

Gionata Bernasconi

# Martin the Little Wolf

Simona Mulazzani

Fondazione  
**ares**

**Kiwanis**  
ITALIA - SAN MARINO

C·A·R·T·H·U·S·I·A

An illustration for a children's book cover. On the left, a white swan with a large orange beak is eating a string of red cherries. In front of it, a grey wolf wearing a blue tank top is also eating a string of red cherries. Above them, a branch of a cherry tree with green leaves and red cherries hangs down. In the background, a small yellow bird is on the ground. On the right, a fox wearing a striped shirt and pink pants is riding a blue bicycle on a path. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with green hills and a pinkish sky.

To all children  
everywhere,  
without exception.

*Gionata Bernasconi*

*Simona Mulazzani*

# Martin the Little Wolf

C·A·R·T·H·U·S·I·A

Martin was born on a very foggy night.  
The little wolf raised his head, without knowing  
where his little snout ended and the sky began.





Mother wolf hugged her puppy. Through the fog, she turned to the moon.  
She didn't need to see the sky to know that the moon was beautiful.



Martin raised his head but his eyes couldn't get past the branches of a woodland cherry tree. His heart started to race, enchanted by those shining red balls. Martin never looked at the sky, but no one noticed.

The following morning the sun washed away the fog. The wolves of the pack greeted Martin with a long howl, as only real wolves could.



Mother wolf was waiting with joy for Martin's first howl.  
"It will come..." said the leader of the pack "because every wolf has a howl  
in his own mouth, as the moon is in his eyes!"

But Martin stood in silence, for a very long time.  
Then he made two small howls, as small as the two cherries  
that had just fallen on his nose.

An illustration of a wolf family in a cherry orchard. A mother wolf in a yellow floral dress is holding the hand of a small wolf puppy in blue overalls. They are standing under a large tree with dark branches and green leaves, many of which are covered in red cherries. Some cherries have fallen onto the green grass. A yellow bird sits on a small wooden stool, and a butterfly is perched on the mother wolf's tail. The background is a soft, teal-green color.

“Martin... wolves use to howl at the moon” Mommy whispered kindly. But it looked like the puppy didn’t hear those words. He just stared at the cherries, before making them fall on his tongue. Their taste exploded in his mouth. Martin picked up two more cherries. He placed them on his nose and stared at them for a long time, in silence.

He cried out loud once, as if he was being struck by a lightning, when a butterfly lightly touched his tail.



Days and nights were running away, like little wolves who run to catch each other. But for Martin, time seemed to have stopped under the cherry tree. "What are you, a goose?" giggled the other puppies from a distance, grimacing at the thought of tasting those fruits.

But nobody dared to get closer because, when Martin cried at the butterflies, even wolves were a little scared.



“Martin doesn’t howl at the moon!” said the leader of the pack seriously. “He will never be a real wolf!” he ended, staring at Martin’s mum. Mother wolf looked for other gazes, but everybody put their head down and walked away from the woodland cherry tree.

So, the little wolf and his mum were left alone, until the fog of a new evening made them disappear.





But not everything disappears in the fog.  
“Smells, for example!” squawked a goose, smelling danger getting closer.  
The fog, indeed, can hide things only to the eyes of those who aren’t imaginative.  
And that goose had a lot of imagination. So much of it that she imagined  
the dark and wet snout of the fox coming out from the fog. The goose ran away  
from there, along with her fear.



“A-Are you a fox?” the goose mumbled.  
“No, I’m a wolf!”  
“Do wolves eat geese?”  
“No. They eat cherries.”  
The goose breathed a sigh of release.  
She liked cherries, too.

The next morning the goose was still running when she saw something dark and wet coming out from the back of a tree trunk. Certainly, that was not a beak, the bird thought, standing on her trembling legs.



The goose looked at the little wolf.  
She looked at him very carefully, going further than the two cherries on his nose.  
Actually, he looked a bit like the fox. He had sharp teeth, but he didn't hurt her.

The goose and Martin were very different,  
but they stayed side by side like two little cherries.



