

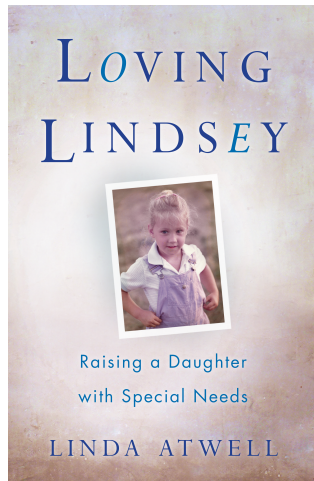


**For Immediate Release:**

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## **Debut memoir ‘Loving Lindsey’ shares Linda Atwell’s inspirational story of raising her daughter with special needs**

**PORTLAND, Ore.** – Linda Atwell’s debut memoir tells the beautiful, tumultuous coming-of-age story of her daughter with special needs, Lindsey. Written like a novel, “Loving Lindsey” blends the poignant realism of handling difficult situations with the joy of raising a child,



creating a dynamic narrative that will have you hooked from the first chapter.

Dealing with the complex subjects of sexual relationships, independence, and family involvement for people with special needs, “Loving Lindsey” is an emotional story that lovingly brings hard-to-discuss topics to light. Atwell’s gorgeous storytelling puts you in the middle of every moment, leaving you laughing and crying as you follow Lindsey’s journey through the highs and lows of growing up.

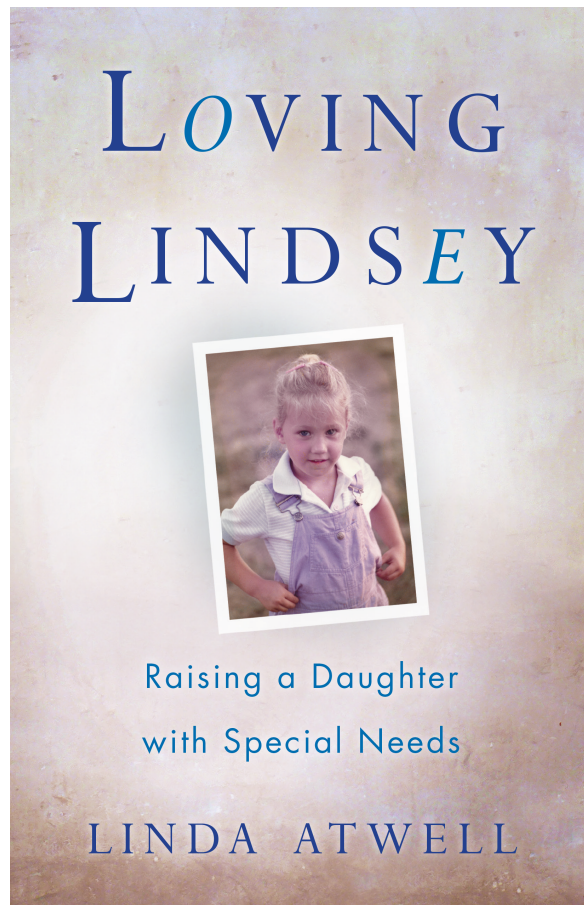
**About the Book:** Linda Atwell and her strong-willed daughter, Lindsey—a high-functioning young adult with intellectual disabilities—have always had a complicated relationship. But when Lindsey graduates from Silverton High School at nineteen and gets a job at Goodwill, she also moves into a newly remodeled cottage in her parents’ backyard—and Linda believes that all their difficult times may finally be behind them.

Life, however, proves not to be so simple. As Lindsey plunges into adulthood, she experiments with sex, considers a tubal ligation, and at twenty quits Goodwill and runs away with Emmett, a man more than twice her age. As Lindsey grows closer to Emmett, she slips further away from her family—but Linda, determined to save her daughter, refuses to give up. A touching memoir with unexpected moments of joy and humor, “Loving Lindsey” is a story about independence, rescue, resilience, and, most of all, love.

