

The following text was written by a teenager whom I had the opportunity to meet in my clinical work. It clearly illustrates the challenges faced by an autistic person who presents with associated symptoms, but especially someone for whom the overall intellectual potential has been underestimated. I admire this teenager's ability to share his experiences with us today and even more so for doing so with a perspective of hope despite all the adversities he has faced.

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The story of Cram*

My story could have been a desperate one, but it has a beautiful ending.

I was born incapable of speaking and very clumsy with my fine motor skills. From my very childhood I was unable to dress myself or hold my toys correctly when playing. I remember trying to speak only to make growling sounds.

I was having frequent tantrums from the rage of realizing my body would not obey. I was hitting and mutilating myself to punish myself for being clumsy. I was able to hear and understand everything people were saying but I had no way of answering or even acknowledging that I was understanding. Specialists quickly diagnosed me as autistic with a deep developmental delay.

I went to a specialized school where they assumed I was mentally retarded. I continually felt I was a failure and we were being taught very basic material. I was desperate and depressed so I started to hit teachers which made matters worse.

When I was 8 years old, my dad took me to the United States to see a therapist who immediately spoke to me as a normal child. She told me "my name is Elizabeth come sit and write my name". I stopped crying, took a seat and was able to point at big letter boards to spell her name.

Everything was hard from targeting letters with my eyes, I had to use a pen because my index didn't work to my arm that moved all over the place. But I knew how to read and write and I had just realized I could communicate.

From that moment on I worked on my coordination every day. I was able to control my eyes, my index

started to point and I finally had a communication mechanism with the world. I did this for years traveling 2 days every 2 months for intense sessions.

At one point my dad proposed to my school to show them how to communicate with me using the letter board and to my great surprise the school refused by invoking all kinds of excuses and really refused to believe I could read and write.

I became even more depressed and hopeless. I saw that I would never get an education. I was on a road to nowhere and my behaviour as school got worse.

My situation changed the day a neuropsychologist took the time to evaluate me and let me spell my answers with my letter board. His evaluation gave me hope and allowed me to apply for a normal school.

I am starting my third year in a regular high school this September. I go to school with a lady that was trained to help me with my communication. I can now use an iPad to communicate with my friends and teachers. People appreciate me for who I am even if I don't speak. My teachers are very supportive and I love my school.

Most of all I am finally happy. The period of despair is finished.

I'm writing my story hoping it will help children that have been labeled as disabled and autistic. In my case the disease affects my muscles but not my mental capacity. With my iPad and a little goodwill I will be able to have an education and contribute to society.

My story continues! 

In my case the disease affects my muscles but not my mental capacity. With my iPad and a little goodwill I will be able to have an education and contribute to society.

*Cram is the pseudonym this teenager has chosen to use.