My Journey to Being Diagnosed With Adult ADHD

by KRISTI LAZZARI

My ADHD Journey Began With a Book

Everything in my life became painfully clear within the pages of a used, tattered paperback.

My daughter has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Her official diagnosis was a formality, and a starting point for treatment — and I learned all I could to help her succeed.

I Never Recognized Symptoms in Myself

My story was very different from those I usually heard. I didn't have problems in school; I was never in trouble, I didn't have a problem with compulsive lying, my teachers loved me, I was quiet, and happily sat in the back of a classroom doing my thing.

My grades were average. I always felt I wasn't living up to my potential, but I think most of my teachers just assumed I was an average student. Not struggling, but with no special gifts either.

I always felt there was so much more inside than I could show in the classroom. There were so many things I thought about, things I questioned, things I wanted to know that were not satisfied in the classroom, and not reflected with grades.

I was a hopeless daydreamer. I taught myself to take copious notes because that was the only way I'd pay attention to the lessons. My note taking saved me in high school and community college.

Somewhere It All Fell Apart

I always felt scattered. I always had too much noise in my head. I noticed too much, felt too much, saw too much, heard too much.

I struggled with things I knew other people did without thinking. I wondered what was wrong with me, but I never confided in anyone. Many would have been surprised to have known I felt something was wrong with me.

There were so many things I could not make myself care about; things that were supposed to be important. Yet I could latch onto an idea that interested me turning it into an obsession.

I rarely finished anything I started. I got bored with new activities quickly and was constantly searching for things to interest me, and few things did for long.

I started two home-based businesses, and although there were circumstances beyond my control when I took time off from them, I never returned to them. I found more excuses. I was so scared of failure I didn't try to succeed.

I was living my life on auto pilot. I wasn't fulfilled, and all I could think about was what a huge failure I was. I moved through my 30s thinking I had nothing to show for it.

I had no career, I felt disorganized, chaotic and baffled as to how I could want things for myself with no follow through. I couldn't figure out how I could be so lazy and unmotivated.

Next page: diagnosis and moving forward

Somewhere It All Fell Apart

My mind wanted things. I craved a life where I was in control, where my priorities were always in order, where I got things done on time, and where I made a success of myself. Yet no matter how much I thought I wanted certain things, I never did them.

I had a very small comfort zone and I lived within it. Something was wrong; if only I could calm my mind and not be thinking of five thousand things at once, each thought crowding out the one before it, everything would be fine.

The Answer

Then came the book. I'd gotten it to learn more about my daughter's ADHD diagnosis, but after reading the first half on childhood ADHD, I read the second half about adults.

There was a checklist of about 30 things, and it said if you check yes to 15 or more you may need to talk to your physician. I checked all the boxes except two.

I read the book hungrily, devouring accounts of people who sounded an awful lot like me. Their stories were so very familiar: the guilt, the shame, the not living up to potential, the excitement of trying new things only to get bored quickly. They were me.

The Diagnosis

I went to my doctor and told him my fears, doubts and hopes. We went over the checklist. He gave me more papers. We talked.

ADHD was my answer; it was explanation for so many things in my life. I cried with relief but I was still afraid. What if knowing made no difference? What if I was all the negative things I thought about myself?

Moving Forward

Honestly, not a lot happened outwardly after my diagnosis. The change was internal. Before, I didn't know the things I did and felt were symptoms of ADHD. Knowing set me free.

Knowledge that not only was there a reason for the way I was, but that there were others like me, made me feel like I was part of something bigger than myself.

In my mind, everything started to fall into place — I felt lighter. Now I understood why I zoned out, had difficulty prioritizing tasks, why I struggled with things like being on time or estimating the amount of time it took to do things. There was a reason for the constant noise in my head, the swirling thoughts, and the endless inner chatter. It had a name: ADHD.

The Difference

Now I feel more comfortable in my own skin — I am more confident. I know there are tools to help me tame the

chaos and I learn all I can.

ADHD can be overwhelming, but things are easier to deal with when you can give them a name and put them in their place. I learned the flip side to the “messy” parts of ADHD is all the great creativity, abstract thinking and innovation. I’ve learned to love those traits more, while learning ways to overcome the ones that give me grief.

I’ve learned to accept myself — quirks, flaws and all. That has been the greatest gift of diagnosis.