There came the evening,  
and with darkness there came  
the real fox. The goose could  
run away, as she always used to.  
Or she could hide herself,  
because she was feeling good  
under that cherry tree.  
“I will dress up like a wolf!”  
decided the goose,  
sure that it was  
a brilliant idea.

Without a second thought, she put some  
tiny pebbles in her mouth, to reproduce  
Martin's teeth. Then she placed two cherries  
on her beak, to look like a real wolf.



“Beware... I’m a wolf!” said the goose showing the cherries on her beak.  
The fox rolled on the ground, laughing out loud.  
She was a real goose, in word and deed!

Then she saw two more cherries coming forward to her.  
But the fox’s gaze didn’t go past the little fruits.  
“And here is another goose” giggled the mouth-watered fox.





“Beware! He is a real wolf!” said a voice behind them.  
It was Martin’s mum. The baby smiled to her, then he looked  
the fox in the eyes, as he still had a friend to save.

He made a small howl, showing the cherries, and his teeth with them.  
The fox pricked up her ears. Then she ran away because only real  
wolves can howl that way.



Even the fog had run away. And everybody could see clearly now.  
The puppies came closer, lighter than butterflies. The leader of the pack spoke, too,  
but this time he did it after tasting a bit of a cherry.

It had a strange taste, but this  
didn't stop him from saying:  
"Welcome to the pack, little wolf!"



Martin is fond of cherries and he's scared of butterflies. And you?  
Write or draw what you like and what you are scared of.

I like

It scares me



When Martin and the goose meet, they suddenly become friends.  
Imagine living an adventure in the woods, just like them. If you were an animal,  
which one would you be? And which animals would you like to have as friends?

Try to draw yourself and your friends



Although the fog covers the sky, Martin's mom does not need to see the moon to know that it is beautiful. Imagine being Martin: what is beautiful for him?

And for the leader of the pack? And for the goose?

Or for the other characters of the story? Try to write it:

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Now close your eyes and describe three beautiful things that come into your head:

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Then, imagine being your mom, your dad, your brothers and sisters and describe what is beautiful for them:

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.....



Martin is the only wolf in the pack that carries cherries on his nose.

And this is a little bit weird: no one else behaves this way.

Now try to imagine something that is weird for you and try to draw it.

[Large blank white rectangular area for drawing]

In the story, the goose keeps a sharp eye on Martin, "going further than the two cherries on his nose". How do you feel and what do you do when someone does something weird? Try to write it:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



# Martin the Little Wolf

A story to help  
young people and adults  
talk about Autism,  
facilitate the relationship  
with children in the classroom  
and enhance diversity.



## One of the many ways to be in the world

There is no person like another. Each person comes to the world with his own chance of physical and mental development which can be implemented with the growth in the relationship with his familiar and social context. The level of skills is very low at birth. That's why it is possible to see neurotypical children with recurrent features of the autistic condition, such as a strict way of thinking and the lack of abstract thought. Every child needs indeed an individual intervention on his growth just as much as children with autism. The condition of Autism is just one of many ways to be in the world.

An autistic person can have the fortune – which many people do not have – of catching some aspects of reality in an accentuated way, according to one's own specificity and interests. Martin the Little Wolf is hypersensitive to the touch of a butterfly just as much as many autistic children who have a higher tactile sensitivity that allow them – with appropriate tools – to appreciate shapes, features and the consistency of the world they live in.

Eventually, like the fog that prevents the little wolf and the goose from seeing the physical reality surrounding them, the prejudice and stereotypes which are still too intrinsic in the word “Autism”, prevent people from seeing what lies beyond the diagnostic label. Unfortunately, cultural resistance tends to exclude autistic people and doesn't grasp their qualities and strengths. Every person should be given the chance to learn, to develop new skills that can allow him to empower himself to the daily life, day after day. Actually, society – namely people who think they are normal – and school have the task of promoting the right to be who you are, beyond prejudice.

Instead, they should encourage and admire people, like those in the autistic condition, who learn, through hard work and a lot of dedication, to adapt to a hostile and uncomfortable environment such as ours, which is noisy, smelly, fast, confusing. The book “Martin the Little Wolf” is crucial because it can teach every child and adults to see past appearances, fog and fears to welcome those who seem different from us: eventually, every person is unique and different from the other, but difference doesn't mean inferiority.

