

Carol's Story

"Late Bloomer", by Carol

Growing up, I always knew that I was different. It was not until the age of 43 that I came to understand why.

Raised in a middle-class household in the 1950's, I never suffered for lack of every day essentials. My father was dedicated to his wife and two daughters: he generously and lovingly provided for his family and was my rock. As a child, I saw my mother as a drama queen, who seemed to get some kind of satisfaction from tormenting her family, albeit unintentionally.

I adored my father, but was sometimes frightened by his volatile temper, which erupted at the least provocation. He spewed profanities and self-recriminations when he was engrossed in a woodworking or other project and something went wrong (eg. when a piece of equipment malfunctioned): I recall one Christmas morning when I was young when he hurled the Kodak camera and flash attachment across the living room when the flash did not go off. I can still hear the pieces of metal sizzling as they hit the wall. I remember his short fuse when he would drill me on my times tables and I made mistakes (frequently) and when he'd help me prepare for a social studies test in grade six: he would explode with "Why can't you ever get the right explorer up the right river in the right ship?" and I did not have an explanation that was acceptable to him.

In her prime, my mother had been a gifted singer, pianist and artist. After my older sister was born, she began to exhibit very bizarre behaviour and at other times, a very depressed state that included suicide attempts. She was often away from home – hospitalized for months at a time. When at home, she was usually unable to manage the activities of daily living and family life was tumultuous, to say the least.

In elementary school, I think I somehow managed to amuse my teachers (up to grade four at least) with my perky personality. But by the time grade five came along, a dark cloud had settled over me as school became complicated, difficult and fiercely unpleasant. I was expected to sit still in class: I could not. I was expected to pay attention and answer questions: I could not. I was increasingly restless, fidgety, easily bored, talked out of turn and was laughed at by my peers. Sometimes, when I'd feel so humiliated I would cry, only to be subjected to more taunting and name-calling both in the classroom and on the playground.

So I struggled to find my way through a confusing maze at home and at elementary school, but no one noticed. There were no youth counselors or school social workers. I believe that I survived the "crapola" precisely due to having ADHD: I was perpetually busy and had boundless energy for any activity outside of school. By age 12, I had become a "mother's helper" in my suburban neighbourhood, and soon a full-fledged babysitter, spending my weekends earning my own spending money, generally avoiding my peers and trying to disconnect from the constant drama in my home.

The summer I turned 15, I began working at resort hotels in Muskoka and continued every summer until I was 20. These “escapes” helped me survive adolescence, as did being active in student theatre, swim club, and sorority activities, which were appropriate outlets for my excess energy. Unfortunately, I continued to struggle in the classroom.

By the time I completed grade 13, I knew 2 things for sure: I was a strong person to have survived thus far, and I wanted to pursue a career in helping troubled youth. For the next 2 years, I fell in love with self-directed learning and embraced all the courses in a local community college program. The hands-on learning environment was perfect for me. Finally, I didn’t feel stupid, but with my lousy school history, I knew I had to try harder than other students to succeed at college. I excelled in the work placements that were 50% of the diploma program. This is where I gained confidence in myself and graduated with outstanding grades overall. One year later I married my prince charming, but we certainly did not live happily ever after.

Marriage was a rollercoaster of emotions, and challenges that neither my college sweetheart nor I were prepared for. Sadly, after 5 and one half years married, and with my first child only a year and a half old, I ended the marriage. So began my journey into the depths of depression that I had never before experienced and I feared that I was doomed to be just like my mother. I put myself into therapy and bounced back into action. After a serious 6 month relationship ended when the man I was dating decided he did not want a ready-made family, I again plunged into a depressed state. Loss was too much to bear again, and I felt like a failure and worse: unlovable, but had no idea why?

Short-term therapy was in again order, and my resiliency kicked into gear yet again. Before long I secured my dream job as an itinerant, Child/Youth Worker with a local school board and for the next 2 years I was over the moon happy again.

A second marriage, the arrival of 2 more children, and trying to navigate the daily life of a blended family, became my focus. I loved being a stay-at-home mom, but with 2 overly active children and a third who was noticeably less so, home life became more than stressful. My second husband turned out to be a stern, controlling person who had zero tolerance for boisterous children and zero empathy for me. I became worn out from trying to protect them from the wrath of my husband and his rigid, intimidating and hurtful actions in our home. My instinct to protect my children from a toxic home environment led me to initiate a separation from my husband. After 6 weeks at an abused women’s shelter, and following the sudden death of my beloved father, the children and I returned home. .

