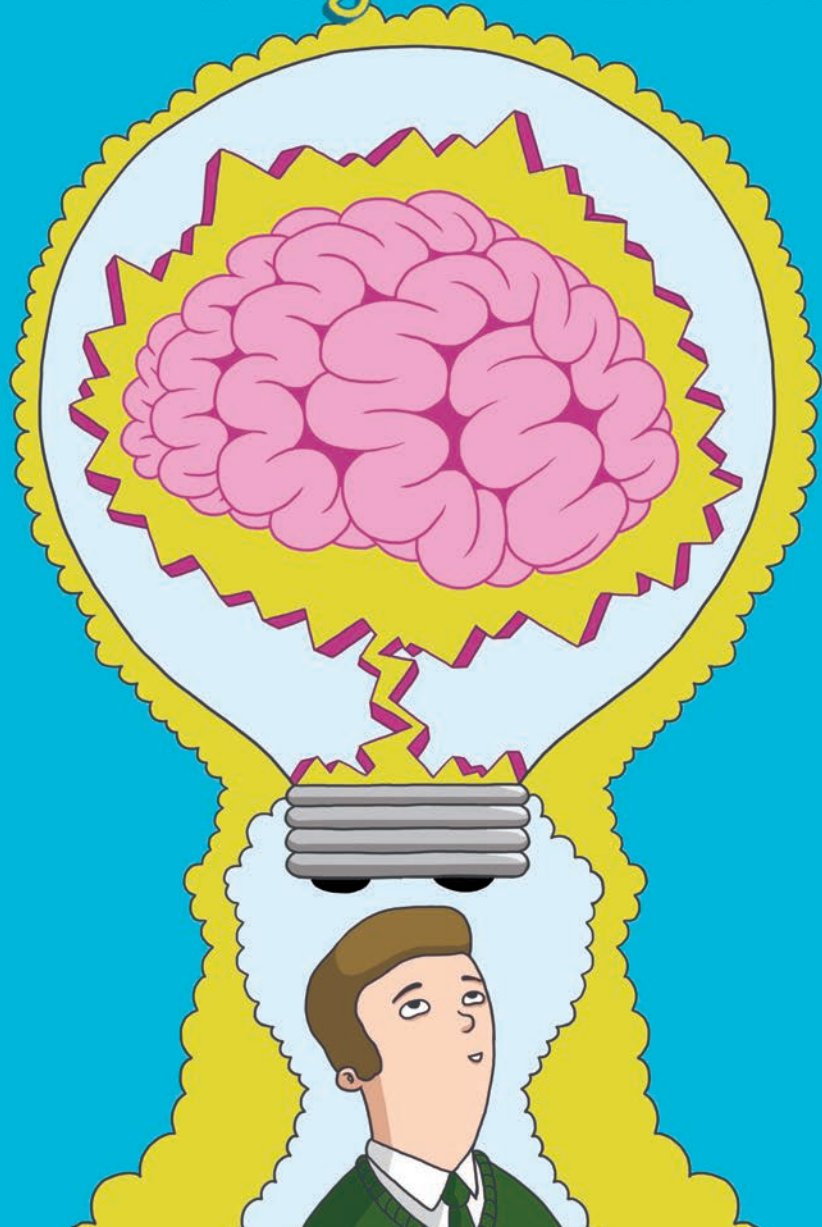


# The Special Brain

by Dr Susan Ozer



## **Foreword**

*'The Special Brain' by Dr Susan Ozer fills a much needed gap in educational resource as it is a short story specifically aimed at helping younger children understand the science behind ADHD. Understanding how ADHD occurs is a big step in improving compliance to treatment and also helps improve the child's self esteem after having a diagnosis. Getting children to understand how the brain works and how ADHD occurs can sometimes be challenging. Dr Ozer captures this really well through the simplicity of the language in the book and the very engaging story which will appeal to so many children. Professionals will also find this book a great resource when discussing ADHD diagnosis with children and their families.*

### **Dr Inyang Takon**

*Consultant Community Paediatrician and Clinical Lead in ADHD (East Hertfordshire)  
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## **Acknowledgments**

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Nine-year-old Kieran loved the Christmas holidays, especially when he visited his grandparents in the country. This visit had been a family tradition since he was born. He and his 6-year-old brother Sean loved their grandad and nan to bits, and grandad and nan spoilt Kieran and Sean endlessly.

Kieran particularly looked forward to bedtime. Grandad was the greatest storyteller of all time.

Also, at his grandparents' home, Kieran found it easier to fall asleep as his grandad knew the exact story to help him relax.