**Lucio Moderato**

*Autism Service Director,*

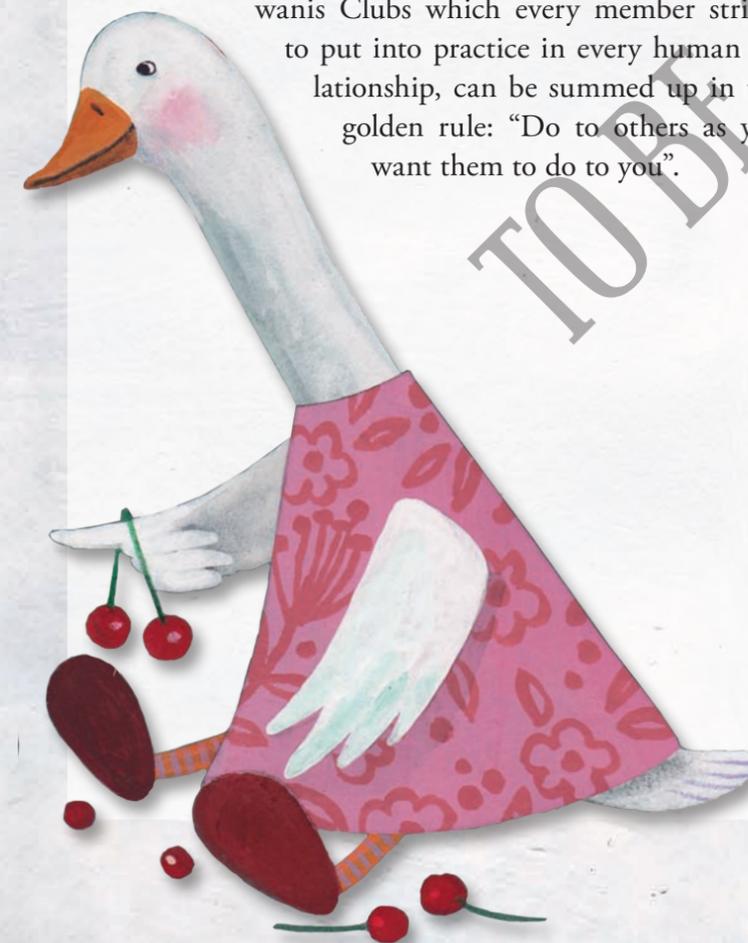
*Fondazione Istituto Sacra Famiglia ONLUS*



## Martin the Little Wolf, ambassador for Kiwanis

The Kiwanis is a world organisation of volunteers committed to changing the world, each child and each community one by one. This is our mission which is expressed through our motto: “Serving the children of the world”. We dedicate part of our time and energy to the service of children, knowing that also one hour of our time and a small token can change their life as well as the world.

Kiwanis was founded in Detroit in 1915. Nowadays it is widespread in more than 70 countries around the world and has about six hundred thousand members of all ages. The principles underlying Kiwanis Clubs which every member strives to put into practice in every human relationship, can be summed up in the golden rule: “Do to others as you want them to do to you”.



Kiwanis achieves its “mission” through the different Clubs activities that are developed in each territory. Their actions focus on concrete and efficient services, such as the renovation and the construction of playgrounds and meeting areas, the organisation of meetings in schools about obesity, cyber bullying, cybercrimes and other social issues.

“Martin the Little Wolf” is a concrete example of the commitment which Kiwanis Distretto Italia – San Marino is willing to carry on in its Clubs and in the whole national territory because it involves little ones in the complex and important issue of Autism, supporting values such as friendship and togetherness beyond stereotypes and diversity.

Through the years, Kiwanis have taken care of great worldwide service projects, such as the campaign in collaboration with UNICEF aimed at defeating diseases caused by iodine deficiency. Currently, Kiwanis is committed (always with UNICEF) to a very demanding challenge: the defeating of maternal and neonatal tetanus. Anybody can become a member of Kiwanis, it's all about being ordinary people willing to do “extraordinary” things.

This special edition has been realised to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary since the foundation of the first Kiwanis Club in Italy: the Club Milano Centro, in 1967.