Fast forward to November 20,1993. Depression was my constant companion as I only felt more despair in my marriage. It became painfully clear that no resolution was possible and I felt I had no choice but to leave again and with no options, spent another transition period at a shelter for abused women. Sadly, the next 2 and one half years were a nightmare as my husband tormented me and my children in a contentious custody battle.

In May 1995, I picked up a book entitled “Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood through Adulthood” by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. and John J. Ratey, M.D. As I read this book I began to see patterns of behaviour from my own life and could see that I was probably afflicted with ADHD, so I kept reading but also kept procrastinating about getting help. It just all seemed surreal and overwhelming at the time. *I began to understand that the emotional and psychological victimization I suffered in my marriage had certainly exacerbated my ADHD symptoms and compromised my coping skills. My undiagnosed ADHD also made me more vulnerable to relationship abuse/domestic violence.*

By the summer of 1996, I was alone, devastated and facing part-time parenthood: all of my children had gone to live with my husband. The depth of my struggle was excruciatingly solitary: climbing out of the pit of despair I was trapped in and searching for answers was, however, my journey. I began to look in the mirror at a person I no longer recognized. Maybe it was time to get officially diagnosed and pursue treatment for ADHD, I wondered? This is the path I chose and life became somewhat manageable, but incredibly painful nonetheless.

Three years later, I decided to try to live without medication for ADHD. A lot of personal chaos resulted: extended periods of brief jobs, unemployment; financial deprivation and dark despair at times. By 2008, I gave up the delusion that I was coping adequately with my ADHD and after nine years of suffering, started taking medication again. I also expanded my plan for wellness: Life Coaching. Through a series of sessions that included goal setting, learning to identify my strengths and abilities and focus on them again, I learned how to manage the day to day challenges of being an adult with ADHD. I will be forever indebted to my coach, Sue, for her unconditional understanding and support along my journey.

I returned to full-time work in the social service sector and continue to help others navigate challenges to move forward with their lives. I am stronger for the struggles I have come through and want to inspire other adults with ADHD to never give up.

What do I know? ADHD can ruin your life if you let it. To learn how to live fully and richly with ADHD takes effort and I have finally learned that I am worth the effort.

Dan's Story

My parents realized I had ADD when I was very young. I had very disruptive / aggressive behaviors as a young child/ adolescent. I struggled with anger and frustration of not getting enough positive attention and positive reinforcement and positive support from my family, so I made it so I got negative attention. I was very popular and social; my whole life. I spent 3 years in a group home for those with behavioral issues on a volunteer basis during high school. Because I had full time Child care Workers, I was a model resident. I was the only one who never ran away. This was not a locked setting. I went to school my whole life in special schools for learning disabled and emotionally challenged adolescents from ages 13-16.

College was very difficult because I could not stay focused, and my mind wandered during lectures, I graduated successfully with a Law Clerk diploma in 2006. I went on Concerta in 2008 and Celexa in 2012. These medications have changed my life. I am attempting to find and keep a job longer than 3 months. I am struggling with the decision to find a new career I can be successful. I enjoy the fast pace and demands of a Law Firm. I struggle with verbal impulsivity and am slowly starting to learn appropriate subtle social cues.

I often have difficulty staying focused and attending to daily, mundane tasks, I may be easily distracted by irrelevant sights and sounds, I quickly bounce from one activity to another, I become bored quickly.

- I have trouble with “zoning out” without realizing it, even in the middle of a conversation.
- I have a tendency to overlook details, leading to errors or incomplete work.
- Poor listening skills; hard time remembering conversations and following directions.

I have trouble focusing on tasks that aren't interesting to me; I get extremely bored with repetition.

Life for me often seems chaotic and out of control. Staying organized and on top of things can be extremely challenging.

- I have very poor organizational skills (home, office, desk, are extremely messy and cluttered)
- I am constantly losing or misplacing things (keys, wallet, phone)

I have trouble inhibiting my behaviors, comments, and responses when frustrated. I tend to act before thinking, or react without considering consequences. I find myself interrupting others, and blurting out comments. I have had impulse problems before I went on Celexa, being patient is extremely difficult for me, I tend to go head first into situations and find myself in potentially risky circumstances.

