Learning Disabilities and Life Stories

EDITED BY

Pano Rodis
Upper Valley Associates in Psychology & Education
and Dartmouth College

Andrew Garrod
Dartmouth College

Mary Lynn Boscardin
University of Massachusetts

Allyn and Bacon
Boston • London • Toronto • Sydney • Tokyo • Singapore
Gretchen O'Connor

In this essay, Gretchen, a 21-year-old white woman, tells the story of her eventual recovery from the psychological injury done to her by others' misunderstandings of her ADHD. Within her family, Gretchen was early on labeled a problem child: poorly organized, prone to school failure, and apt to become distracted. Perhaps as a result of her parents' marital difficulties—which destabilized the family generally—Gretchen was afforded little room for error, and as her problems persisted, she was subjected to escalating emotional and physical abuse by her mother. Finally, during her senior year of high school, Gretchen dropped out and ran away to live in the city with her boyfriend. After months in a drug rehabilitation center and a stint in an outdoor therapy program, she chose to return to high school.

Writing as a college sophomore, Gretchen challenges the conventional belief that ADHD is nothing but a problem, a syndrome to be cured, a disease to be eradicated. Instead, based on her own experience, Gretchen believes that ADHD can be a source of joy and life-energy, a part of a person's cherished uniqueness. Accordingly, Gretchen advises her readers to adopt a more curious and open stance toward ADHD, warning that failure to do so can result in the misjudgment and abuse of persons like herself.
I woke to the sound of my mother’s footsteps hammering down the stairs to the kitchen. Through sleepy eyes, I looked out at the glorious fall foliage, the bright sunshine warming my face as I sat up and stretched my small body, thinking, “It’s finally Saturday!” I loved Saturdays in the fall; it was soccer season, and Saturday was the one day of the week I spent with my dad. As part of our Saturday ritual, Dad would always bring doughnuts for me and my sister, one chocolate and one honey-dipped. The smells of coffee, doughnuts, and the newspaper surrounded him when he came to pick us up for my soccer game. I loved the way Dad looked on weekends, his hair messy, his face unshaven and salty from his early morning jog. Handing me the doughnut bag, Dad asked if I had my gear ready, and I realized I didn’t know where my uniform, cleats, or shin guards were, though I did know where to look.

I darted upstairs to examine the heap of things on my bedroom floor. I first looked under the bed, where I found one shin guard and one cleat behind my Scrabble box. Beginning to feel frustrated, I scurried around my room, finding only two dirty soccer socks in my doll clothes drawer and a pair of soccer shorts from last year’s uniform. Wanting to appear organized, I threw on the mismatched pieces of my uniform, just in time to hear my father’s call up the stairs, “Ready, Gretchen?” As I ran down the stairs, I was something to behold wearing my wrinkled shirt, still dirty from my last game, a pair of shorts that were too small, and my dirty soccer socks, carrying one cleat, and one shin guard that had a doll hat stuck to the Velcro strap. I squirmed as my father examined me, his thick, dark eyebrows raised, his eyes squinting skeptically. I spotted my sister’s gear stacked neatly in the corner; dropping mine, I scooped hers up and followed Dad out the front door, feeling somewhat relieved by the cool morning air. My very organized father followed with a shopping bag full of cookies and punch for the team; it was his turn to bring the post-game refreshments, and I thanked God for letting me remind him of that yesterday, and not on the way to the field.

We sat in silence as we drove to the field, but I was happy just to be with Dad. I loved watching his strong hands shift the car, which smelled just like his office: a mix of leather, paper, coffee, and new carpet. I liked to feel part of my father’s world, and this time alone was a bonding experience. I would often pretend I was one of his clients and that we were on our way to a meeting. I’d also pretend that the air of seriousness that surrounded my father was comfortable.

