

Wonderfully AD/HD

by Davina Perl Beacham

Devoted to real life testimonies of coping with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Attention's newest department made its debut in December 2007. Send us your stories of living with AD/HD.

MY HOUSEHOLD IS LIKE A COMIC STRIP. You see, I am a forgetful-at-times, more-than-mildly-neurotic, “out-of-the-box,” creative artist (translation: an adult woman with AD/HD). Luckily, 10 mg of methylphenidate helps me with the forgetful part, but only between the hours of 9 AM and 3 PM. After that, I return to my daydreaming, multiple-silent-conversations-with-myself, forgot-what-I-went-to-the-pantry-for, oops-I-burnt-dinner-again-because-I-got-sidetracked-on-another-project... self. I also have an eleven-year-old son with AD/HD, an eight-year-old son who in addition to AD/HD is sprinkled with Asperger syndrome, and a husband who was “full of beans” as a child and used all that energy to become a successful financial advisor. Our friends like to set a timer when we eat dinner together to see how long my husband will stay seated before getting up to work on another project.

Three years ago my son, Brad, sat in Dr. Edward Hallowell's office and shocked me. Before Brad actually sat, though, he was sort of nervous. Well...okay...he was...VERY nervous. He took this plastic collapsible sphere, collapsed it around his head, and started bouncing around the office and off the walls—literally bouncing off the walls! He looked like a Martian from outer space. I sat there... quietly... turning five shades of red... brewing a hive on my cheek... hoping Dr. Hallowell didn't think poorly of us.

Dr. Hallowell watched and smiled. “Brad is wonderfully AD/HD,” he said. Then he asked Brad, “Do you know what AD/HD is?”

Brad stopped bouncing, slowly lifted the collapsible sphere from his head, sat down, and then flung both legs over the side of the

chair. He looked up toward the ceiling, as if to find the answer. In a very matter-of-fact way Brad said, “Well, it's like this... I feel like... there's a wrecking ball in my head. Sometimes it starts banging and banging. It gets to where I can't even hear myself think, and then finally... when I just can't take it

anymore... it bangs a hole through my skull to let all my creations out.”

My jaw dropped, because that was me thirty years ago. We are so much alike, Brad and I—very creative, wacky senses of humor, always daydreaming, and unfortunately, often our own worst enemies. I could not have described the pain of dealing with

an executive functioning deficit better myself. Brad, still to this day, will say things to me like, “Ideas charge through my brain all day long,” or “I can't hear myself think.”

Even with all his brilliance, Brad struggles daily with organizational skills. This past year, there were nightly tears during homework, particularly with creative writing, because he had so many ideas but only one small 8x10 sheet of paper to fit them on. There were

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An artist who has exhibited her paintings around the United States, **Davina Perl Beacham** grew up in Italy, France, Switzerland, Mexico, and New York. She was interviewed by Katie Couric as an AD/HD success story on the Today show in September 2005. Beacham is a certified Parent to Parent teacher and a member of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council at her younger son's school. She recently completed *Breathe*, a memoir about raising children with AD/HD.



times he sat and stared at a blank sheet of paper for two hours before his fingers started writing. The end product was always amazing, but then he had no energy left to finish the rest of his homework.

I spoke to Brad's fourth grade teacher, who suggested we let Brad designate how much time he will spend on each of his subjects, and then set a timer. Amazingly this worked. Sometimes the timer went off before he finished, but the teacher assured Brad that he would not miss recess if he only got halfway through. Within a few weeks, Brad began to plow through his homework tear free.

Then a miracle happened—the fourth-grade poetry unit. Brad loved learning poetry. It gave him a chance to be “wonderfully AD/HD,” as Dr. Hallowell had put it. I'll leave you with a poem Brad wrote at age ten, titled *Needle in a Haystack*. ●

NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

Writing a poem is easy, but writing a poem that is good is like finding a needle in a haystack... and here is why:

I was working on my homework when I had a great idea

I went to write it down, but then it disappeared—in an endless haystack

Only for me to find it and fumble it again

It can be so frustrating

To work for many hours

And when you've almost grabbed it

The other player gets it first

And then all your plans are lost in space

To be found by someone else

That someone else might tell you

And then you will remember

You might take out your papers and show him all your work

You might also finish your poem and your opponent will share the glory

You will be remembered and so will your friend.