

MY STORY

My life with FASD, what a big picture to look at. As I sit here thinking about my life with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder I have a lot of feelings go through me, feelings of sadness, feelings of accomplishment, feelings of frustration, and I wonder where to begin so I guess the beginning is the best place.

Briefly, my early life with FASD was filled with challenges at every turn. I didn't start to show any signs of difficulty until grade 2, where I began to find it hard to pay attention in class, was easily distracted, couldn't remember what I was being told, but also couldn't understand what I was being told. I began soon after to run the gauntlet of people that catered to the "special needs" students they found out that I could actually do the work that I was assigned if it was explained to me a little differently, however, I could never seem to do it when I went back to class afterwards. This baffled my teachers for most of my school existence they couldn't understand how I worked and I couldn't explain to them. Some of the things that they thought of me was "attention seeker", "daydreamy", I was even accused on day of trying to "run the class".

The higher grades got even harder so by the time that I got to high school I was frustrated and ready to give up. There were a few courses that I enjoyed in school which were home ec., and typing class, these were classes that I excelled in and felt good about myself and my accomplishments. Actually I received an award for typing in school I had the fastest timed writing in my grade 12 year it was 91 words per minute. I admit though it was on the computer and I knew the timed writing by heart and was able to just look at the screen and correct as I go so it probably wasn't all that fair but it wasn't done deceptively everybody knew which one it was. I had quite a good support system while going through all this I had good true friends who accepted me for who I was and I had wonderful parents who did their best of help me with my schoolwork but couldn't always do it because they weren't even sure about how I learned or what I needed to help me learn.

I did graduate high school on time but near the bottom of my class. I didn't really want to go to college at all the thought of more schooling and frustration didn't appeal to me at all. But my parents said that I should go because if I took a year off I probably wouldn't go back and that would have probably been the case, so reluctantly I enrolled in Malaspina College in Nanaimo and in this simple action I created even more difficulty for myself in areas that I had no idea about.

College life was interesting, I had no idea how much stuff I would have to know. First of all I had to learn to use a transit system (I am from a small town with no buses). I lived along way from the college and had to figure out which bus to get to get there as well as transfers and such. I had to keep track that I had enough money to get on the bus. My parents road the bus with me from my place of residence to the college and procured me a schedule to help me get around. I then had to adjust to a large college campus fortunately, most of my classes were in one building so I didn't have to move around to change classes, this was an office course I was taking so I had to dress business appropriate. I also needed 75% to pass the course and had never had that in my entire life. I don't know what I thought when I went to college but it wasn't what I expected I though for some reason that I wouldn't have to do Math, English, Computers again (these are courses I hated) but no such luck I had to do all these plus my specialty course in medical terminology. I enjoyed the medical terminology course immensely believe it or not I only had to do this course once and I could actually remember all those big long words once I understood all the roots. Anyway to make a long story short I started a 10 month college course in September of 1990 and Finished April 1992 a year and a few months longer than normal. I did finally achieve the 75 percent but barely. I did meet lots of nice new people over the two years so that was a plus. During college I also had to learn to grocery shop for myself. I lived with a very nice lady who helped look after me. It was difficult though because

despite all of the work my parents had done with me over the years about saving money and shopping for myself when it came down to actually putting it into practice I was not very good at it. I was very impulsive and had no concept of time so rent was sometimes late. I felt like a little kid and couldn't understand why (I didn't know I had FASD at this point) I now realize that instead of being 19 years old I was actually only about 16 and displayed behaviour as such without realizing it no wonder people were confused about me. I could do some things that would show my chronological age of 19 and some that would show me a lot younger.

After college came job hunting, it was a disaster I had trouble holding down just about any job that came along. I usually couldn't keep up with what was being done, or I would do something completely different because I misunderstood what I was supposed to do, or they just got so frustrated from having to take on extra work to cover for me they let me go.

I did have a few successes along the way but most of the jobs were volunteer and you know what the funny thing is it has been 11 years since college and I haven't found a job in the field I chose and worked so hard to get in college, I use aspects of it but not any of the medical terminology. Some other successes were getting my scuba ticket, getting my drivers license, getting my own car, having my own place, and even now holding down multiple jobs. I have learned over the years different strategies to help myself and now help others develop strategies for themselves. I am a member of the Cowichan Valley FAS Society and do a lot of public speaking (a big accomplishment) it gives me a great deal of satisfaction and pride to know that in my own little way I am possibly making a difference for people living with FASD.

Submitted by Leila Wilson