Before the game, I huddled with my team, shivering because I had forgotten my sweatshirt. When my coach shouted, “Get out there girls, let’s hustle,” I stared blankly, wondering why she hadn’t put me in the lineup. Then I heard my dad yelling from the sidelines, “Weren’t you listening? GO! Get out there, you’re playing defense, pay attention! GO!” I ran onto the field, with my too-small shorts riding up my behind. My mind drifted as I watched my teammates dominate the game at the other end of the field, and I started mentally going over the moves I had learned in gymnastics that week. I started to do a cartwheel, and as my legs kicked over, I saw the ball heading straight toward me. My coach screamed from the sideline, “Gretchen, for Christ’s sake, this isn’t GYMNASTICS, it’s SOCCER! Why are you doing flips in the middle of the game? PAY ATTENTION!” I glanced at the
laughing parents standing on the sidelines, saw my father’s embarrassed look of disgust. My coach took me out at halftime, and I sat with my back to my father for the rest of the game, hating myself for being so stupid, wondering why I could never be as organized as everyone else. The car ride home was silent. I was filled with shame and devastated that my day with Dad had been ruined. I was not, after all, his client, but merely his unreliable child whom he couldn’t understand.

"I would hear my name being screamed from the front of the class."

When I think back on my years as a young student, I can laugh at some of my behaviors in class. I was constantly told to sit down, to stop talking; if the teacher gave instructions, I was always one step behind everyone; if we were supposed to hang up our coats, I would be easily distracted by something else. I was constantly yelled at for being disruptive, and I remember feeling very guilty, but, also confused: I did not mean to disrupt my class, and I often didn’t even realize I was doing anything wrong. I realize now that I was not a child with a discipline problem, but a child with ADHD.

But, at that time, nobody knew what my real problem was, and at school embarrassing things would happen to me daily. I was constantly in trouble for taking too long when I went to the bathroom or to sharpen my pencil. I would look out the window and totally forget I was in class. Then I would hear my name being screamed from the front of the room. The thing was, I could not control my behavior. I felt I was not in control of my own mind and body. My frustrated teachers and my parents always wanted to know why I was not paying attention or why I was acting up in class, but I would only tell them, “I don’t know, I just did.” Often I couldn’t even remember what I was in trouble for! But no one ever believed me, and soon I was pegged a liar—a label that followed me for a long time. Every teacher at my school knew me because I was always in trouble. I was regularly kicked out of class, which bruised me emotionally because I could not explain my behavior. I felt like a really bad kid.

“There are days when I can actually feel my ADHD taking over my mind and body.”

ADHD is not merely a part of me or an influence in my life. It is me. It is the main force that controls me mentally, physically, and socially. I cannot separate it from myself or keep it under control. It is hard for me to explain what it feels like to be driven by an inner force that is so powerful and primordial. There are days when I can actually feel ADHD taking over my mind and body. It’s kind of like being on a ride at the fair that goes ‘round and ‘round in circles as it jolts up and down and side to side, and everything is a huge blur of lights, smells, and noises, and you try really hard to single out your friends down on the ground watching you, but you can’t focus because it’s spinning so fast. That is how hard ADHD can hit. Imagine that happening when you are in class trying to listen, or when you are trying to do your homework. In class, I often have the feeling that I am sitting in the middle of a drain, and I sit there at my desk, spinning furiously, trying to stop
the motion. When the force erupts, my anxiety starts to take over, and I have to fight the urge to scream with frustration. My body reacts to this rush, and I have to move. There is nothing that can bring me back to the moment, and the only thing that helps me to relax is space and open air. An escape! This is an extremely complicated psychological state to have to describe when someone asks, “What’s the matter?” or “Why can’t you just sit still?” I feel that someone would think I was psychotic if I tried to describe the feeling.

The strangest thing about this state is that, though I know what I am supposed to be doing, I have absolutely no control. I can have a huge list of things I know I have to do, or else pay severe consequences, but I still will not do them. There is a force stronger than my own will controlling me. For example, if I have an important assignment to complete for school the next day, I’ll go for a run or clean my room, all the time thinking, “I’m not doing my assignments.” Then I might read the paper or go out with my friends, still conscious that I have this assignment, but still not doing it. I want to, but I really can’t stop not doing it, can’t stop doing something else. This also happens in class: I get the urge to do something else, like go for a hike, and I go. It does not matter what else I should be doing—I have to go. I’m driven.

“How come no one ever saw the fear in me?”

As a child, the hardest part of the day was the bus ride home. I always had a bag full of notes from my teachers, and I knew the school had already called my mother to tell her I had them. I would get off the bus scared to death and very sad. I would contemplate running away, or wonder whether things would be better if I were dead. I would close the front door very quietly, knowing what I would get when my mom knew I was home. I always felt like I had worms in my stomach, and would sometimes vomit from the anxiety. I’d develop a migraine, which my mother would say I was faking because I knew I was in trouble. I often felt like I was spinning out of control, and my parents would make me spin even harder, until finally I would just shut down and cry myself to sleep, feeling worthless and scared. I always felt very misunderstood.

