



# MAKING CHRISTMAS MAGICAL



It makes me so happy that my book helps people



Me with Jordan, Tommy and Cody

Dear Tommy,

All children love Christmas, don't they? Well... not exactly all. I discovered that when your big brother Jordan was three. It was December, and being a big fan of Christmas, I couldn't wait for him to experience all the magical things about it that I loved. I took him to the mall in Brisbane, Qld, to see the shiny decorations, twinkling lights and hear the Christmas carols. He wasn't as thrilled as I'd hoped. 'Can we go now, Mummy?' he said, clinging to me. He didn't even want to see Santa's grotto. Back home, I decorated the tree with lights that played festive jingles as they flashed. 'Look at this, Jordan!' I said, expecting to see the wonder in his eyes. Instead, he burst into tears. 'What's going on?' I said to your dad, Jason.

'Beats me,' he said, surprised. Jordan wasn't any happier on Christmas Day, either, when we took him to see your grandparents. Despite all the gifts he received, he hated the sounds of all the excited chatter, and the fuss we all made of him as he unwrapped his presents. It wasn't until he

was seven that he was diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder, or SPD. It meant that sensory information, such as sights and sounds, got all jumbled up in his brain. 'No wonder Jordan hates Christmas,' I said to Jason. 'His brain is so overloaded, he can't enjoy any of it!' We soon learnt your other brother, Cody, then four, also hated the fuss at Christmas time, particularly the loud festive music playing and crowds in the mall.

with background noise. He'd get really cranky when it became too much for him. Then, when Jordan was 14, and Cody was 11, you came along. We weren't surprised to discover that you also had SPD. You had an aversion to noise, lights, and even the texture of many foods. You hated surprises too, so you chose your own presents to be left under the tree. Once, I took you to a Santa parade that turned out to be much bigger than we'd expected. You were overcome with anxiety. 'Mummy, I want to go home!' you sobbed. Back at the house, it took

hours for you to calm down. You couldn't even hear me talking to you because you were still processing everything you'd seen and heard. We weren't sure why you and your brothers all had sensory issues, but you were all premies and we learnt that it was far more common in premature babies. But I didn't want you to miss out on the magic of celebrating Christmas. So, we established our own traditions. We avoided big crowds and parades and found a

Michelle Worthington, 44, was confused when her boys didn't like the festive season

Sitting with Santa, you happily chatted, asking him about his reindeer. We also used the same artificial tree and decorations each year, so trimming up the house always felt familiar.

## Sitting with Santa, you asked about his reindeer

When Jordan was eight and Cody was five, we began to spread the Christmas joy out over three days, so it wasn't all too much at once. So by the time you came along, we had it all worked out. On Christmas Eve, we open one present, then on the day we open stockings with lollies and pyjamas. Then we visit your grandparents and on Boxing Day, we see other relatives. The first Christmas we tried this, in 2008, I was stoked to hear the house full of laughter.

'The new regime is working,' I smiled happily to your dad. Thrilled, I decided to write a book about it. Calling it *Little Gnome's Christmas Wish*, it was about a young gnome who finds the noises and lights of Christmas time overwhelming, until he is invited to make a wish. The aim of the book was to show other children with sensory disorders that they weren't alone and they too could enjoy Christmas. I was delighted when the book was snapped up by an American publisher and went on to sell well. And it was lovely to get emails from parents in the same boat. I'm so glad to find a book

my kids can relate to, one person commented. I was even invited to the US to talk about how important it was for authors to include children with special needs. Today, Jordan is 20 and studying IT at uni, and Cody, 17, is an electrical apprentice. Tom, you're now six and I'm proud of how you're handling your disorder. And now we know how to help you enjoy Christmas, you love it as much as I do! Which is why I've dedicated the book to you. Christmas can be fun for everyone – you just need to do it your way!

All my love,  
Mum xxx

*Little Gnome's Christmas Wish*, published by Clear Fork Publishing, is available online for \$29.50.



Christmas is now a happy time in our house



Tommy is thriving



Tommy, Jason and me

AS TOLD TO EVA LEVICKI