***Linda Atwell lives in Silverton, Oregon with her husband, John. They have two incredible adult children. Linda earned her BA from George Fox College, but it is her entrepreneurial and adventuresome spirits that have inspired her career goals. She owned a successful home décor business for ten years before switching to adjusting catastrophe insurance claims and climbing roofs for a living. Now she writes. Her award-winning work has appeared in print and online magazines. She irregularly writes a blog about her daughter with special needs. Atwell is happiest traveling the world, and hopes to get fifty stamps in her passport before it expires.***

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*About the Book*



**“Loving Lindsey”**

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Memoir

“Atwell’s evocative descriptions provide added depth to the characters, particularly Lindsey, whose voice emanates from the pages. A brutally honest, affecting memoir of family resilience.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

## *Advance Praise*

“As the older sister of a brother with special needs, I despair over those stories that portray people with disabilities as carefree candidates for sainthood. Linda Atwell's ‘Loving Lindsey’ provides a candid look at what it means to be the parent of an adult child with special needs. She captures the complexity of her relationship with her daughter in prose rich with compassion and wit. Lindsey emerges from these pages as a real person--complicated, challenging, and absolutely delightful.”

~Melissa Hart, author of “Wild Within: How Rescuing Owls Inspired a Family and Gringa: A Contradictory Girlhood”

“Ms. Atwell writes with clarity and contemplation through the triumphs and tragedies of raising someone with special needs. Her memoir is a moving exploration of a mother’s resolve to keep her daughter safe, despite Lindsey’s determination to dance to her own off-beat drum, and how the love that bonds this mother and daughter will prevail against the odds. At times funny and always candid, ‘Loving Lindsey’ is a book every woman should enjoy reading, no matter where they fall on its relationship spectrum.”

~Kathleen Cremonesi, author of “Love in the Elephant Tent: How Running Away with the Circus Brought me Home,” winner of 2016 Gold Medal Independent Publisher Awards for Coming of Age/Family Legacy

“I LOVE this book so much! ‘Loving Lindsey’ is a brave and big-hearted story every parent should read. Linda Atwell writes with generosity and depth about what it means to fiercely love and accept each other.”

~Ariel Gore, author of “The End of Eve, Atlas of the Human Heart”

“As the parent of a child with disabilities, I often wonder and worry about what the future holds for my son. Reading ‘Loving Lindsey’ has given me great hope. Linda Atwell's tender, funny, real, and at times heart-wrenching memoir about her daughter—who as an adult woman still sleeps with a Cabbage Patch doll yet holds a job, gets a place of her own and falls in love, as doomed as it may be—portrays the self-sufficiency and experiences that I want my son to someday enjoy. I know there will be bumps along the way large and small, but ‘Loving Lindsey’ shows that it is entirely possible to have intellectual disability and also have a good life.”

~Ellen Seidman, author of the award-winning blog Love That Max

“A suspenseful heart-wrenching tale of broken dreams and incredible burdens, ‘Loving Lindsey’ is a first-hand account of raising a child with a diminished emotional and intellectual capacity who will never be a fully-functioning adult. This harrowing journey—a page-turner that’s every parent’s nightmare—will stay with you long after you have put down the book. Highly recommended.”

~Barbara Donsky, award-winning author of “Veronica’s Grave: A Daughter’s Memoir” (Canadian version: “Missing Mother”)

“Loving Lindsey” is a mom's heartbreakingly honest account of letting go of her daughter, Lindsey. Linda Atwell describes the increasingly rocky relationship between her and her daughter with special needs as Lindsey approached adulthood, along with difficult decisions Atwell and her husband faced as Lindsey matured and began making self-destructive choices. The heroes of this book are Atwell’s fierce and imperfect love for her daughter and Lindsey’s determination to be as independent as possible. “Loving

Lindsey” offers parents of children with special needs a glimpse of the challenges their children will face in adulthood and food for thought about how to prepare and navigate them.

~Jolene Philo, author of “A Different Dream for My Child and Does My Child Have PTSD?”

“The reader gets to see this family in a world we don’t usually get to share—raising a teenage daughter compounded by the difficulties of developmental disability. Told with clear-eyed empathy for her daughter and the other members of her family, Atwell’s memoir is unflinchingly honest, allowing us to drop midstream into this remarkable family’s life.”

~Diana Y. Paul, author of “Things Unsaid”

“‘Loving Lindsey’ is provocative and it will leave you changed, which is the highest praise I can give a book.”