My mother had a mean and violent temper when I was a kid. I know now that she was unhappily married and felt neglected by my father, and she would take out her anger on me and my sister. But as a child I just thought that this was how my mother was. I always got it worse than my sister—I added more stress because of school. When my mother got mad, she screamed so violently that I did not recognize her. She also hit. Instead of sitting and discussing why I was having trouble in school, she would usually beat me. This made me fearful; I started to lie to my teachers and hide my bad reports from my mother—because it was my only defense from the abuse.

The first time I was caught forging my parents’ names to a progress report was in the third grade, when I was eight years old. The consequences of lying were always worse than the bad report, but I could not stop. I had to protect myself somehow; nobody else understood what it was like for me. I felt that the only way for me
to avoid punishment was to lie, and though I was often caught and punished, for
some reason it didn’t stop me. It became a habit, and I found myself lying even in
situations where I did not have to. I never got in trouble at school for problems like
fighting, but I was very dishonest, which gave me a bad reputation. My parents and
my teachers overlooked my learning problems and focused on my behavior.

How come nobody ever saw the fear in me? Why did I have to be so deceitful so young? This overwhelming fear started very young, and stayed with me
until recently, like a terrible weight I carried inside. I was a nervous child, and the
stress caused migraine headaches and a nervous stomach. Stress can do many
things to people, especially children, which I feel is one of the largest factors behind
my failure in school.

As I got older, things only got worse. I was evaluated several times at my
school, which showed only that I had deficiencies in copying from the board, work completion, math, and spelling. I was always off the charts on my vocabulary and
comprehension abilities. They always told me that my testing scores were way
above average and that I was capable of the work, but that I was careless and lazy.

I was often told that I didn’t have my priorities in order, which was why I was
doing so poorly in school. When I was in seventh grade, my parents decided to put
me in private school, hoping that it would solve my problems. This may have been
a good idea, but, in fact, it only brought on a new wave of problems. The private
school had parent advisory slips—commonly known as PA slips—that would be
sent home if you were disruptive in class, did not do homework, or if you were
basically not doing well in a class. I probably hold the record at Cabot Academy for
the most PA slips! As I explained, bringing home PA slips was not an option for me
because I was so scared of my mother. So, once again I forged and lied daily. I
would hand the forged slips to my teachers, but they usually found out my mother
had not seen them and would then tell me I was caught. For the rest of the day,
I would conjure up possible escapes, imagining myself living on the streets or in the
woods, lonely and afraid. But I always went home. I would get home, where I
would be verbally tormented by my mother. I would try to explain that I didn’t
know why these things were happening and that I was as confused as she was, but
all she could say was, “You’re lying,” or “You’re a lazy, stupid, selfish, child.” I was
called an “insensitive brat,” a “lazy, fat ass,” and I often heard my mother say, “I
could fucking kill you!” As she screamed at me, she would twist my arm or smack
me or push me, then send me to my room, saying, “I don’t want to see your face
for the rest of the night.” I would wish that she could understand that acting that
way was only hurting me and killing my self-esteem. I wanted her to realize that I
was not doing these things because I was a bad person. I wanted her to realize that
my problems in school were caused by something that I didn’t understand.
Instead, my mother only added to my problems.

Several incidents will never be erased from my memory. I hope that sharing
one will help explain why I stayed in this pattern of lying, why I was just too scared
to stop. I was in bed one night when I heard the phone ring. I thought it could be
one of my teachers telling my parents that I had failed a math test. I heard my
mother say, “Thank you very much for calling and letting me know.” I knew I was
right. I heard my mother scream from her bedroom and come flying down the hall­
way to my bedroom. The door burst open, and standing in the light of the hallway
was my mother. She stormed into the room with a belt in her hand and started to
whip me where I was lying in my bed. She was screaming cruel things at me and
whacking whacking whacking me with the belt. Finally, my sister ran into my
room and pulled my mother off me. It was total chaos. My sister and I were scream­
ing and crying, and my mother was totally flipping out. I was confused and embar­
rassed that my sister had seen this. I know she felt bad for me, but I also know that
she was angry at me for causing this. I put a chair in front of my door and huddled
under my blanket, crying and getting sick to my stomach until, finally, I fell asleep.
All this because I failed a math test. By the time my father got home from work, the
house was silent and we were sleeping.

