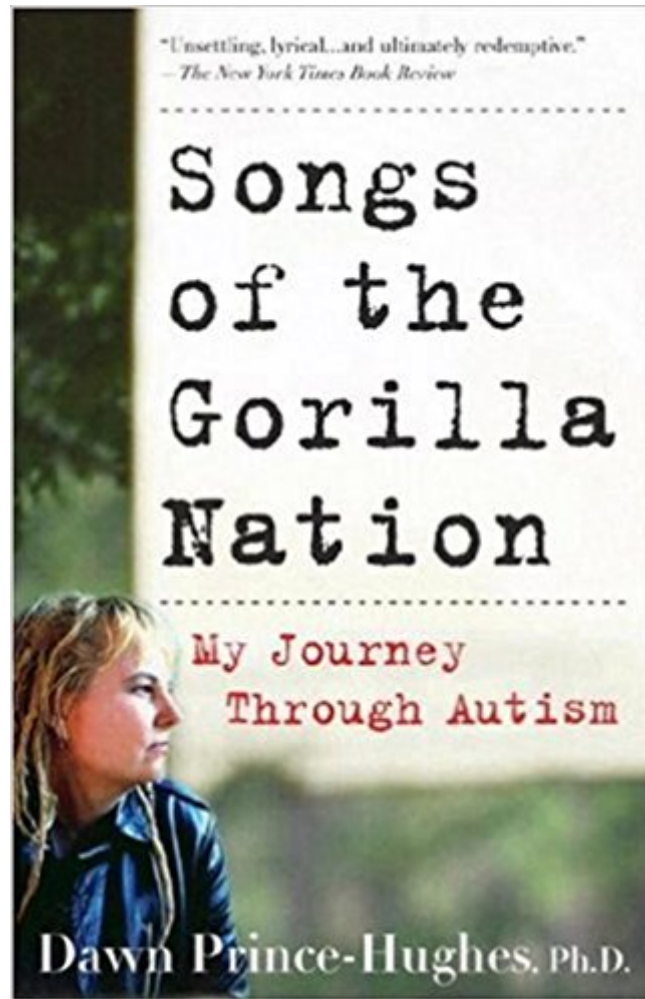


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# Songs Of The Gorilla Nation: My Journey Through Autism



## Synopsis

• This is a book about autism. Specifically, it is about my autism, which is both like and unlike other people's autism. But just as much, it is a story about how I emerged from the darkness of it into the beauty of it. • In this elegant and thought-provoking memoir, Dawn Prince-Hughes traces her personal growth from undiagnosed autism to the moment when, as a young woman, she entered the Seattle Zoo and immediately became fascinated with the gorillas. Having suffered from a lifelong inability to relate to people in a meaningful way, Dawn was surprised to find herself irresistibly drawn to these great primates. By observing them and, later, working with them, she was finally able to emerge from her solitude and connect to living beings in a way she had never previously experienced. Songs of the Gorilla Nation is more than a story of autism, it is a paean to all that is important in life. Dawn Prince-Hughes's evocative story will undoubtedly have a lasting impact, forcing us, like the author herself, to rediscover and assess our own understanding of human emotion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a memoir about being autistic and learning to accept and even revel in the uniqueness of being autistic. Autism, in a sense, is a different strategy. It may be, in its "milder" forms, as that experienced by Dawn Prince-Hughes, who writes so beautifully well, an attempt to adapt to an ancient environment in which social abilities are not as valuable as some other talents. Many autistics would be more at home in the jungle or in woodlands or on the savannas of Africa than

non-autistic people. Their ability to concentrate and to sense things acutely would serve them well. And any lack in social skill would not matter. At least that is my impression after reading this wonderful book by a woman who "went forward by going backwards"--backwards, that is, "into the most primal and ancient part of myself." She had this experience with her "first and best friends, a family of captive gorillas, people of an ancient nation." On the other hand, the autistic spectrum of disorders may represent imperfect ways of dealing with the world and with others. Usually autistic people are at a disadvantage, especially socially and vocationally, because other people find their behavior inappropriate and unfeeling. Dawn's behavior seemed at times cold and withdrawn and without proper affect. She had to force herself to make eye contact with people and to remind herself to engage in the social niceties. The curious thing about this is that autistics may actually feel things more strongly than the rest of us. The lack of social grace that many autistics display does not mean they are incapable of feeling or that their feelings of love and empathy are less than that of "normal" people.

I was spellbound by *Songs of the Gorilla Nation*, a beautifully written memoir of a young woman who has Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism. Although she has difficulty communicating and interacting in person, she is a remarkably eloquent writer, and is able to describe and provide profound insight into the thought processes and experiences of people who have the syndrome. She describes her syndrome as a sensory filter malfunction (interestingly enough, many people with Autism and Asperger's have asthma and terrible allergies, which can be seen as other types of 'filter' disorders). For her, to experience the world is to drown in synesthetic sensory overload. Overwhelmed, unable to process the tidal wave of stimuli, she escapes the painful barrage through obsessive compulsive behavior, repetitive actions, and solipsism. As a child she was unable to connect normally with other people and was incapable of picking up on normal social cues. Although not cognitively or verbally delayed, she was socially helpless. Blunt, inadvertently rude, and always "different," she was a vulnerable target for vicious schoolmates and even teachers. She suffered greatly as a tormented, confused social outcast. Completely alienated, she dropped out of school at 16 and was moved to Seattle and became homeless, eating out of garbage cans to survive. She eventually became an exotic dancer, and with her first paycheck visited the Seattle zoo because she had always found solace in animals. There she discovers an almost mystical connection with the gorillas, and for the first time experiences empathy and connection with another primate.

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