- frequently interrupt others or talk over them
- have poor self-control
- with family I blurt out thoughts that are rude or inappropriate without thinking
- I act recklessly or spontaneously without regard for consequences
- have trouble behaving in socially appropriate ways (such as sitting still during a long meeting)

I have a hard time managing my feelings, especially when it comes to emotions like anger or frustration. These are the things I struggle with;

- sense of underachievement
- doesn't deal well with frustration

- easily flustered and stressed out
- irritability or mood swings
- I have hypersensitivity to criticism
- short, often explosive, temper
- low self-esteem and sense of insecurity

I'm highly energetic and perpetually "on the go" as if driven by a motor

- feelings of inner restlessness, agitation
- tendency to take risks
- getting bored easily
- racing thoughts
- trouble sitting still; constant fidgeting
- craving for excitement
- talking excessively
- doing a million things at once

I've suffered over the years for patience from supervisors and co workers and family members

I have just started to develop my self-esteem.

- I have struggled with career difficulties and feel a strong sense of underachievement. I have trouble keeping a job. Managing finances is also a problem: I've struggled and suffered with all, my life debt due to impulsive spending. and lack of long term employment
- Relationship problems. The symptoms of ADD/ADHD can put a strain on your work, love, and get over my inability to sit still and to have perfect social communication with family members, I struggle with verbal impulsivity when angry or not feelings recognized, or get organized. Those close to me, feel angry and resentful over my perceived "irresponsibility" or "over-sensitivity."

Dave's Story

Feeling like a Martian among all these humans, that's how I describe my life living with ADHD.

I discovered I had ADHD in my mid 30's only when my son was diagnosed with ADHD which both shone a light on many of the feelings of being different that I'd had all my life and also left me searching for a way to explain to my son that ADHD wasn't necessarily a bad thing. I knew he and I were different, but I didn't want to tell him he was abnormal, so it occurred to me that

what we are is "**not average**". My son is the most important part of my life, but out of respect for his privacy I won't share any more about him and the challenges of being a parent with ADHD raising a child with his own obstacles to overcome: instead, I'll share my story hoping the it leads even one more person to understanding the challenges and opportunities ADHD present.

ADHD is finally being recognized as a "*disability*" which affects learning but I prefer the term "*differently-abled*" since truly, we are all "*differently-abled*" and everyone who thinks they're "*normal*" is deluding themselves because they simply haven't taken the time to find their own weaknesses or dis-ability. Me, I know I'm not average; but I know that means while I may be much weaker than most people in some areas, I am much better than average in other areas. Besides, as I tell my son, who wants to be average? They don't have an Olympics for average people, great discoveries aren't made by average people, history isn't shaped by being average – these things are shaped by people who are great in some areas and downright disabled in others!

My ADHD ensured there would be more challenges in life, but it also gave me strengths once I learned to harness it and that is the challenge for everyone with ADHD to find your areas of strength and play to your strengths while accepting that you'll be lousy at other things --- that's a requirement of greatness and every person has the potential for greatness within them!

At a very young age, talking too fast and non-stop earned me the nickname of motor mouth and in grade 3 my teacher's way of dealing with my talking too much was to make me stand behind my chair with my hands on my head. I suppose she believed this would "*teach me*" to talk less, but all it did was humiliate me. At some point, I realized that I was talking so fast because my brain was thinking faster than most of the people around me so despite being a shy person, as an adult I started presenting in front of large groups of people confident that I could think fast enough to answer the questions that would come up. People who've met me will doubt that I'm shy until they realize that they won't see me socializing in a group of 30 or 300 people – I don't know how to do small talk, to smoothly move in and out of a superficial conversation because there are too many social cues to manage in those settings so I've adapted, learned to turn what was perceived as a weakness into a strength by how I used that "dis-ability" – talking too much and too fast.

I was ostracized and bullied as a kid because I was "different" which means you get picked on. I had a difficult time making friends as a result and even to be included in playing games. I remember having to give the ringleader my toys as payment to be allowed to play so when I was out of toys, I couldn't play. I ate as my emotional escape so being over-weight just helped to alienate me. However, these interactions forged my sense of right and wrong, of social justice. I became the defender of those that were being oppressed and find great satisfaction from efforts like having collected tens of thousands of pounds of donations for food drives among many other efforts to help those that could use a hand up. Despite my dis-ability, I never asked for a handout and I won't give one to others; but, I am always ready to give

everyone a hand-up, the assistance to help them improve their own personal situation as others have done for me.

