



First Person

Finding My LD Pride!

By: Liz Bogod

This is the story of how I came to accept that my learning disability is nothing to be ashamed of. Through a long, painful journey to arrive at this acceptance, I have come to know my many strengths and to find skills that I did not know I possessed. I offer my story to other LD children, youth and adults, in the sure knowledge that, if they can come to the realization of their own true abilities and talents, like me, they can shed the sense of shame which all too often leaves LD people feeling dumb, stupid and altogether incapable.

This story begins where all stories must start... at the beginning...

I was six years old. It was September and the long, hot summer had come to an end. When I got to school, I knew something was not quite right. I was returning to the same classroom and the same teacher but there were none of the same students. I was in Kindergarten again. My parents told me that my birth date was in the wrong month which meant I could not go into grade one and would have to repeat Kindergarten. At the time, I accepted this explanation.

It was not until the following year in grade one that I had any inclination that the excuse my parents used for repeating Kindergarten was a white lie. I did not know that the real reason was because I could only count to ten while my classmates were counting to one hundred; I could not tie my shoes while classmate were tying them for me and I could not write my first name.

I have vivid memories of my parents meeting my grade one teacher to discuss my school difficulties. After being sent out of the room fully aware of the topic of conversation, I was mad! How dare you, I thought, have a conversation about me without including me! My attempts to eaves-drop failed, but I did not need to hear what they were saying, I knew exactly what they were talking about - me and my unfinished math book! I had tried to hide the fact that I could not cope with math and had hidden the math book in my desk.

Soon I was to be faced with one of the most traumatic experiences of my childhood. I found myself with my mother in an interview with a scary doctor who seemed to have no rapport with children. I was commanded to answer her questions. She frightened me and I instantly took a dislike to her. I shut up like a clam and was totally uncooperative. I remember my mother arguing with her so evidently things did not go well. Many years later, I discovered this scary doctor was a very eminent child psychiatrist at a major children's hospital!

The next thing that happened to me was that I was moved into a special education class. I wondered what was so special about me. I was just a normal kid who wanted to fit in, do well in school, and make my parents proud of me, but somehow my inability to do math and other learning disabilities seemed to make me "special". So the "special" kid went into a "special" class with seven other "special" kids, with other "special" problems. I felt different and abnormal.

I remained in the special education class for two years. During this time, I was slowly reintegrated back into the mainstream class. My academic reintegration went fairly smoothly, but my social re-integration was a disaster. On my first day, I went to class wanting to make friends, but I really did not know how. My poor social skills made it difficult for me to relate to people. I had trouble understanding humor, keeping up with conversations, and using and understanding body language. As a result, children did not want to play with me.

The memories I have of my early school years are of isolation, loneliness and the many recesses when I sat alone on the school steps. When I set out to find a friend the kids ran away from me. One well meaning, but misguided, teacher took pity on me sitting by myself and decided to assign me a "friend". News of this assigned friend got around the school and I was told, "You're such a loser, you had to be assigned a friend." Throughout my elementary school years, I experienced this kind of social rejection over and over again. This was the part of my learning disability nobody understood.

The story moves forward... to high school.

To help with my learning disabilities in math, science and French, I would spend one period a day in the school Learning Center, often called the Romper Room! Math and French were compulsory in grade nine and I had a lot of difficulty with these credits, but coping socially weighed much more heavily on my mind. I dreaded group work because I was always the last one to be picked to join a group. I was really very unhappy in high school. I felt totally isolated, and soon became depressed. I was labeled as being mentally ill and passed from one psychiatrist to another. Many interpretations were made to explain my problem. I was told I had a depressive mental illness and was put on medication. I was told I was too dependent on my parents which I have since learned is very common with learning disabilities.

With hindsight, I know all my pain could have been prevented. To know the cause of my problem would have enabled me to cope with it. It was the not knowing that left me in the dark. I am not sure quite when I discovered I had a learning disability. I think I always knew, but could not put a label to it. One day I found myself at a learning disability association. Here I read some of the literature on the topic and here I found a revelation. As I filled out a learning disabilities check list, I was amazed to find how much of the list applied to me. I was also amazed to learn that many of the symptoms had to do with social skills.

To be able to label my problem as a learning disability was the beginning of my recovery. I had a reason for being as I am. I was not mentally sick, retarded or stupid. As I continued to explore this subject, I found out how many famous people have learning disabilities, and as I was able to speak to others on this topic, I found how many people there are who have a learning disability.

Finally, I decided to come out of the closet altogether! I decided that much more was to be gained by shouting out my learning disability and making others aware that though it takes us longer, is more difficult, those of us with learning disabilities get there in the end and can be successful, productive members of society. I wanted to be proud of my new philosophy. This is why I decided to start a web site called "**LD Pride**".

http://www.ldonline.org/firstperson/Finding_My_LD_Pride!?theme=print

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