

# Father's lifelong mission to tell the world about 'solitary thinker' Doctor transformed life of boy they called sub-normal

by TOM FOOT

A FATHER has praised a miracle recovery by his autistic son 40 years after experts wrote him off as "remote" and "sub-normal" and said he would have to spend his life in a home.

Walter Solomon, who lives in Buckland Crescent, Belsize Park, was told his son, Robert, would never recover from his autism.

But, thanks to a doctor's visionary approach, Robert now has a job and is living a normal family life with his wife and two children, the second born just last week.

The story of how Robert beat autism, with the help of the late Dr Geoffrey Waldon, is revealed in a new book by Robert's father.

He said: "Dr Waldon's genius lay in causing children to perform movements which, if missed during their early critical formative years, could lead to underdeveloped areas of under-



Walter Solomon with son Robert, daughter-in-law Yelena and grandchildren

standing. He found that, through the constant repetition of these movements, vital new connections are made within the brain."

Mr Solomon said of Dr Waldon: "He was a solitary thinker and not in any way a publicist. He never published his ideas.

"My book is the first

step in broadcasting the Waldon approach."

The concept is that human understanding is linked to the way we organise patterns and that meaning comes from movement. Mr Solomon said: "I have absolutely no doubt that, had it not been for Dr Waldon's help, Robert would have been placed in an institu-

tion and in all probability he would have been there for the rest of his life."

He said his book, *Autism and Understanding: the Waldon Approach to Child Development*, was the product of a "lifelong mission".

Robert, who now lives in Baltimore, was just a year old when he first saw Dr Waldon for a

hearing test in 1970. "He told us that Robert was not deaf but that he was 98 per cent deaf to the human voice," Mr Solomon said.

He and his late wife Pamela refused to accept their son – who seemed physically strong and healthy – was destined to live his life in a mental institution. Almost every week for more than seven years, Robert was taken to Dr Waldon's clinic in Manchester.

"Robert soon began to know us as his mother and father," said Mr Solomon. "His tantrums, spinning and rocking movements dropped away. He gradually learned to understand speech and by the time he was four or five he started to talk." Over time Robert's feelings of "isolation and loneliness" diminished as he began to integrate normally.

He will not be able to make his father's book launch next week as his wife, Yelena, has just given birth to their second daughter, Sarah.