**Valchiria Do**

*Governor, Kiwanis Italia District – San Marino*

## A book to learn and to communicate

According to the latest data, autism spectrum disorders – also known as “Autism” – affect about 1 child in 100 and they can occur with different levels of harshness, from mild to severe.

Autism implies a qualitative problem (abnormal or loss-making development) in communication (verbal and nonverbal) and in social interaction. These two areas characterise us as human beings more than any others. Moreover, the disorder means difficulties in the imagination’s development and narrow interests as well as repetitive attitudes.

Since 1995 Fondazione ARES (Autismo Risorse e Sviluppo), with its headquarter in Giubiasco (Switzerland) has pursued studies and intervention measures – from childhood to adulthood – for the correct support for people with autism spectrum disorders.

Fondazione Ares is spurred by the will to spread a further and correct culture of Autism, because it believes that only in this way the inclusion in our society of affected people and their families can be facilitated. For this reason, Fondazione Ares cooperates at national as well as international level, with institutions and organisations which have aims close to theirs.

And it was the same common aim, pursued during the whole collaboration between Fondazione Ares and Carthusia Edizioni, which gave life to the editorial project “Martin the Little Wolf”.

Firstly, the foundation and the publishing house shared the willingness to act for an accurate and delicate information aimed at children and their contexts of life. Then, they listened to the stories of families and children affected by Autism and also to professionals who everyday strive to

ensure educative interventions and proper care for these children and their families. Finally, they looked for a partner which could accept the project with confidence and sensitivity, so they found the Fondazione di Beneficenza di Lugano Kiwanis Club and Varese and Como Kiwanis Club.

Autism is still subject to many stereotypes and different myths.

It is crucial for us to inform people involved in this world as well as public opinion through events and projects in order to raise awareness.

Knowing Autism means recognising it more easily and facing it without fear. It is possible thereby to make the Disturbance diagnosis increasingly earlier thanks to an adequate and wide range of information; this is a key issue to guarantee people affected a quick support and a better quality of life. It is useful as well to reinforce the acceptance and the integration that can enhance autistic people in our society.

**Claudio Cattaneo**

*Head of organisation, Fondazione ARES*

## The book: how and why

For more than twenty years Carthusia has developed editorial projects in collaboration with foundations, associations, public and private bodies in order to talk to children about complex and tough issues which concern them, with a narrative and illustrative language that suits them.

Each project is a challenge, a passionate work in which different skills converge with the common goal of touching children’s hearts, recognising and sharing their emotions with parents, teachers and classmates.

This common aim connected us to Fondazione ARES, which immediately replied to our suggestion to create together an illustrated book to talk about Autism, in order to facilitate relations with those special children with the Disorder and to enhance the diversities. We have wanted to deal with Autism for a long time, because it seemed to us an important issue which had to be faced in a new and original way. Right from the start, Fondazione Ares has been a special fellow traveller for an editorial project which did not exist yet.

We shared the purpose of turning to children from 4 to 7, an age group in which it is important to raise awareness. We chose to include the project in “Storie al Quadrato”, a book series which deals with tough issues through metaphors, where the protagonists are usually animals; it is easier for our young readers to empathize with them in this way.

The adventure started around a table, comparing different skills and experiences. Carthusia for its experience in

communication and editorial design aimed at children; Anna, for the editorial development; Fondazione Ares, with the support of Barbara, Michele’s mom, Nicola, specialist educator, Gionata, author and educator, and Rosy, as coordinator.

An intense, close exchange of views, thoughts and emotions which has been returned by Gionata, through a gentle and amusing tale, and by Simona, with her powerful illustrations.

“Martin the Little Wolf” is the outcome of team work, where each step has been shared and considered together. Each of us strongly believed in it, firstly a few from the Club della Divisione Lombardia e Liguria and now also the Kiwanis Distretto Italia – San Marino with all the other national Clubs, who supported the project with confidence.

This book faces Autism in its specificities for the first time and, overall, in its relationship with others, with the aim of facilitating dialogue with those who are different, seeing past appearances and fears. It is a basic tool that will be distributed free of charge in schools – the brochure addressed to parents within – to spread a correct culture of Autism and, meanwhile, to help children, parents and teachers to see “more clearly”.