~Debby Dodds, author of “Amish Guys Don't Call”

“Atwell shines a light on the complicated issues involved in loving and living with someone with special needs. Whether you are a family member of someone with intellectual disabilities or just looking in from the outside, you will be moved.”

~Teresa Sullivan, author of “Mikey and Me: Life with My Exceptional Sister”

“Told with astonishing honesty and candor, this is a story about the courage and bravery of daily life in a family bringing a “forever child” into adulthood. It’s a story about real love in real life.”

~Corinne Tippet, author of “Just a Couple of Chickens and When No One Else Would Fly”

“Atwell’s strong relationship with Lindsey, her adult daughter with special needs, carries her (and us) through heartbreaking times that include fear, frustration, and disappointment that are always tempered by unwavering love and a determination to equip her daughter with skills for an independent life. A riveting narrative of mother-daughter struggles and rewards.”

~Matilda Butler, memoir coach and award-winning author of “Rosie’s Daughters: The ‘First Woman To’ Generation Tells Its Story”

“Linda Atwell is a master storyteller, and does a phenomenal job of sharing the love and grievances that come with raising her daughter. The moments and years of joy and frustration every family feels are especially touching as she navigates life with her sweet, defiant girl. ‘Loving Lindsey’ is an exquisitely told account of a mother’s protection, pride, frustration, and is, ultimately, a story about never giving up. I highly recommend ‘Loving Lindsey’ to every parent.”

~Kristi Rieger Campbell, speaker, author, advocate, and Finding Ninee creator

“Linda Atwell is a beacon of light in her book about the richness of raising a daughter with special needs. Lindsey stories are woven into the midst of Atwell’s own very full life, and she truly tells it like it is. She shares her experiences through the lenses of love, humor, and the human condition.”

~Diana Dolan Mattick, special education teacher and learning specialist



## ***An Interview with Linda Atwell***



**What made you decide to write a book about raising Lindsey, and what do you hope to share with the world through this story?**

I wasn't a perfect mother. I failed my daughter on many occasions. Yet I also recognized that, like most parents, my motives were grounded with love. During the writing process, I learned to find a healthy balance between the daughter I thought I wanted and the one I got. Because of Lindsey, I have more stories to tell. Some of her shenanigans sure didn't seem entertaining back in the day we were going through them, but with the passage of time, I can now find nuggets of humor. My daughter certainly has her own unique way of seeing the world, of speaking—and that amuses me.

I wanted so much for my girl—despite her intellectual disabilities—to get what a typical kid gets: independence, romantic love, purpose. Fortunately, Lindsey not only wanted, she demanded these things for herself. And, for the most part, she's succeeded. But with such desires, such goals, sometimes there are pitfalls. Bad things can happen. Yet I hope "Loving Lindsey" readers will see the success people with special needs can achieve when offered parental, educational, and community support. They often have more abilities than we give them credit for. Lindsey continues to surprise us all the time.

**Special education in the public school plays a prominent role in Lindsey's life. How has education helped Lindsey, and what's your perspective on its importance?**

For several years, Lindsey had only been diagnosed with essential tremors. When she started preschool, her teacher voiced some concerns about Lindsey's inability to make friends and do the work. At first I dismissed the teacher's concerns because my daughter looked so typical. My initial reaction (I'm ashamed to say now) was that it must be the teaching, it could not possibly be my girl. Now, I realize this is a classic reaction by a lot of parents who've gone through similar situations.

Yet, as time went on and Lindsey had difficulty grasping her lessons and socializing, I realized she needed to be evaluated at Oregon Health Science University (OHSU), one of the most respected medical facilities in Oregon. Had my daughter not attended preschool and kindergarten, I don't know how long it would have taken to recognize that she did indeed have challenges.