“I don’t ever remember my parents getting along well.”

It is amazing to me how much my family influenced how I see myself and
shaped who I am. I will start with my parents. I believe that my parents’ marriage
was doomed to fail from the beginning. They were married at 25, and within two
years they had my sister Meredith and me. My father started a job at an account­ing
firm in Boston, where he has worked for the last 21 years. My mother stayed at
home for the first few years to take care of me and my sister. The main reason my
parents are no longer together is that my father is married to his job; it’s the reason
they started fighting. My father worked 12 to 14 hours every day of the week. My
mother thought it was unfair that she was left home all day with two babies to take
care of and that she was totally alone all the time. When my father did come home,
my sister and I were usually asleep; we never spent time with him. I believe that
my mother felt neglected, and that she felt bad that my sister and I never saw my
dad either. My mother could not handle my father’s work schedule, and she
became very depressed and angry, and my parents fought regularly over the fact
that my father was never home. I think my mother was so angry that she couldn’t
tell my father that the problem was that she really missed him and wanted to have
a better marriage, so she would yell and scream and push him away even further.
Eventually, their arguments became violent, and my mother would hit my father.
The first time I witnessed this was horrific. It is hard to see your parents acting so
irrationally. I was scared my parents would end up killing each other.

Looking back, I understand my mother’s frustrations. I know she needed much
more affection and communication than she was getting from my father. I know she
tried to make their marriage work in many ways. She became an excellent cook and
homemaker. She kept herself looking great, always beautifully dressed, and in great
physical shape. She was envied by her friends for being so domestic and desirable.
Only my father never recognized her efforts, never complimented her or gave her
more time. That is why my mother became a very angry person.

My mother’s temper became the thing that scared me the most. She would hit
me and my sister when she became angry, often enraged over little things like spills
or messes around the house. My mother treated every situation with violence. My
father never really knew what was happening, and there was no one to help us. My mother’s erratic behavior was confusing: After she hit me, she would give me a big hug and a kiss and tell me she loved me, but it never made me feel better. I wanted her to feel bad for what she had done, not kiss and make up. I often felt I was living in the middle of total chaos, but was too small and powerless to stop it.

"The doctor told them I had ADHD."

When I was in eighth grade, my parents decided to take me to see a specialist. I had been evaluated many times throughout the years, but I was still not improving. My parents were desperate to get some help for my problems. I remember the ride to the hospital: It was no big deal for me, since I had become accustomed to being taken to psychologists and doctors. As I went through yet another series of testing—the ink blots, the puzzles, the building blocks—I wondered how these simple games would tell these people anything about me. At the end of the testing, my parents and I met with a doctor, who told them that I had ADHD. He said the drug Ritalin was the latest treatment and told my parents how it was used. I had never heard of ADHD, and at the time it did not mean much to me. I just figured, "Well, that’s one more thing we can add to the list, so can we go home now?" That was the extent of my diagnosis; we never got any information about ADHD, and we never talked about it again. My parents never thought to seek any advice about my condition, and, for me, it was just another name of another syndrome that was not going to change who I was. It didn’t really bother me that we never talked about it again because the doctor didn’t seem to think it was a big deal. By the end of that school year, I was kicked out of private school and back in public school, still without any mention of my ADHD.

I now regret so much the way my parents and I let my diagnosis be pushed under the carpet. If I had had some help, I could have accomplished so much more and been spared the humiliation I felt when I was expelled from school. The guilt was even worse; I was so tired of disappointing my parents. I knew I was doing poorly in school, but I never expected to be kicked out. I think this was a turning point for me in many ways. I think this is when my parents finally gave up on me, and when I gave up on myself. I was tired of not being understood and of being hurt so much that eventually I stopped caring about myself. I became so afraid of failure and admonishment that I was unable to take a risk or try really hard for things. I became scared of conflict or even the possibility of conflict. I couldn’t trust anything I believed, and I became a sponge for other people’s opinions. I never told anyone my feelings because I was so embarrassed about myself all the time.