Home was no better as I was mostly left to my own devices when I wasn't being mistreated - my philosophy as a young child became to "stay out of everyone's way". By age 13 I was ready to check out because of one particularly hurtful comment from a family member who told me I was a mistake and they wish they'd never had me. Talk about feeling all alone, that statement crushed me for years because I felt like there was nowhere I belonged - I felt like a Martian surrounded by insensitive earthlings and the teen years are particularly difficult because we all just want to fit in. When you are differently-abled, you either let those differences crush you or you use adversity to push you. I decided that since no one expected anything of me, I could take chances, risks that others were afraid to take because failing would simply have meant I lived up to their minimal expectations of me. It took me decades to build my self esteem, but by my early 40's, I had made peace with myself and my contributions to this world and while I still don't fit in, I accept that I continue to do the best I can with what I've been given and that's all any of us can aspire to - be the best you can be today and always and you will have succeeded. No one else's opinion matters because you have to look at yourself in the mirror and when your life comes to an end, you leave this world as you came into it - alone and you have to answer only to yourself when you wonder if you've lived well and given more to the world than you took from it.

Starting in my later teen years, I relied on my ability to think faster than most to start analyzing every social interaction to be able to "fit in" which made me a sociologist from a young age. In grade 12 I took a liking to economics which is really the study of human behaviour as it intersects with money. Throughout school, I discovered that like other folks with ADHD I had little ability to focus and learn about things that didn't capture my attention (which explains the 43% mark in statistics on my University transcript), but that was balanced against a great ability to hyper-focus on the things I found interesting. You have to live it to understand it, but I could sit through a two hour lecture and not remember a thing that was said. I would walk out of exams and when other students asked what my answer was to one of the questions, I couldn't remember the questions, much less the answers. I would sit at the library and study for hours then on the walk home realize that I remembered none of it. My low water mark academically was being given an exam back in first year math and I had no idea how I did because I remembered nothing about the exam. I saw a 4 on my exam paper and I asked the prof "40-what" and she held up 4 fingers - I had managed to get a 4% on an exam and I had no idea it was coming! The flipside; I could sit in an economics lecture and not make any notes - just watch, listen and "get it". Others would ask me if I didn't need notes and I'd ask them if they didn't understand - it was so obvious to me. I sat down to write an economics exam, looked at the questions and put the exam down, sitting there with a goofy smile on my face I think because the prof asked me if I was OK and I said "I got this". I wrote a long exam in about 40 minutes instead of 3 hours and although I didn't remember any of the questions as I walked out, I knew I had crushed that one. I got a mark in the high 90's because economics spoke to me - I could apply the numbers to people and the world so I just "got it" no studying or notes necessary. My experience fits with the thought that everyone and particularly people with

ADHD should specialize in the things we're good at and just laugh about the things we're not any good at. If you can't dance well, dance like it doesn't matter because it doesn't and be great at the things you can be great at!

As for work, I just wanted to fit in at a workplace with everyone else, but it's hard for folks with ADHD to fit in at work the same way it was difficult to fit into a particular mold at school. I was always in a hurry, wanting to finish one project to move onto the next which combined with my poor social skills meant I also couldn't fit in at work, so I held down one job as an adult for more than a year. Holding down a job is one of the challenges for people dealing with ADHD; however, that led me to continuing as a reluctant entrepreneur. I discovered that ADHD is a great strength for entrepreneurs, so I had found my niche professionally!

Being different also meant that I became comfortable with taking the road less travelled so when most people go left, I veer right and when I do, I find opportunities because those "other people" just haven't realized they're followers while I had no choice but to be a trailblazer. Having a knack for going in my own direction and having to analyze how people make their decisions meant that I was uniquely equipped to succeed as an entrepreneur because I see business opportunities where "average" people don't. Fortunately for me, I was able to grow from selling comic books at age 15, to running hot dog carts and a game at the CNE in my late teens. I bought a video store as a 21 year old to test what I was learning at University in the real world and then I started a second and a third. Not "getting" other people, I didn't know what I wasn't supposed to be able to do, so I created my own franchise system of almost 20 stores across Ontario over a few years. After that business was wiped out in a divorce, I founded another which today works with over 1,000 video rental businesses from coast to coast making it the largest video rental organization operating anywhere in the world! I could regale you with many stories about being an entrepreneur, but the only important point I want to make is that I don't use ADHD as a crutch and don't need anyone's pity. I try to understand others and only wish that those of you that delude yourselves into thinking you're "normal" would take the time to understand and appreciate all of our wonderful differences that put the "extra" into the world that turns ordinary into "extra"ordinary ;-)

As you might imagine, building a relationship with a significant other and nurturing that when you have ADHD is the most monumental of all tasks – ranking right up there with raising a child. I have little advice in that area other than to recommend you find someone who's a good listener (because we talk a lot) and someone who is adaptable and willing to change with you as the one constant in the life of a person with ADHD is change. If you can find someone who loves you for who you are and understands that while life will constantly change, love can be constant, marry that person because you've found a winner. I think I've found my winner and I'm keeping her, so you have to get your own!