Kieran had always found it hard to wind down and sleep after a day full of activity. At bedtime, he felt as if his mind was racing at 200 miles an hour. He sometimes felt envious of his brother Sean, who could fall asleep in the twinkling of an eye. Sean would not wake up, even if you set off a firework just outside his bedroom window!

Kieran thought about his visit to the paediatrician three weeks ago. This had come about when his teacher and parents started



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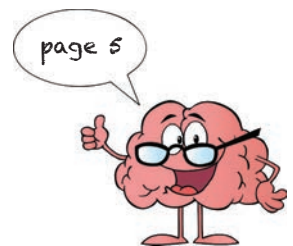
preferred to dream about things he would do if he ever went into space. It was so much fun imagining what it would be like in space. He would find aliens and learn an alien language. He would then return to Earth and teach everyone how to speak alien, and maybe even create his own alien dictionary and encyclopedia. This was surely more exciting than listening to maths or English.



Kieran also liked retreating into his own world at mealtimes when the family sat at table. He was always the last to leave the dining table. This frustrated his mum no end, particularly when he had to get ready for school in the mornings. After all, he wanted to be an adventurer when he grew up, travel into space, dance and moonwalk, and surf on some huge waves somewhere in the world.

Kieran liked Miss Petit, the learning support assistant. She helped him with his schoolwork twice a week, as Kieran's schoolwork had begun to suffer. Somehow Miss Petit just knew how to bring the best out of him by helping him focus.

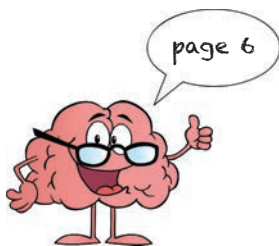
The paediatrician said that Kieran had a condition called ADHD, which stood for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She explained to his parents that he was not a naughty or lazy child, only that he had a special brain. Kieran was intrigued





about his 'special brain' and wondered whether the tablets the doctor gave him would help. Even though he did not like taking tablets, he would do this if it could help him do better at school. He would ask grandad about his special brain when it was time for his bedtime story. Grandad knew a lot of things. He had been in the army a long time ago and also had a library full of books at his home. Grandad also liked surfing the internet, something that his best friend's grandparents could not do.

That evening, bedtime couldn't come fast enough. Kieran quickly drank his warm milk and then brushed his teeth. He felt hungrier in the evenings, particularly since starting to take his tablets. The warm milk mum gave him was a welcome top-up to his evening tea. Mum also said that it would help



him get to sleep quicker. Kieran finished brushing his teeth and settled under his bed covers. He could not wait to ask grandad all the questions he had in his head. Kieran knew his parents had told his grandparents about his diagnosis. Mum had also brought them a lot of information on ADHD from the paediatrician, so they'd understand him better.

Kieran finally heard footsteps at his door. Grandad knocked gently and came to sit by Kieran's bed. "I can see someone is ready for a bedtime story," grandad laughed. "What story do I have in my story box for my lovely...?"

"Grandad," Kieran interrupted, "can you tell me more about my special brain? My doctor said I have a very special brain and need more help to concentrate at school."

Grandad let out a gentle sigh and looked tenderly at his grandson. He remembered many years ago when he was a little older than Kieran. He often struggled to concentrate in class, which

earned him the nickname Danny Dreamer. As a child he had always felt restless and would do the most dangerous things as a dare, often getting into trouble. ADHD was not very well known back then. You were easily labelled a naughty child



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and then told to get on with it. These days, science had clearly progressed and children were getting more help in school. Grandad had found his vocation when he joined the army at 21. He discovered that he could focus better. He had managed to catch up with a lot of schooling later in life. After coming out of the army, grandad was a very successful librarian until he retired. He loved books and spent a lot of his time catching up on the reading he had missed when he couldn't concentrate enough to read a good piece of literature. Since he learnt about Kieran's diagnosis he had done a lot of research on ADHD. He was particularly intrigued about the way ADHD affected the brain. Grandad was convinced that he had a lot of the symptoms of ADHD when he was younger, so he empathised with his grandson.

“Well then,” he looked at Kieran's expectant face, “let's see what we can do.”







## Grandad's story

### The Christmas tree

It was two weeks before Christmas and all the Christmas trees on Sugar Street were rustling with excitement. Some had been packed away in boxes since the last Christmas a year ago. They had been the lucky ones. The real Christmas trees had been recycled, sent away to rubbish dumps or used as firewood. This year a new batch of trees would make a grand appearance.



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The winter air was cold and crisp with a stiff wind from the east. A million stars shimmered in the velvety night sky like diamonds. The trees had been confined for so long that it would take a while for their Christmas-tree eyes to adjust to the natural light. They could not wait to breathe the cold fresh winter air. It was even rumoured that it would be a white Christmas. The trees that were outside decorating the street were particularly excited. Snow and ice on their branches would transform them into beautiful, natural works of art.