Yet all of this did lead to something positive: I became a listener! The one area of my life that gained something from my bad experiences was my ability to be a good friend. I have had the same friends for many years, some since the first grade. I always put a lot into my friendships. All my friends would come to me with their problems because I was a good listener. I wanted to make sure these people felt that their problems were significant and that they were being understood. I never wanted anyone to have their feelings misunderstood, as I did. I would change
plans for my friends, even if it meant missing the biggest events; I would never desert a friend. I never let myself be in a clique and made it a point to try never to hurt anyone's feelings. I stuck up for kids who were being picked on and felt good about helping people. I was so well liked that I never had to worry about being picked on like I was at home or by my teachers. I was never a victim. Many teenagers have a hard time socially because kids can be really mean, but I never experienced that. This was great for me, but it also became a problem. I became so involved with everyone else's lives that I totally ignored how I was really feeling. Helping other people did make me feel better, but it was not enough.

During my sophomore year in high school, I became involved with Rob, a boy I had known throughout my school years. Rob gravitated to me because he had a lot of emotional difficulties. In elementary school, he had cancer for seven years, but cancer was the least of his problems. When Rob was diagnosed with bladder cancer, his father took off, and Rob never heard from him again. After later bouts with lung cancer and a tumor on his spine, Rob went into full remission when he was twelve. A week later, his mother announced that she had cervical cancer and that it was too far gone to help. She had never told anyone because she wanted Rob to be taken care of first. She died when Rob was a freshman in high school, and he blamed himself. This kid had major problems, and he became my new project.

I went out with Rob for five years, devoting myself mainly to his problems. I believe he'd be dead by now if not for me, but it sure didn't get me anywhere. He was a drug user, and I got into heavy drugs with him—acid, pills, coke. For two years straight, that was all we did. It was great: I was "helping" Rob, and I was too fucked up to feel my own pain. Rob hated school as much as I did, so we stopped going after a while, and if I did go, I was high. My parents separated the year I met Rob, so they were dealing with their own problems. My mother was such a wreck throughout her divorce that it was easy for me to get away with things.

But midway through my senior year when my mother had an emotional breakdown, I totally lost it. She wanted me to affirm her and comfort her, but I was so angry at her for what she had put me through that she made me sick. I could not even feel bad for her, and I let her suffer. My dad and sister were gone, so I was left alone with my irrational mother. And I just lost it. I quit school and ran away from home. I got an apartment with Rob and two of his friends in a part of the city surrounded by crack houses. This was the worst possible environment, but I did not care. I felt like I was losing my mind and just had to get out of my house. I have never been so depressed in my life; I totally hit rock bottom. I was still seeing my therapist through all this, and one day I showed up for a therapy appointment to find my dad waiting there with two guys in white coats. My father forced me to take a drug test, after which I was locked up in rehab for a few months.

"Those three months in Minnesota were a period of rebirth."

When I got out of rehab, I had a hard time motivating myself to do anything. The whole world felt dead to me. My relationship with my parents was not great,
and my self-esteem was at the lowest place it had ever been. I couldn’t pretend I was happy; I couldn’t even smile. I was able to put a lot of effort into figuring out what I needed to do to be happy again, and the one thing I was sure of was that I needed to get away from my family, my friends, and my hometown. I needed to see myself in another setting, to cut myself off from the rest of my world and totally concentrate on myself. My father suggested that I try an Outward Bound course for the summer, and I instantly agreed with him. I knew a little about the philosophy behind Outward Bound, but I didn’t know what to expect from my trip. I think the main reason I agreed to do the trip was because the distance and seclusion sounded so right.

I spent three months in the woods of northern Minnesota backpacking, kayaking, and canoeing. There is something so amazing about living without a clock or a schedule hanging over your head. Getting away from the noise, hustle, and stress of life, I was able to reflect and think. I found a calming silence in nature that soothed my mind and gave it the time to expand without unnecessary chatter and noise.

My Outward Bound course was the most significant experience I have had, the best choice I have made in my life. The changes I experienced during my trip were so strong and unbinding that I could feel them as they were occurring. I had moments of great clarity that allowed me to separate myself from the cloud I had been living in for years and to free myself from insignificant worries and fears that I had been holding on to my whole life. I think this was the first time I recognized myself as an individual person, rather than as a mere part in the lives of all the people I knew and all that I experienced. Before, I had absolutely no sense of who I was; I viewed myself according to what other people told me I was. Outward Bound gave me the personal freedom to explore inwardly and form an identity for myself. This freedom was the crucial aspect of my experience. I was in a group of seven strangers who did not have a clue about my past, and this was the first time that I could be the person I knew I was. I did not fear that these people would analyze my behaviors like my family did. I had lost the faith of all the people who were close to me and was used to getting few words of encouragement.

