Nicholas Nigel Norris

Produced by the Cerebral Palsy Association of Western Australia with funding from the Lotteries Commission of Western Australia
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This book was produced by the 'CP & Me' team at the Cerebral Palsy Association of Western Australia Ltd.

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Western Australia
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Nicholas Nigel Norris went to school.

He loved school.
He loved to play, paint and sing.
One day Nicholas Nigel Norris noticed something. He was different to the other kids.

He wore splints on his legs. He couldn’t always keep up with the other kids. Sometimes his hand wouldn’t do what he wanted it to do. Nicholas Nigel Norris wondered about this...

Not very different, but different.
One day his friend asked, "What are those things on your legs?" Nicholas told him they were splints. He wondered why he wore them when the other kids didn’t...

He thought it best to ask mum. His mum was very clever.

"What’s a splint?" he asked his mum. Mum said, "A splint is a helper. It helps to keep your foot straight. Lots of people have helpers. See how my glasses help me to see? They are a helper too."
Nicholas Nigel Norris thought about this for awhile.

He thought about his Grandpa who used a stick to help him walk.

He thought about the girl at school who sat in a wheelchair to help her move around.

He thought about his dad who used a puffer when it was hard to breathe. "That's OK," he thought, "lots of people need helpers".
Nicholas Nigel Norris kept going to school. He kept playing, painting and singing. One day his friend asked, "Why do your legs need splints?" Nicholas Nigel Norris wondered about this...

He thought it best to ask mum. His mum was very clever.

"Why do I need splints?" he asked his mum. Mum said, "Sometimes your legs won’t do what you want them to. Your splints help them do what they should."
Nicholas Nigel Norris thought about this for awhile. He thought about how his left toes wouldn’t wiggle as well as his right and how his left hand wouldn’t always hold the paper when he drew.

He thought about all the paintings he could paint, all the songs he could sing, and all the other things he was clever at. "That’s OK," he thought, "some things I’m good at and some things I need a helper for."
Nicholas Nigel Norris kept going to school. He kept playing, painting and singing. Sometimes when it was hard to keep up he wondered, "Why won't my legs do what I want them to?"

He thought it best to ask mum. His mum was very clever.

"Why won't my legs do what I want them to do?" he asked his mum. His mum said, "You have a part of your body called the brain. Your brain works like a computer. It sends messages telling your body what to do. Sometimes the wrong messages are sent. That's why your legs won't do what you want them to do."
Nicholas Nigel Norris thought about this for awhile. He thought about his brain computer and how it helped him to do lots of things. It helped him to think, dream and play. It even helped him to move.

"That's OK," he thought, "sometimes my brain finds it hard to make my legs move, but it still helps me in lots of other ways."
Nicholas Nigel Norris kept going to school. He kept playing, painting and singing. Sometimes he felt different to the others and sometimes it made him sad. Talking to mum nearly always helped.
"I don't want to be different," he told his mum. Mum picked him up and put him on her knee. "Sometimes when we feel different it's hard. I wish it wasn't so hard for you, but we are all different in our own way. Some kids wear glasses, some don't. Some kids are good readers, some aren't. Some kids need special helpers, some don't. Sometimes we don't want to be different. Sometimes it makes us sad, sometimes it even makes us mad but we are all different, and we all have things we can do well."

Nicholas Nigel Norris thought about this for awhile. He thought about his painting prize and how his singing was the loudest and brightest.

He thought about lots of different things...
He thought about the leaves that fell in all sorts of shapes and colours. He thought about his little sister’s blonde curls and his brother’s spiky red hair and he thought about what a boring world it would be if everything and everyone were the same.

His mum was clever and Nicholas Nigel Norris was very clever too.
ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book has been written to help children understand cerebral palsy. An accompanying workbooklet entitled "CP and Me" is also available. Both resources seek to aid parents and teachers in the often delicate task of explaining physical disability to children.

The main character in this story, Nicholas, has cerebral palsy, which is the most common cause of disability in children. Damage to or lack of development in the movement centres of the brain results in difficulty with muscle control. Children may then have weakness, stiffness, shakiness and balance difficulties ranging from mild to severe.

Some children are more accepting of individual differences than others. When a child encounters questions or comments from peers, it is important that we help him to develop resilience or learned optimism, which is an essential life skill for meeting the demands and challenges of everyday life. We can do this by reminding him of a few important principles found in the storyline.

* ONE DAY HIS FRIEND ASKED, "WHAT ARE THOSE ON YOUR LEGS?"... Most children are curious and ask questions out of a genuine desire to understand. They do not set out to upset a child or make him feel uncomfortable. We can help to prepare a child for such encounters by rehearsing responses to foreseeable questions and scenarios. If a child is able to give an age-appropriate understanding of their disability in a confident, matter-of-fact way, this will help him to feel confident in social situations.

*HE THOUGHT IT BEST TO ASK MUM... As a parent, establish an agreement with your child that they will tell you about anything that happens to them that does not make them feel good. Let them know that all things can be discussed and that nothing is too embarrassing or awkward.

*SOMETIMES HE FELT DIFFERENT TO THE OTHERS AND SOMETIMES IT MADE HIM SAD... Children don't find it easy to identify their emotions or ask for help. More often they will give out signals that all is not well. Through active listening we can help him to find out exactly what is troubling him and give him the satisfaction of being heard and understood by another person. We do this by voicing his messages in our own words. The child may then 'correct' our perceptions of the situation which opens the way to further discussion.

*HE THOUGHT ABOUT HIS PAINTING PRIZE... Focus on a child's skills and commend him for these. Every person has strengths and weaknesses. It is important to be realistic and encouraging about weaknesses while continuing to be positive about strengths.

Further information may be obtained from the 'CP and Me' workbooklet