Once OHSU doctor's diagnosed Lindsey, they also provided some suggestions for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). We tried different types of individualized learning: resource room, classroom aide, then special education classroom. We tried complete mainstreaming, then partially mainstreaming. Each decision had its strengths and weaknesses. By the time Lindsey reached junior high and high school, I realized that a lot of what I wanted for my daughter was ego based. Not hers. Mine. When I let go of my ego and decided to allow Lindsey to concentrate on Life Skills, instead of a traditional education track, things got a lot better in our household. Lindsey wasn't as frustrated with the lessons she brought home each evening, which translated to a calmer home environment—a long-awaited and welcome change. Lindsey liked doing the hands-on projects much better. The school system also provided job shadowing and training. Her regular classes—choir, home economics, and physical education—were interspersed with the Life Skills program throughout her junior and senior years in high school.

I'm not suggesting our decision to go with the special education and life skills training is the correct route for every child who has developmental delays, but it did seem to work for our girl. One drawback was that Lindsey did not earn a high school diploma. Instead she earned a certificate of attendance. Making the decision to only receive a certificate of attendance was harder for me (again), than for Lindsey. After all, she just knew that she was attending graduation, walking across the stage, and receiving a certificate, exactly like all of her classmates. And in the end, it did not matter. A "real" diploma would not have made a difference in Lindsey's future.

**“Loving Lindsey” deals with a variety of complex subjects including living independently, romantic relationships, and tubal ligation. What perspective would you share with parents and caregivers struggling with the same issues?**

I'm not a certified professional in this field, I'm just a mother who loves her daughter and wants what's best for her. For the most part, in offering my perspective, others must understand, that is all it is: my perspective. Of course, each individual will have different issues and so what was right for Lindsey, for us, may not be the correct choice for another family in a similar situation.

So first of all, we are fairly liberal thinkers when it comes to social issues. Still, I do believe, that any and all subjects should be discussed with a child or young adult when they show interest, gearing the discussion to the age appropriateness of the individual. From our experience, these issues won't go away if ignored. Most people with some sort of disability or special need still mature physically—just like the rest of us. And they have dreams and urges and needs that cannot—and should not—be ignored. I would highly recommend addressing all concerns and questions with the individual and try to come up with a solution that works for all. If you need

more advice, I would chat with someone who knows your child the best: a doctor, a counselor, an education specialist, etc. They would know how to handle your unique situation the best.

**Your community played a huge part in creating an environment for Lindsey to thrive. For people that do not have loved ones with special needs, how would you recommend they can encourage and help people who do?**

This is a rather tough question. Individuals with special needs are more vulnerable. Many of us have taught our children about stranger danger. Still, our family has relied on the kindness of strangers on many occasions. And, as much of a cliché as this is, I believe it takes a village to raise a child. At least it has been true in our case.

So having said that, my daughter does love to chat. Especially when she feels safe. So if you have an opportunity to chat in a line at the bank or grocery store, Lindsey would likely be fine with that, and I can only assume others would be, too. Individuals with special needs often feel invisible. People are often uncomfortable being around someone different. So if you are comfortable starting up a conversation, it could be as simple as asking how he or she likes the weather or giving a compliment about an outfit.

If you live in an apartment complex or neighborhood, it is nice to get to know your neighbors. And if so, you could reach out, tell the individual that you've noticed them around and if she ever needs assistance, you would be available (please only say that if you mean it). You could share your phone number, HOWEVER, please note that a great deal of individuals with special needs do not necessarily understand boundaries or social queues. If you provide a phone number, she might call you. A lot. You will have to find kind ways to end a conversation that goes on longer than you wanted or intended. We often tell Lindsey, "Thank you so much for calling. This isn't a good time right now, but do you have another time I might be able to call you back and chat?"

In our daughter's case, she is generally not offended if someone tells her this is not a good time, or I only have a minute to chat and then I have to go, or please don't call my house after eight at night or before 9 in the morning. Please explain/set boundaries with someone like Lindsey, otherwise you might have a new best friend. And one final thought, you might have to share these boundaries/guidelines several times. Sometimes the first time doesn't register. You may be uncomfortable doing so, but if you do it kindly, you are doing a service to someone like my daughter.

**How would you recommend parents of children with special needs reach out for support? What kind of support helped you the most as you raised Lindsey?**

In some ways, while Lindsey was growing up in the 80s and 90s, we felt isolated from other parents who had kids with similar special needs. Back then, there was no Internet. Lindsey's diagnosis was so vague that we didn't have the support groups that parents who have a child with Down syndrome or Autism might have access to. The Internet has changed that scenario for a lot of parents. Now there are more support groups and they are just a Google search away. Sometimes you can chat online, which means you don't even have to leave your home!

