

Personal Testimony:

Daniel Hawthorne

When Daniel was a child his future looked bleak. Without the ability to communicate and remaining non-verbal until almost 7 years old, Daniel was classified as mentally retarded. Today he is totally independent with meaningful relationships and a good career. Among many other accomplishments, he is also the author of ***A Reason For Hope***. This book will amaze you and show you that anything is possible.

Daniel's Answers

What age are you? Between 20 and 30? 31 to 40? 41 to 55? Over 56?

I am between 41 and 55.

**What was your diagnosis as a child?
What is your diagnosis now?**

My original diagnosis, when I was age 5, was that of mental retardation, perhaps based on my lack of speech, and inadequate social skills for a child of my age. My current diagnosis of classic autism was based on personal history, personality traits, and in-depth IQ testing over a period of 3-4 months.

Do you get upset if you're called "autistic" rather than "a person with autism?"

Actually, I prefer to think of myself as being autistic rather than having autism. Autism is pervasive; it affects every facet of my life. It is not just something I have in the sense that one may have diabetes or epilepsy. Autism affects the way I think, my personality, my abilities and much more, and I accept it.

Are you verbal? When did you learn to talk?

Yes. I spoke for the first time at age 6

1/2. However, I had difficulty pronouncing words correctly, though I did not know this at the time. All I knew was that the people around me seemed to have trouble understanding my speech, and it both puzzled and frustrated me. Once I entered elementary school, the school district assigned me a speech therapist.

Still, it took time and effort to train my vocal chords. It was through the efforts of this devoted speech therapist that I learned to pronounce words and sounds correctly. It was difficult, but she made it fun by using a toy named Mr. Potato Head. I've long since forgotten her name, but I will never forget what she did for me. In time, people were able to understand my speech. Today, I am able to speak as well as I do because one particular speech therapist never gave up on me.

Did you have friends as a child?

No. During my preschool years, unlike my siblings, who were around their friends much of the time, I chose not play with other children. Instead, I preferred the solitude and lack of noise of our large back yard. Later, when I did start school, the other children tended to avoid me while on the playground, perhaps due to not being able to understand my ways. I loved to read, and often thought of Thumper and other story book characters as my friends. Even in high school, there were acquaintances with whom I felt comfortable being around, but not really friends as such. After high school, I attended a college and there I made friends, people who could accept me for me. I would later graduate from there with a degree in Bible.

Do you have friends now? If not, do you feel you're missing out?

Yes, I believe I do. People who when I reach out, they reach back, friends

who care about me as much I care about them, and friends who accept me as I am. There was a time, though, when people told me they were my friends solely because it was in their job description to say that. When upon leaving the agency, I was told they no longer wished to have any contact with me whatsoever. It hurt me deeply, and at times, I still grieve over the perceived loss of their respective friendships.

Are you married? If not, is it because you prefer to be alone?

Yes, I am married. When I turned 23, I was fortunate to meet someone who wanted my friendship as much as I wanted hers. We have been married now for over twenty seven years. There are times when I want to be alone, and she accepts that, and vice versa.

Can you drive a car and do you have a license? If not, does it upset you that you are not able to drive?

When I was 16, my sister briefly taught me the basics of how drive a Ford pick-up. During my driving test, my testing officer began showing extreme anxiety every time I pressed too hard on the brakes. At the end, he sighed, saying only that I needed more experience. Still, he approved me for a license, and I've had one ever since. It was not until I finished college, the first time, that I had a car of my own. I had some funds saved up, so my sister helped me find a Pinto to buy. She then handed me the keys and told me she would meet me back at her house, some 18 miles away. I knew nothing about stick shifts, and had forgotten much of what I had learned about driving otherwise. So I started my engine, and drove for a couple of miles in first gear. I was puzzled by all the odd looks other drivers gave me as they went around me. Then I figured out that the car had other gears too. I eventually made it to my destination, somehow managing to keep my flawless driving record intact.

Are you employed? If so, what do you do?

Currently, I work out of my home in a resume posting business. I proofread, polish, and post online resumes sent to me by various nationally known resume writers. Many, if not most, are for senior executive-level job seekers. I have been doing this for 7 years now, and would have to say that I have learned more about the business world through this than I ever learned in college.

I am also an author and advocate. I enjoy writing science fiction, following my characters around to see how they are going to grow as they meet various challenges. Still, my heart-felt passion is to make a difference in people's lives through my writing and my speaking. I desire to help others understand autism as I understand it, so that their quality of life will be improved through knowledge. I have been on my journey of self-understanding for many years now, and the more I learn about myself, the more I can help others understand what autism is all about. If I can help even one person have a higher quality of life through this sharing of knowledge, then to me, everything I've done in my autism-related endeavors has been worth it.