For the kid who was told he wouldn't amount to anything, I have created businesses that employed over a hundred people and contributed tens of millions of dollars to government revenues that help provide vital services like education and health care to my fellow humans. I have been there to support family and friends when they needed me. I have cared about others

and contributed what I could even when often times it feels like others are insensitive to those who don't "fit in" like me. That's one of the things I think people with ADHD most suffer from, we don't fit in, so it feels like we must be harder to love. I would like to close by highlighting how much of a difference simply taking the time to care makes and how that caring helped shape an insecure child who was afraid of his own shadow into a builder, someone who prides himself in contributing to making the world a better place.

- My grade 7 teacher materially changed my life with a statement as simple as "*you can and you will*" and then he did things like challenged me to verbal debates which played to my strengths - for the first time in my life someone believed in me.

- At 15, I tried to resign a part time job because I couldn't continue working with people that were stealing and I wouldn't rat them out (I think I had a heightened sense of right and wrong because I had so often been wronged). My manager's solution was to promote me to supervisor and tell me I was responsible for the night shift including hiring and firing staff - a lot of responsibility for a 15 year old but this was the beginning of my understanding that "I could". Someone believed in me and I wasn't going to let him down. Moreover, for the first time I was in a position of power and I knew not to abuse it.

- There are others that showed faith in me; were there to help me when I needed help; were proud of my successes or were simply just good human beings who treated me well despite my not being "average". These people and others have helped shape me into who I've become, so I have learned that I am part of this race of human beings; that we are all different and that's OK. If I could ask only one thing of anyone who reads my story, it would be to do what you can to help others live up to their potential in life by recognizing that we're all different and that's something to be celebrated because life would be boring if we were all average ;-)

Yours truly, a guy "blessed" with the curse of being different because I have ADHD

Glenis's Story

I am a woman with ADHD. I was diagnosed as a 40yr old adult. I came across an article, and a questionnaire, filled it out, got my result and broke down and cried. It was a revelation. A relief in so many ways. I was not alone. There were others like me. There was an answer for the way I thought, felt, acted, reacted! There was a reason!!! I was not the only one. Some of the fear and shame I've lived with for so long lifted just a little bit that afternoon. I wanted to tell everyone. But I decided to first find out more about it.

It was and still is a very interesting journey. I learn and understand more about myself every day. I am motivated not just for me, but for my son who struggles with ADHD as well as Anxiety (which I realise I have as well), and ODD, compounded with CAPD. I am his biggest advocate. I am also teaching him how to be an advocate for his own needs as well. It's a lot for an eleven year old to handle, but he is amazing!

I always knew I was intelligent, but sometimes I sure did feel stupid. I could read and understand concepts innately, yet found it very difficult to explain them when asked. It took me

so long to complete assignments, because it was all in my head, and it had to be “perfect” before I could start it (even this article was left to the last minute, because it had to be “just right”, “perfect”), then I remind myself, I just need to start somewhere. I was looked at as an underachiever, by many people. My own father thought I was just not trying hard enough. Not applying myself enough. It was frustrating and exhausting to never quite measure up. The worst was that I knew I was capable....I just had trouble getting there. My self-esteem took daily beatings.

One of the things that really helped me, and still does is the support, love and honesty of my best friends. My tribe as I like to call them. The magnificent women who have helped me and stood by me and accepted me throughout my life so far. I was also blessed with parents that didn't necessarily understand me, but loved me no matter what.

The thing about ADHD is, it forces me to give 110%. We can't just go from A to B. Our route is a lot more circuitous. It takes so much more energy, and thought to achieve the same results as a “so-called normal person”. One of our greatest assets is our ability to think outside the box. I find answers or solutions for things, that others wouldn't even dream of! I read three books at a time, and understand all of them. I can multi-task, and keep all kinds of facts and information in my head, that others couldn't. I am a very quick thinker and learner. Hyperfocus is amazing, and I love being “in the zone”. Unfortunately for anyone “outside the zone”, like someone trying to get your attention....not so great. I have had to explain to people at work, that I am not being rude, or ignoring them, and if they needed me, to tap me on the shoulder. My friends laughingly remember calling me on the telephone as a teenager, and me being so absorbed in my TV show, that they are carrying on a one way conversation, and eventually hang up.