When Lindsey was first diagnosed, our doctor did offer advice. When she went through OHSU, it seems they had some sort of liaison who helped coordinate some of Lindsey's early education intervention. But since Lindsey didn't really require a great deal of medical attention, after that, the school system was our best resource.

As Lindsey approached her senior year, the director of the special education program recommended we apply for Social Security Disability for Lindsey. It seems like there were some advantages to applying before Lindsey turned a certain age. (Please check that out because it turned out to be excellent advice and the age may have changed since we applied.) The director also suggested we consider a caseworker who could help Lindsey transition into adulthood. That advice helped us learn about the resources available for our daughter, such as subsidized housing, food stamps, activities for people with special needs, and much more. These services are valuable because they help Lindsey live an independent life. Besides, one of our major concerns is: we don't know how long we will be here on this earth. Therefore, we want to make sure that Lindsey can continue to live in the same manner as she currently does, whether or not we are here to help her.

**You mention details of Lindsey's special needs throughout the book. How was she diagnosed, and what would you recommend to parents whose child receives a similar diagnosis?**

A year or two after her grand mal seizure, a neurologist diagnosed her essential tremors. When they got worse and we began to notice other things, such as not playing well with others, fine motor skill issues, her inability to concentrate on schoolwork, her inability to retain information, I insisted she be evaluated by doctors at Oregon Health Science University (OHSU). In 1985, Lindsey was selected for a nine-month study. At the end, the doctors concluded that Lindsey was mildly mentally retarded from an unidentifiable syndrome. They said she had a short in her neurological system and would never process information the same as her peers. First of all, the word "retarded" hurt my heart. It felt like someone hit me with a stun gun. And I couldn't believe that my typical-looking daughter could have such a diagnosis, and for years, I didn't believe it. I thought that if my husband and I worked with Lindsey long enough, she would outgrow this label. But that didn't happen.

Fortunately, "retarded" has been phased out. Today, Lindsey would likely be identified as intellectually or developmentally disabled. Despite her diagnosis, we didn't treat Lindsey any differently. We didn't make excuses (for the most part) for her disabilities. We expected a lot of the same things from her as we did our typical son.

For someone who receives a similar diagnosis, I would recommend that they take the time to mourn the loss of the child they thought they were getting. It hurts. But it will get better. Seek counseling if needed. I'm so glad I went that route. In the end, she is still your child and you will still love the heck out of her. Then figure out the best ways to help your child to be all they can be. Whether you get through the difficult times by using various social services offered in your community or state, the educational system, or a religious organization—do what you need to do. Learn to accept that your child may have limitations. Ask yourself, am I doing this for my child,

or for my ego? Yet, encourage her to do what she can; be your child's advocate. No one will do that job better than you.

**You mention how much you love to travel. Where is your favorite place you've traveled to so far, and what's your dream trip?**

This may sound like a cop-out for this question, but every single place I visit is my favorite while I'm there. I love different destinations for very different reasons. I love the national parks in the United States and am awed by the beautiful country I get to call home. I adore Europe because of all the old architecture. I love Mexico, Central and South America because of the inexpensive, incredible cuisine as well as a lifestyle that is so different from how we live in Oregon. However, if I were forced to pick one place, I'd have to say Cuba. I wanted to go there for as long as I can remember. Two years ago, after the U.S. relaxed restrictions, I made my reservation and am so glad I did. I wanted to see Havana (and other areas on the island) before the country was changed by tons of tourism. (For many reasons, I no longer feel that Cuba will change quickly—if and when U.S. citizens are able to travel there more freely.) The people, music, art, all exceeded my expectations. I would go back to Cuba a heartbeat.

My dream trip would be an extended African safari. I love animals. Being able to see lions, tigers, elephants, hippos—all the wildlife Africa has to offer (and in its natural habitat before it no longer exists)—would be a dream come true. And let's not rule out exploring the distinctive landscape and authentic villages of that region. I definitely want to see those, too.