We are with you, our little wolf!

**Patrizia Zerbi**

*Editor and editorial Director, Carthusia Edizioni*

**Marianna Turchi**

*Editorial Coordinator, Carthusia Edizioni*

## The magic of a story

**M**aking a story which could tell children something as complex and delicate as Autism through metaphors is an exercise that lays itself open to a few hazards. The first is to write a story built on a sense of pity for the protagonist and his family, paradoxically having the opposite effect of stigmatising the little wolf who represents Autism in this tale.

Children affected by Autism don't need pity but comprehension, in its actual and deepest meaning, which is not "understanding" but cum prehendere (taking with), to grasp the nature of this disorder on a theoretical as well as human level.

The second hazard is to give in to the temptation of forcing the happy ending without considering what it would mean to the autistic person and his family. For example, an unrealistic evolution of the protagonist compared to the issue which he represents.

Autism is a disorder that affects the areas of communication and social interaction. These two fields characterise us as human beings and, in case of deficit, the consequences are crucial to inclusion in society which, in this story, is represented by the pack. No doubt these difficulties may be present because of some characteristic features of the autistic child, but they could even be reinforced by the others' stigmatising looks and by the several stereotypes that came with the autistic disorder.

In this story the happy ending doesn't mean denying Autism, forcing a miraculous recovery of the protagonist until he becomes similar to others little wolves; it would be disrespectful because no-one recovers from autism. The autistic child can however learn many things whether accepted in a sensitive and skilled society, where his special

characteristics are comprehended. The happy ending is learning to see past "the cherries" in order to understand who we are up against. It is also developing the capacity to include everyone in the pack, because inclusion doesn't mean making a fellow similar to others but it means participating at community life (such as school) in the most independent way.

That's why Martin strives to learn how to howl – although he doesn't see the moon – but the leader too should try a cherry to know its actual taste before passing judgements or fearing unusual attitudes. You have to see past "the cherries" as the goose does, in order to overcome your fears and prejudices, and also to make sense of your surroundings. The fog which envelops the story is thereby a metaphor of the ignorance that could be unravelled, bringing to light surprising aspects of Autism, a reality both complex and delicate at the same time.

### Gionata Bernasconi

*Educator, Fondazione ARES*

*Teacher and Writer of children's books*

## The voice of parents

**O**ur son Michele was born with a disturbance: Autism. As parents, we have had to face, to learn to how to "read" and to comprehend his particular nature before knowing how to react and respond to him in the right way, and also before knowing how to help him growing up.

Initially it was tough because we couldn't comprehend his attitudes so we felt frustrated, though now things are getting better. We have understood that Michele has his own way of perceiving the world, which is different from ours, so we have to comprehend his way of thinking in order to live with him. Our life is a special one because we have a special baby who although has to face normal surroundings and situations with kids (classmates, neighbours), adults (relatives, friends, other parents) who can't obviously understand his attitudes. We often have to give an explanation: "Michele weeps because he is bothered by children who speak up, his hearing is very sensitive."

To us, this book is of great value because it is an occasion to move autistic people closer to others. It's good to help children since it is the precursor to understanding this "planet" that is so strange and meanwhile, so full of beauty, treasures, sensitivity and will to communicate. Now Michele's classmates know some tricks that make him feel good and they're proud of it, and he is finally calm while playing with them.

### Barbara Bernasconi Regusci

*Parent*

## The importance of this book

**W**hich words could I use to explain something complicated, investigated, involved in our daily life but also, in some respects, still wrapped in the fog? I ask myself this question often when I speak about Autism.

We can go for a scientific and technical register, otherwise we can search for other types of language, such as an illustrated book.

The cause of autism is linked to an abnormal development of the brain. It is crucial to recognise the disorder at an early stage in order to act immediately and to support parents. The features and manifestations of Autism can differ very much from child to child, although you can find some common elements: some deficiencies in the developing of social and communicative skills, repetitive attitudes and narrow interests, sensorial anomalies.

