

# A Journey in Their Shoes

Personal Perspectives as a Teacher and Advocate

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# Misunderstood and Underestimated

- ◆ When I was a year old my parents thought I was deaf and was given a hearing test.
- ◆ At two I was severely cognitively delayed and was diagnosed as intellectually disabled.
- ◆ A year later I was taken out of a school for students with intellectual disabilities and put in a regular nursery school.
- ◆ At six I was diagnosed as severely learning disabled and would be lucky to hold a menial job.

# O'Canada Land of Conformity

- ◆ Quite often in elementary school I was passed from grade to grade, regardless of my progress.
- ◆ The environment of the classroom was overwhelming to me.
- ◆ I had an inability to sit in one place for much time.
- ◆ Due to my talkative nature I was often put in the hallway instead of learning.
- ◆ Although I was quite immature my interests were more towards adult topics.

# Bullied With No Reprieve

- ◆ Due to my idiosyncratic behavior and how I presented myself I was often bullied.
- ◆ Often the school did nothing to address the situation.
- ◆ I tried to hide the situation from my parents, but they figured what was occurring.
- ◆ I had my teeth smashed in pavement by a bully.
- ◆ Despite everything I never gave up.

# Parental Life Preserver

- ◆ My parents always had my back.
- ◆ They helped me realize that I was not dumb.
- ◆ Although it was difficult learning in school they created the conditions at home where it was an oasis of learning for me.
- ◆ I was expected to be responsible.
- ◆ They didn't self-pity me and taught me to be a strong and resilient person.

# Coming Into my Own

- ◆ Going to boarding help me develop both my self confidence and academic abilities.
- ◆ I was in smaller classes where i was actually able to learn.
- ◆ I was given classes in social skills training.
- ◆ Over time I became much more aware of my strengths and was more cognizant of my challenges.
- ◆ I graduated a year early.

# A Journey Towards Autism Acceptance.

- ◆ As a child I would have been diagnosed as being classically autistic.
- ◆ In graduate school a professor told me I was likely on the autism spectrum.
- ◆ It put me into a depression and was very difficult to come to terms with.
- ◆ My father helped me come to terms with possibly being on autism spectrum.
- ◆ Ultimately my wife got me to confront and deal with the possibility of being on the spectrum.

# Observations from the Classroom

- ◆ Less is more for the environment of a classroom for ASD students.
- ◆ When teaching students I use meta-cognition and adapt it to their learning styles.
- ◆ They are encouraged to be themselves and to believe in themselves.
- ◆ Social skills training is integrated into the environment of the class.
- ◆ Self-advocacy and self-esteem awareness is focused on.
- ◆ Student interests are often integrated into curriculum.

- ◆ Openness and expressing feelings is encouraged in class.
- ◆ Students are taught concepts in an in an incremental and proactive manner.
- ◆ My class is a safe space for me students.
- ◆ They are encouraged to be themselves.
- ◆ In my class students are not allowed to use autism as an excuse.
- ◆ Open line of communication with parents and teachers is important.

# A Person With Autism or Autistic: It's Our Choice.

- ◆ One of the most important things is that people with autism define themselves.
- ◆ That we need to see ourselves as whole people.
- ◆ People need to look at the full person.
- ◆ An individual with autism should be celebrated for what they can do, not maligned for who they are.
- ◆ We must take an active role in changing societal perceptions.

# Being Different is Just a Way of Declaring I'm Unique.

- ◆ Many people who were seen as different contributed to society in countless ways.
- ◆ Different is not being abnormal or atypical.
- ◆ Normality is subjective at best.
- ◆ People need to embrace not only what qualities we share, but what makes us different.
- ◆ Identities are not etched in stone, but can be changed.