Those three months in Minnesota were a period of rebirth. I shed about 19 years of unwanted skin that was trapping my spirit. With every step I took, I sweated out the toxins in my body and mind. Every day, I struggled and cried, and I released and released all the pain inside me. For the first time my nerves settled, and the sick feeling I had in my body left. My stomach felt empty and happy without the butterflies that had lived in there for years. I smiled and I laughed out loud, and I was happy!

Equally important to my rebirth was that I gained a lot of insight into my family. I had had so much anger at them for so long that I could not distinguish the good in them. I know that I had an inner demon eating away at my spirit, and my family was that demon. In time, I was able to conquer the burdens my family had placed on me and to recognize my own faults and the ways I had contributed to the deterioration of our family. I had put so much emphasis on defending myself
that I couldn’t see my role in the problem. I went home from my trip feeling settled and open to my family. The trip also gave me time to decide what I wanted in the future, and I decided to go back to high school to get my diploma.

There is a part of me that would never want to change the fact that I have ADHD. I believe that this condition can be positive in many ways for the person who has it. The main setback for most people with ADHD, especially children, is that they are misunderstood. If I had been taught to believe that ADHD was a learning difference rather than a learning disability, I feel I would have had a more positive view of myself while growing up. ADHD has caused me problems as far as learning goes, but not because I cannot learn. I just do not learn the same way other people do. But then, everyone learns differently, not only people with ADHD. ADHD becomes a learning disability when teachers try to put many different kids together in one room and expect them all to learn the same way. I feel that a lot of the problem for children with ADHD lies within the education system. Most schools have a set curriculum and routine method of teaching, but it is ridiculous to believe that all children will be stimulated by the same things. The problem is that not all classroom settings incorporate a multimodal form of teaching. There are simple strategies that can be incorporated into the classroom that can greatly help all students learn more effectively according to methods that work best for them.

Many specialists believe that medication is the most effective treatment for ADHD students. This is something that I am very afraid of. I have experimented with a few of the drugs that are prescribed, like Ritalin and Dexedrine. When under the influence of these medications, I am a completely different person. I lose all my energy and emotions. It is like the driving force behind who I am is sucked out of my body, leaving me feeling like a hollow shell. My ADHD is the source of my energy, and it is vital for me to have that. I feel that my personality would not be what it is if I did not have ADHD. There are so many positive aspects of ADHD. For example, I can do many things at one time successfully. My mind is always in motion and always looking for something to do. My main goal is to be able to control my ADHD in certain settings, and to use my ADHD as an advantage, rather than taking drugs to suppress all my creative energy.

Although most people look at ADHD as a negative condition, I disagree. I believe that if you were to ask anyone that has a friend with ADHD, they would say that all of these crazy symptoms are what they love about that person. ADHD makes a person an individual unlike anyone else. I know that at times my erratic behavior and spontaneity aggravate my friends and family, but those are the qualities that make them laugh and appreciate me. The problem is that most of the literature about ADHD is written by people who do not have ADHD. They generalize ADHD and say that the symptoms are concrete. This is extremely offensive to me. I understand my symptoms, and I know how my ADHD affects me, but it’s all personal. My situation can be totally different from another person with ADHD.

I am happy that I have the opportunity to write about my experiences. They are me, and they are real. I hope this essay will help some people see the importance of dealing with learning disabilities so that they or their child will get the
help they need. I also hope people can learn from my story so that they will deal with this issue differently from the way my family did. I want people to understand that ADHD should not be labeled a disability, that it only becomes a disability when it is not understood and when people fail to see the benefits and the positive aspects of it. I believe that my ADHD caused people to look down on me and tell me that there was something wrong with me. I had hundreds of tests for that reason alone; everyone wanted to know what was wrong with me rather than just seeing the energy and passion that I had for so many things. My teachers and parents overlooked all the areas in my life where I was succeeding and instead concentrated on my faults. If I had learned earlier how to turn my ADHD to advantage, I would have had a better outlook on life and I would have had more respect for myself as a person. It has taken me a long time to be able to see the good in me. Because of all the people telling me there was something wrong with me, I was unable to recognize any part of myself as positive and “normal.” All I wanted was for people to listen to me and to really see me, not what the doctors were seeing.