Some of the trees had been with their families for a long time. Old Abel, a wise and good-natured tree, was thought to be the oldest. Some trees said he was about 20 years old, others reckoned 30. Old Abel always shook his head and smiled when the debate about his age came up. He never told anyone about his age. Some of the older trees suspected Old Abel had forgotten how old he really was.

Pedro lived in the house opposite Old Abel. His owner, Miss Thelma, was very old, about 87 years old. Miss Thelma had a few visitors who checked on her each day to make sure she was fine. Despite her age, Miss Thelma was very strong and did things with very little help. Old Abel told Pedro that Miss Thelma's only son had emigrated to a country called Australia, which is very far away. At Christmas, Miss Thelma's friends from her book club joined her for Christmas dinner. Miss Thelma's favourite moment was listening to the Queen's Speech.

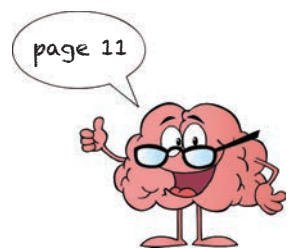


This year, the trees were more excited than usual. The people who lived on Sugar Street had joined a national competition to find the



home with the most beautifully decorated Christmas tree. The winner would be given prize money to donate to their favourite charity. Amidst all the excitement, Pedro was sad. Every year, Miss Thelma put decorations and Christmas lights on him. Pedro's decorations had been handmade by Miss Thelma over several years and were truly beautiful. Pedro's Christmas lights however were another matter. For eight years, Miss Thelma had failed to notice that some of Pedro's lights were completely out or dim. This prevented the other trees from seeing his beautiful decorations.

When Pedro was five Christmases old, a few of the younger trees teased him about his dim lights. Now, most of the trees felt sorry for him. Each Christmas, Pedro dreaded discovering that more of his Christmas lights had gone out. Pedro felt very frustrated. Telling the other trees about his decorations was different from the trees actually seeing them. The truth was that because a number of his Christmas lights



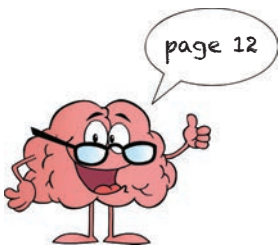


were out, the full extent of his beauty could not be seen. Some of the younger trees were mean, spreading rumours that he didn't have any beautiful decorations and that he was dreaming as usual. This made Pedro very angry indeed.

The older trees just felt sorry for him and would tell off the younger trees when they were mean to

Pedro. Pedro liked Old Abel across the road the best. He always had a kind word for him. Old Abel also told the most awesome stories. Pedro particularly liked the ones about Santa and his reindeer. Pedro wished he could see Santa one day, and he would try to stay awake on Christmas Eve long after the other trees had fallen asleep. This wasn't hard for him at all. The trouble was that he found it very hard to fall asleep.

Every Christmas Old Pedro told himself that his lights would soon be fixed or replaced. He had waited for this to happen for eight years and was losing hope. Miss Thelma only had a



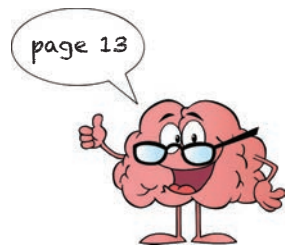


few visitors. Her family did not visit at Christmas as they lived in Australia. Also, he suspected that Miss Thelma was gradually losing her sight and wouldn't notice that some of his Christmas lights were dim or not working at all.

The excitement on Sugar Street was growing as Christmas drew near. The real Christmas trees had arrived and looked beautiful with their grand decorations and lights, particularly the outdoor ones. The trees in the houses had also been decorated. There was a lot of talk about who might win the competition. Everyone reckoned it would be Zara, the 3-year-old tree bought in a very expensive shop. Her family always put new and expensive decorations on her. Even other families would come and gaze at her. Zara lived in the biggest most expensive house on Sugar Street. The outside of her house was always decorated with very expensive lights.

Pedro never joined in the discussions about who would win. Any assumptions he made would result in familiar pitiful looks and embarrassing silences. Pedro knew in his heart that if his lights were fixed, his beautiful decorations would be seen by all. His decorations had not come from an expensive shop. Some had been handmade by Miss Thelma over several years, and some had been collected from all over the world by Miss Thelma and her husband. Miss Thelma's husband had died about five years ago.