Teachers were however, not so forgiving. My entire school career, I was asked, “why can't you sit still?, why can't you put your hand up like everyone else?, why can't you stop talking, why can't you hand your assignments in on time? why can't you understand, when I explained it? why can't you listen? I know you are intelligent, so why are you not applying yourself? I didn't have the answers. In fact, I wondered why myself. I just wished I wasn't centered out all the time and embarrassed. Made to feel like I was always wrong and bad.

My greatest wish is that parents and teachers will see the damage they do to kids with ADHD, simply by not taking the time to understand and support them, when they need it the most. They need to learn the tools that they will need to survive living in a world where all squares must be made to fit the round holes.

Finding the right medication to help you succeed is also beneficial, and can be a journey in itself. It can be trial and error, but as another tool, it is worth it in the end. Learning and understanding ADHD will empower you as well. Belonging to such a wonderful and supportive group as CADDAC will help foster better understanding, help your loved ones understand you better, and give you a greater insight. With greater understanding there is acceptance. And isn't that what we all really want and need from our fellow human beings?

Jo-Anne's Story

As a child I was the loud chatterbox who always did poorly in school. It was often said of me that "she has quite the imagination, that one." Even at a young age, I knew this wasn't meant as a compliment. In our house, discipline was the answer for everything, as it was for most families at that time. And I was in trouble a lot. I heard "Sit down", "Sit still", "Pay attention", "Why can't you be more like your sister?" over and over.

I hated school. Some days I spent more time in the head mistress's office than in the classroom. Everything seemed so hard and boring; I would spend a lot of time staring out of the classroom window, drifting off into my own world.

I was twenty-two years old when I was diagnosed with ADD. To be honest, until then I had never even heard of it. I couldn't help but feel angry, looking back at all those years at school and remembering how stupid, lazy, inadequate, and frustrated I had felt. It wasn't that I didn't want to listen in class, or get good grades, or complete assignments. I remember thinking to myself: Okay, I really need to listen this time... I don't know how to do this... listen, listen! I would start by staring at the teacher, forcing myself not to look away. I thought that if I was looking at her, I must be listening. I would hear her state what she was going to talk about. After that, I wasn't sure what happened, because the next thing I knew she was saying, "Okay, now you try it; show your work so I know you were listening." I would get so frustrated, not to mention in trouble for not listening, and usually a failing grade. I was labeled dumb, lazy, a failure, not disciplined, and overall just a bad kid.

Once enough people call you that, you start to believe it's true, and you stop trying. My grades were fifty percent at best; most were significantly lower, except for gym and sometimes English. Along with the drop in my grades came a drop in my self-esteem, and then my self-respect.

When I was diagnosed I was prescribed a medication called Dexedrine, and right away the change was incredible. What a difference it made! I was able not only to read books, but also to finish them; for the first time I understood and remembered what they were about. I could focus on my writing and was able to finish stories that I had started, even completing my first novel. My daily life was more manageable. I could make supper and talk to my kids at the same time, without burning anything. I was able to relax more when doing things without becoming frustrated, angry, or giving up when things weren't working as they should.

If only I had been diagnosed when I was younger, still in school, still with plenty of time to benefit from being medicated.

I knew when my youngest was diagnosed with ADHD that I would not let him have the same school experience as I began researching and getting as much info as I could. I stay very involved in his school and talking to his teachers. I have taught my son to be his own advocator. To speak up and tell his teacher what he needs. Some years are better than others, it all seems to depend on the teachers knowledge of ADHD. When he has a teacher that doesn't have a

good knowledge of ADHD, we try and give them as much information as possible and do anything we can to help make the school year successful.

Having ADHD myself and a child with ADHD, has changed our lives, but its not all bad. We may have our struggles, but we also have a home full of creativity, imagination, spontaneity and fun.

Lesley's Story

You forgot?

What do you mean you lost it?

Why can't you just sit still?

Sigh...You've got your stuff all over the house... again

Stop interrupting me all the time!

Omg you make a lot of noise!

Sound familiar?

I hear them frequently. It makes me sad sometimes. It reminds me of good intentions and the 'I'd like to be able to...'