Do you have any accomplishments you'd like to mention? (Such as education, work achievements, personal accomplishments)

I first graduated with a 4-year degree from Freed-Hardeman University, and later graduated with honors from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. I feel honored that so many parents, therapists, and teachers have visited my website, and thanked me for helping them understand how to help others who are autistic. When I first began studying HTML so that I could put up a website, I quickly figured out that it is harder than it

looks.

Do you have sibling(s) and if so, did you have a good relationship with them when you were growing up? Do you have a good relationship with them now?

I have a brother and a sister, both older than me. As a child, they had little interaction with me, for whatever reason. In the years since, I've not had a close relationship with either, though in the past 2 years, my sister and I have gotten closer.

Do you have sibling/s and if so how was it watching your sibling succeed at things that were much more difficult for you, particularly if he/she/they were younger?

I have long accepted the fact nothing in life has ever come easy to me. Perhaps that is why I have a passion for life as I do, that I just enjoy living in the moment. No, it was not difficult for me to see them succeed at things that were problematic for me when I tried them. Usually, I did not share their interests in playing games, especially if the rules made no sense to me. The one time I did try to do something they did, I fell off the cab of the truck and broke my wrist. Afterwards, I decided that climbing up there was not a fruitful activity.

What extracurricular activities did you take part in when you were young? Which did you enjoy or not enjoy?

I was never coordinated enough to participate in school-related extracurricular activities. My passion was for reading. My somewhat rigid mind did not like the idea of mysteries, so I read a lot of non-fiction. I also enjoy reading well-written science fiction novels. I also enjoyed drawing maps of the U.S.

When did you realize you were different to everyone else?

Being able to realize that one is different from others is in itself an abstract concept. I'm not sure when

exactly it was that first realized I was different. I suppose it was in high school.

What are your biggest sensory challenges. If so, what strategies help you the most in this area?

I drive, but all the traffic-related noise, buildings of various shapes and sizes, and road signs take their toll on my vulnerability to sensory overload. I quite often use ear plugs or cotton to block out some of the noise. I avoid shopping malls completely. When at church, I typically wear ear plugs following services. If someone wishes to speak with me, I ask to go to a quiet place away from the crowd noise. Otherwise, I know it will affect my level of functioning and cause me to ache all over for days afterwards.

What did your parents do that really worked for you?

They bought me a bicycle. Since we lived in a relatively rural area, there were lots of places for me to ride it, so I did. I often spent hours riding it, especially during the summer. Following my diagnosis as an adult, I found a number of medical studies that indicated that such physical activity was very beneficial in my cognitive development, so that I could more easily grasp abstract concepts.

My dad was gone a lot at work, but my mom was always accepting of me, and that helped me accept myself as a unique individual with unique and special talents. Also, they encouraged me to play, and from this came my imagination and creativity. It was my creativity that helped me to learn how to learn, to think of abstract concepts in terms of analogies and stories.

If you could change one thing about neurotypical people, what would it be?

I would change the presumption about intelligence. One may well be very intelligent, but not yet know how to express that intelligence in ways others are accustomed to seeing such

intelligence expressed.

If you could tell parents one thing, what would it be?

There are two things I would want to tell parents. One is to be attentive to helping their children work from their strengths, using their own unique talents to meet life's challenges, rather than trying to constantly try to compensate for their weaknesses.

Everyone has his own unique strengths and weaknesses, and autistic individuals are no different. If they can learn how to best use their unique strengths, then they will live happier lives for it.

The second thing is that parents should help their children learn the joy of communication, even if it is through sign language initially. One does not miss communication until one has experienced it first-hand, then one is hooked, and will exert whatever effort is necessary to communicate one's needs.

If you could tell teachers one thing, what would it be?

Those of you who work with speech or learning difficulties, I urge you not to think solely of the progress made today; instead, think of how their lives will be so much better 10, 15, 20 years from now just because of your efforts today. They will live better quality lives just because you, their teachers, cared enough to intervene, to make a difference in the world, one child at a time.

They will go on to live much happier, fulfilled lives than they would have, had no one cared. Of this, I am living proof.

Company Updates: (WI families)

- ✦ The incentive program is still in affect. Therapists will receive FREE gas cards for attendance. Ask your senior for details.
- ✦ Any therapy done outside of the home needs approval, contact your senior!
- ✦ Keep hours consistent; only cancel if your child is sick!!!! All hours need to be made up if the therapist cancels!
- ✦ The only shifts that are excused by weather are if the schools are closed. All other cancellations must be made up if canceled by the therapist!
- ✦ If any therapist wants extra hours please contact your senior! We may have extra hours for spring break coming up next month!

Joke of the month:

A young woman was taking an afternoon nap. After she woke up, she told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine's Day. What do you think it means?"

"You'll know tonight." he said.

That evening, the man came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it--only to find a book entitled "The meaning of dreams".



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