Christmas Eve finally arrived. The local councillor would be judging until late into the evening, and the results would be announced on Christmas Day. Pedro was naturally anxious as he didn't particularly want people staring at him and





noticing his poor lights. As Pedro was feeling so sorry for himself, and also anxious from all the hustle and bustle going on in the street, he had failed to notice the goings-on in the house. There were more people than usual cleaning Miss Thelma's house this Christmas, and more decorations had been brought down from the attic. Miss Thelma's family was coming to spend Christmas with her and were expected any time now. For the first time ever, Pedro felt a few stirrings of hope. Maybe the family would notice his lights, particularly if they had children. Pedro knew that children loved Christmas lights best of all. Some of Pedro's lights could even sing Christmas tunes.

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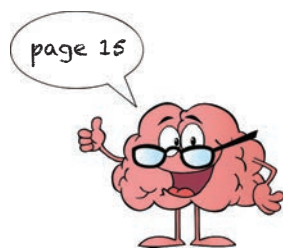




The family finally arrived. There were two children, 8-year-old Kai and 5-year-old Tanya. They ran straight to the Christmas tree, touching the decorations and looking at the presents underneath it. They asked their grandmother if they could put the Christmas lights on. These were very well-mannered children indeed! The children were disappointed that a number of Pedro's lights were either dim or not working at all. They were cheered up by their parents who reassured them that some of the bulbs just needed changing. Miss Thelma's son soon found some bulbs in the box the Christmas decorations were stored in. Some of the Christmas lights needed replacing, others had just come loose and needed tightening. When the job was finally done, the children once again switched the lights on. Pedro's lights and decorations at once came alive. He was a truly stunning tree. Even Miss Thelma's son had tears in his eyes. He recognised decorations he had made with his dad when he was a boy. He really missed England very much and was looking forward to bringing his family back to England to settle, and to being nearer his ageing mother.

Pedro felt very good indeed. For the first time in a long time he felt very alive and full of energy. The world was not a bad place after all. Old Abel was delighted for him and suggested he might even win the competition. The other trees in the street had also started to make comments about just how beautiful Pedro was. This all made Pedro feel good, and he felt a surge of confidence.

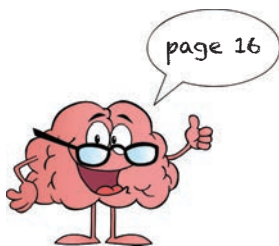
Judging time finally came, and after a lot of speeches and cheers, the first prize was awarded to Zara, as predicted. The competition had been tense between Zara and Pedro.





Some preferred Pedro's vintage beauty, and others preferred Zara's modern look. Zara had beaten Pedro by only half a point. Pedro didn't mind this at all. As runner-up he still appeared in the local newspapers. The best prize for him was the knowledge that he had been able to show his true beauty to all the other trees, proving that he had not been telling fibs or imagining things all along. He would go back into his storage box knowing that in another year he could continue to show his true beauty and full potential.

**The end**







Kieran looked at his grandad as if he expected more.

“Am I like Pedro the Christmas tree in the story?” he asked quietly.

Grandad was silent for a few seconds. “Yes,” he quietly replied.

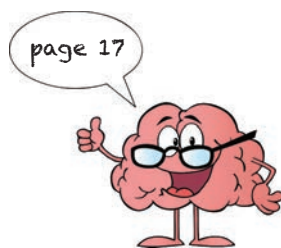
“Your special ADHD brain is like Pedro.”

“Even though the electricity was working all right, some of the light bulbs needed changing or readjusting. When the bulbs were finally changed or readjusted, Pedro’s lights all came on so he could show Miss Thelma’s beautiful decorations. This also made him more confident.

“Just like Pedro needed new or readjusted Christmas bulbs to bring out his true potential, the tablets and support you’re receiving help you to think. Your tablets help important chemical messages reach areas of your special brain to help you concentrate at home, clubs and school, and avoid doing things that could be dangerous.”

Kieran smiled to himself. He remembered all the things he had done as a dare because he had been urged on by his friends. Climbing the tree in old Mrs Frost’s orchard was one of the dares last summer. If he had fallen and hurt himself, he would have been grounded by his parents following a visit to the hospital.

Grandad got up from the chair and said goodnight to Kieran. He promised Kieran that he would look at pictures with him the next





day to help him understand his special brain more. Long after his granddad had left, Kieran thought about Pedro. He began to understand why it was important for him to take his tablets and receive support to help him focus on his schoolwork. He also understood why his parents used reminders to help him become more organised and focused. This was all to help him do better at school and, more importantly, to enjoy school. Like Pedro in his grandad's story, he was determined that his friends and teachers would begin to see his true potential. That night, as Kieran and the family lay asleep, and the snow was beginning to fall on the rooftops, the Christmas trees in the houses on the street were having a hot debate about which of them would be the most beautifully decorated tree this Christmas.

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***Disclaimer***

*The information presented in this book is intended to educate and provide a source of general information and support.*

*It is not intended as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment.*