So I've learned how to ignore comments... and sometimes even laugh at them. See my strengths and all that. But I really can't help it and the effort to control myself is tiring sometimes.

I really do try.

Really...

It reminds me how easily distracted and off topic I get. I know... I know I forgot...

I was told recently that I was a worrier and that I needed to prioritize: to stop worrying about details. But what does it mean to prioritize when everything is (or seems) equal? I see and I hear *everything*.

I'm not sure if I understand the concept actually. Isn't attention to detail supposed to be a good thing?

I hear sounds around me almost equally; it pulls my attention and I get lost in what I am doing. I can get so overwhelmed that I want to run away.

But in reality it's actually my biggest strength.

It's why I'm a professional musician and an elementary music teacher.

I can hear your watch, the lights, the air ducts, the door down the hall, the elevator, AND your voice. I can hear the musicians around me and I love being enveloped in the sound of the orchestra. It 'keeps my head and attention busy'. I like that...alot

But I can't and I *really mean can't* filter out just one sound. It's what makes teaching difficult.

Imagine someone constantly clapping their hands in front of your face and trying to hold onto a conversation with the other person. It's the dripping tap that keeps you up all night. But I can't find a plumber. I can get *very* frustrated and overloaded very quickly.

Playing an instrument requires you to concentrate on many many things at once.

It satisfies a need I have to hyperfocus like 'crazy'. It's what makes me an excellent musician.

Outside of playing I can get easily distracted and way off topic.

I have lots of unfinished projects. I do 5 things at once. I can finish 'stuff' but it's all or nothing. I'll stay up all night or push myself: to get it off the list.

I don't think I'm being obsessive like I've been told either really I'm just 'afraid' of forgetting and letting myself down again...I've had enough of those in my life.

I'm tired of disappointments.

Living with a constant challenge of ADHD is tiring and full of self regulation.

But

You know what's great about ADHD?

I can outtalk you, make almost anything – let me take it apart, play extremely demanding music, hyperfocus on detail and see things others don't -I'm the best 'nature guide', run half marathons, recognize your voice, your footsteps, I'm fully ambidextrous and I'll drop whatever I'm doing to help you.

I can play my flute, listen to music, watch the T.V., have my metronome ticking and the tuner running. And notice all of them at the same time. Just for fun and just because I can. It's calming in a way.

It's like you sitting down and reading a book I guess. I don't know really I've never done that.

I'm just different.

And because of my 'condition' I HAVE to find creative out of the box ways to fit into the 'normal' world.

I need help. Just in a different and understanding way.

I will ask you questions – and I know I've asked them before.

Please be patient. It's because I know there's a solution. I see the possibilities all around me.

I just get stuck and I can't figure out what to do next; what are they again? It's like magic to me.

Please time me. Keep me on topic. Let's have a clear agenda. Let me fidget or not think of me as 'weird' if I 'drop and do 20'. It will focus me enough to really hear what you are saying. I need a clear deadline. Help me pace to the goal. I have to talk in person for understanding.

And yes, I know I interrupt. I constantly talk. Yes I know I've been told.

Please don't get frustrated with me...

I don't mean to be disrespectful or not care – I'm not ignoring you either. I'm sorry if I interrupted you again...I just get excited and can't stop talking.

Mark's Story

I'm a Videographer / Editor - Struggling Filmmaker - Artist by trade. I've worked on everything from feature films, television, industrial video's, wedding video's and my own personal projects, in one capacity or another over the last 20 years. I've also spent two years studying Improv at Second City in Toronto and graduated from their conservatory program.

It's been three years since I discovered my ADHD and it shook my life. I was going through a particularly tough time and many things that hadn't already fallen apart on me, were on the verges of collapse. Being unable to make sense of all my difficulties, I literally had my hands up in the air asking, "why do I have such bad luck?!"

That's when I happened across a small article in the Hamilton Spectator about a documentary called "ADD and Loving it", and for reasons I can't explain, I sought it out on the web that moment. I must of watched it at least four times that night, slapped my head about a thousand times, fell off my chair 12 times and laughed with the kind of hysterics that only a shocking strike of insight and clarity could bring. I also cried.

All of a sudden, I found out there was a name for the collection of symptoms that I had wrestled with my entire life. Now, so many experiences, situations, issues and mysteries made sense. Not only concerning my life, but also my father's life and his side of the family. The understanding brought me a sense of tremendous relief.... then upset, anger, frustration, indignation, sadness, gratitude, hope and now re-invigoration. It's been an interesting three years, it's been an interesting life.

