

Life Without a Clue

by Stephen Perkins

At the age of 61, I was tested and told that I am on the autism spectrum. It has been a blessing for me because now I know who I really am. It is like I have been born again and starting my life anew, taking advantage of all the great positives that comes with having an autistic mind.

From the very beginning, nothing came easy for me. I was clumsy, not social at all. I had a very hard time growing up in in the 50's and 60's. I looked like everyone else, but I was out of step with my peers. My parents tried to help me by sending me to almost every psychiatrist in the state to find out what was wrong with me. They all said I probably had dyslexia.

During my school years, I received special education which was just starting at the time and it did not help me advance academically or increase my sociability I was intensely bullied when I was in school which has haunted me until this day.

As a young adult, I entered college with the dream of earning a history major and working in that field. Due to my learning issues, I changed my major to art history/studio arts and earned a BA degree, however I was unable to obtain a job in this field.

For three years I was fired from various jobs in retail. Then I worked for a local company for 24 years on the assembly line, wiring assembly boards and putting components on them. I was happy to make money, but it was an unfulfilling and unpleasant experience. I had difficulty following the instructions and would make mistakes which would get me into trouble with my supervisors which I could understand why. I was not happy in this situation and I did not feel the supervisors were happy with my work which often made me feel anxious, depressed, and paranoid.

It was also stressful trying to communicate with coworkers. I felt like I was looking through a glass window at them, trying to communicate with them, but not making any headway. I never felt like I fitted in with my coworkers. They often said to me, "What useless information I spit out, and it was too bad I was not interested in the field of electronics and what they did at the company." Although this was not a good vocational match for me, I felt stuck and worked there for 24 years.

For me it felt like a miracle being laid off with hundreds of others. I knew it was a blessing because I knew I had to be my own boss to make it in this world. I was free to really explore the universe and other opportunities for me.

It took a year to find a business that I would be good at. My mother claims that she kicked of my business of taking care of people's pets by finding my first client. My business was called North Country



Pet Sitting, L. L. C. My company was fully bonded and insured and had been successful for more than 10 years, right up until the day I retired. It was very rewarding since I made my clients happy, and I stayed in great shape by walking their precious dogs. My wife of 30 years helped me keep the books in order and with my schedule for the day.

Another joy in my life is reading and I became addicted to books. I made a commitment to myself that I would solve who I was through knowledge from books. My brain sucked up every ounce of material that I read and placed into my vast memory bank that I never knew I had.

I started to realize through all my reading that I might have more than just a learning problem. When I went back through my years and reflected on myself it seemed as if I was not like typical people. I asked myself, could I have autism? But It took a while to find a neuropsychologist that was qualified to test me. I now know that not only do I have autism, high on the spectrum, but also ADHD.

I am connected to HMEA's Autism Resource Central. I am enjoying participating in various groups such as the 35+ group. I am a strong self-advocate. I am also a member of the Advisory Council. I am also enjoying meeting and connecting to other adults with ASD for the first time in my life.

I can state that I know who I am now and what direction I want to be heading towards. I have successfully established my own company (with help from a lawyer). At this moment I am an art student, my teacher is a remarkable and talented artist who is trying to bring the essence of classical art to Worcester. Both my wife and I are members of the Worcester Art Museum, we are on the friends' executive board of the Gail Free Public Library in Holden, and on the executive board of the Garden Club of Holden. We love to volunteer.

I believe it was a miracle how I became to understand myself as being a person with autism. It was not easy as it felt like I had been through the wilderness, living without a clue, and not knowing what was going on. Now I know who I am and where I am going.

Thank you for listening to my story.