In this story we find the difficulties about recognising the disorder and the original hope that everything would resolve itself. We can find the social deficiency, the "silence" of Martin who "doesn't seem to hear", and the sensorial anomalies, the reaction at the touch of the butterfly. We also meet the tenderness of a mother who, hugging her new born, "whispers to him kindly".

I hope this book, to be read young and adults together, can help ensure that "everyone begins to see more clearly" and that every child can find someone who will tell him: "Welcome to the pack, little wolf!"

### Nicola Rudelli

*Educator, Fondazione ARES*



## The use of the book in classrooms: useful suggestions...

A story is like a voyage. It has a departure, an arrival and a world to discover between them. Moreover, there are many travelers: teachers telling and children listening, hooked by the same adventure. Every single one with his own background which finally will be enriched by a new experience: the widening of our intimate and personal horizons and the sharing of this experience with people.

Martin is the main character of this story. He is a puppy who can't howl at the moon and is fond of cherries. Initially the pack leader thinks that Martin will never be a real wolf. Only when Martin meets a scared goose and a hungry fox, everyone understands who he really is. Because you have to see past appearances and diversities to really know Martin; you have to see through the fog in order to say: "Welcome to the pack, little wolf".

Using a metaphoric language and giving animals the role of characters, the book faces the characteristics and relational features of Autism, aiming at encouraging relationships with autistic children, overcoming stereotypes and fears.

The story is built on metaphors and implied references to Autism. This symbolic and immersive path is suitable for young children.

Metaphors are crucial to preserve the poetry of the story, but for a better and proper use of the book in classrooms it's important to understand the issues surrounding Autism which are connected to the book.

### Here are the main metaphors:

- **The wolf:** an animal which is often stuck in stereotypes, just as autistic people.
- **The fog:** the confusion and ignorance of people who are unable to see past appearances.
- **The howl:** the different communicative development of autistic people.
- **The pack:** mates, brothers and society, connected to exclusion / inclusion of autistic people.
- **Cherries:** narrow interests and sensorial aspects connected to the tastes of autistic people.
- **The butterfly:** sensorial aspects connected to physical contact of autistic people.
- **The fox:** shallow people, unable to overcome fear and prejudice.
- **The goose:** the role of the experts who can overcome fear and prejudices.

This book should be obviously read and leafed through with children, using some small tricks which can increase their participation.

### And here are some suggestions:

- Create the right atmosphere to read aloud: you can sit in a circle, maybe on a carpet or on some pillows.

- Read slowly but in an enthralling way. When necessary, go back to re-read and explain unusual or difficult words, but only when the reading has been achieved.
- Comment on the images all together.
- Re-read and watch carefully the most loved scenes or the less clear ones.
- After reading, listen to children's doubts or questions: as a result, a reflection about the story could start.
- You can ask every child which part of the story he liked the most or the less, and why. Maybe they could make a drawing.
- Use the final pages of activities to help children get involved and express their own personal experiences related to the issues of the story.
- The story is open to many uses which can be freely developed in the classrooms. For instance, children could reproduce the narrative path through images on a big poster, make up and write a new ending, or put on a little theatre show inspired by the story.

"Martin the Little Wolf" is a crucial instrument for dealing together with children, with the issues of diversity and inclusion, to help them overcome the fear of those who are different, and to enhance those differences. It's a universal story suitable for many uses, not only connected to Autism.



Fondazione ARES  
Coordinated by: Rosy Pozzi-Misdea  
Specialised educators' consultancy and texts: Gionata Bernasconi, Nicola Rudelli

Carthusia Edizioni:  
Editorial project: Carthusia Edizioni  
Editorial direction and texts: Patrizia Zerbi  
Editorial coordination and texts: Marianna Turchi  
Art direction: Elisa Galli  
Editorial development: Anna Veronelli  
Illustrations: Simona Mulazzani

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Martin is not a puppy like the others:  
he does not howl at the moon and he is fond of cherries.  
“He will never be a real wolf!”, the leader of the pack says to Martin’s mom.  
But when Martin meets a scared goose and a hungry fox  
everyone understands who he really is.  
We need to see past appearances and diversities to really know Martin.  
We need to pull away the fog and say:  
“Welcome to the pack, little wolf!”.