And today, I received an email from my ADHD Coach concerning the request put out by CADDAC for people who are willing to speak publicly to help raise awareness. Count me in.

Russ's Story

My name is Russ. At the age of 50 (I'm currently 55) I was diagnosed with A.D.H.D.. Scholastically, (as a child) I was always labeled as an "underachiever" and/or a class clown, however the style of teaching always dictated the degree. From B+'s to D's, that was always the range. I'm sure the "He has so much potential!" line was imbedded in my mother's brain. Perhaps my habit of gazing out the window played a role in this "potential" thing. Regardless, I always considered myself as "normal"... okay, so I started driving vehicles on the back roads of Nova Scotia at the age of 11, but I didn't break the 100mph plateau until well after my 12th birthday.

On the professional side, I fulfilled my childhood dream of becoming a "radio announcer". At my peak, I hosted syndicated programming (based out of Toronto) on over 150 radio stations across the country. I also have been a media sales rep, a program director, a sales manager, a promotion's director, a general sales manager, a station manager, a voice-over artist and a newsman. I later went on to become a noted communications consultant, an award winning public speaker, a sales trainer and a public speaker trainer. I guess there's a fine line between "well rounded" and "indecisive".

Despite times of success (a medical doctor once labeled me as creatively "brilliant"... albeit unofficially) I had my extreme low points. With each passing year depression was taking a greater hold of my life. I knew what had to be done, to change my outcome in life, but had no idea why I couldn't program my brain to do it. With increased frustration came more depression. Things changed with my diagnosis.

The A.D.H.D. diagnosis, after 50 years of not knowing, was/is liberating, frustrating, depressing (especially when reliving the past), and dangerous (I'm talking about social status). Note: I've learned that many un-informed "friends" think the spelling of A.D.H.D. is C-R-A-Z-Y). Despite the negatives, knowing leads to adjusting. That being said, I want to make a difference for myself and others by utilizing my communications skills to help break the A.D.H.D. internal and external stigma.

Yes, I still live (and struggle) with the aftermath/baggage caused by 50 years of "not knowing" but with help, I'm still standing, albeit at times a bit wobbly.

Sara's Story

My name is Sarah and I am 20. I live in Calgary Alberta.

I love Animals and Helping people. People say I may be too kind hearted but I believe you can never have enough.

My story starts all the way pretty much from grade 3 I lived in Saskatchewan, in a town of 500 people. Growing up I've always had trouble learning in School, I always needed more help than most kids. Comprehension was my biggest problem. I could read great but not have a single clue of what I was reading, I'd have to go back and read it again and again. My grades were

average but started slipping as I got older. In high school I could never get motivated enough to finish my homework or make it to class on time. This goes for work currently, I cannot seem to make it right on time. I have lots of problems with Anxiety, Depression and Obsessiveness.

I can't help it. At work I usually call my mother (who sometimes I believe keeps me here) 3 times a day crying because the noise is too much and I can't concentrate on my work. Certain peoples typing, breathing etc. always has bugged me and sometimes I may take people too seriously. I have to think of what I'm saying before I speak or else I stutter and my words come out all mixed up. I have been to several doctor appts and they keep bumping my medication up but in all honestly it really doesn't help. It feels like they won't take the time to help me mentally. I always thought I was going crazy and then found out it's not just me. I don't wish people "got it" but I do wish it was recognized more especially in women and Adults. I know my mother has gone through a ton with me and my ADHD. I was diagnosed with it in College, so I went through 12 years of school with minimal help and no medication. For sure a struggle, but it's really made me stronger. I believe that I am not judgemental towards other people because of this. As soon as a look at a person who's in need or a person with a disability, I instantly put myself in their shoes, I can't help that either. That's something I really love about myself. I find it hard to love myself because of this set back. I feel like I'll be like this forever. But as I've learnt and still learning, it won't. My dream is to work with Animals and one day motivates the world to be just in general better. I love Hockey and my dream when I was younger as I was playing was to be in the Olympics, and still is my dream. I'd like to let people know that it is okay to have this and that it's just we have to make one more step and a few more struggles but it make you stronger in the end. I still need help, and a lot of it, but one step at a time will get me there. There are always "medical" stories of ADD and ADHD but you don't see actual people with ADHD speaking out about it often. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story and I hope I can help raise awareness and let people know they are not alone.