

October 10, 2015

AdChoices AdChoices 

Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from
HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

HOT ON THE BLOG
[Sebastian Thrun](#)
[Robert Reich](#)

[T.S. Monk](#)
[Greta Van Susteren](#)

**Haley Moss**[Become a fan](#)

Author of two books, artist, autism advocate, University of
Miami law student

What I Learned as an Autistic College Student

Posted: 10/07/2015 10:08 am EDT | Updated: 10/07/2015 10:59 am EDT



In May, I cried tears of joy when my diplomas came in the mail from the University of Florida. I cried not because I was relieved to leave undergrad behind, but because I won an important victory of not becoming a statistic. I made it, and the proof was in my hands and now hangs framed on my walls.

I have high-functioning autism. I was diagnosed at age three. When my parents got my diagnosis in 1997, they were told I would be lucky if I had one friend, made it through high school, and took the test for my driver's license. A lot of people on the spectrum do not go to college, or are unemployed, or do go and may not succeed. I was one of the ones who thrived.

I stand tall and proud when I say I have a Bachelors of Arts and a Bachelors of Science from the University of Florida, and I stand a little taller when I say I finished in three years opposed to the usual four.

It wasn't easy, if I can tell you so. I did not follow the yellow brick road to get there; I was met with doubt every step of the way. I was told not to go to a larger university, I was told not to jump in head first into academics and get my feet wet first, and I was told that it's okay if it's too overwhelming. Needless to say, I didn't take no for an answer. I would not be held back because I am autistic, but rather, I would work harder and become more resilient to be afforded the same opportunities as anybody else.

For the three years I was an undergraduate at the University of Florida, I lived on campus for two of them, I had a roommate for one semester, I graduated with honors, I took on every academic challenge I could with two majors, and well, I wrote and had a book published. I also accommodated my own unique challenges as best as I could - I scheduled my life in the details, I knew if I couldn't handle the squeaking of player's shoes at a Gators basketball game, I knew what my social limits were, and I knew how to work my way around dining options as someone with limited food preferences. I learned how to make college a triumph with my own rules and expectations.

College taught me a lot about how the world doesn't always accommodate differences, and sometimes, it's up to me to fix that and alter the world just a little bit to make the people around me a little bit more accepting or accommodating. In fact, during my undergrad years, I learned so much about survival, adaptation, and being a student on the autism spectrum that I was able to pass on all of my advice to the next generation in my book, "A Freshman Survival Guide for College Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders".

It was in college, through a diversity retreat, I learned precisely what it means to believe in social justice and to be an advocate beyond the autism and disability communities, but to everyone outside of getting accommodations, or inside the bubble of disability. I learned that one voice can truly make a difference. I learned that my voice was one that my campus needed. I wrote op-eds for the student newspaper, I was a guest speaker to education and disability studies courses, and I continued writing. I was letting my voice be heard all over the place. I graduated from the University of Florida and still get emails that the advocacy work I began is continuing without me, that the next crop of Gators is keeping the legacy alive. For a young woman who had the odds of graduation stacked against her, I was able to do more than survive - I made an impact.

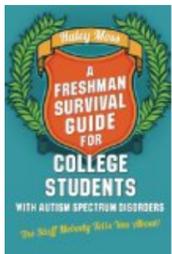
I am in law school at the University of Miami now. I am watching myself do a lot of the same things that worked for me, in a new city, but closer to home. I am watching myself plan my schedules, find time to do what I would like, work around dining options, and also be a "real adult" with an apartment. The statistics are still not in my favor. However, the outside doubt and the internal doubt is much smaller than when I left for college. I've done it before; who is stopping me from thriving once again?

Follow Haley Moss on Twitter: www.twitter.com/haleymossart

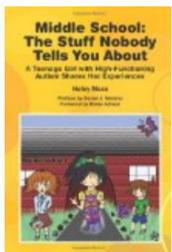
MORE: [College Undergrad Autism](#)

This Blogger's Books and Other Items from...

amazon.com



A Freshman Survival Guide for College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Stuff Nobody Tells You About!
by Haley Moss



Middle School - The Stuff Nobody Tells You About: A Teenage Girl with ASD Shares Her Experiences
by Haley Moss

Conversations

16 Comments

Sort by



Add a comment...



Leslie Heimbaugh · Office Manager at Perry County Literacy Council

I am so impressed, Haley. I have a son on the spectrum who is a Senior in College near Philadelphia. The road has been really rough, but he's doing it. I love your attitude and I am so thrilled by your optimism. I look forward to sharing this with my son...you are an inspiration!

Like · Reply · 8 · Oct 7, 2015 12:35pm



Debbie Moss

Haley, your journey is leaving footprints all over the world. Your achievements and success are a tribute to your hard work, determination, persistence, and never giving up attitude, no matter what obstacles have appeared along the path. Your efforts to thrive and not succumb to statistics proves that the predictions have large margins of error and that each individual should reach for their own goals and their own best outcomes. You truly are an inspiration and have and will continue to be a source of hope for the many lives you are touching by sharing your personal story.

Like · Reply · 7 · Oct 7, 2015 2:13pm



Albert Hartman · Palo Alto, California

Seeing someone succeed gives courage to others who now know it is possible. Someone has to be first on Mt Everest. Congratulations!

Like · Reply · 5 · Oct 7, 2015 3:02pm



Ruth Anne Mak

I have a daughter on the spectrum who is in 6th grade now. I am so excited to

read your writing, Haley! She is amazing too, and I know she can make it through college with a bit of understanding. I applaud you, and keep up the good work. I will be reading your book and passing it on to her!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · Oct 7, 2015 4:25pm



Connie Sarr Bogard · North Port, Florida

Thank you Haley for making this Autism Mom see a brighter outlook for my 14 year old Asperger child. At age 8 his Psychiatrist told me he will do great things. Some days were unbearable but we made it thru and the older he gets, the better he is! I expect no less than greatness and he wants the same for himself. You are an inspiration and can't wait to get the book for him!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · Oct 8, 2015 9:43pm



Amy Stanley Torre · Works at Merrill Lynch

I loved your article, Haley. I just bought your book to give to my son, who is also on the spectrum. He is a senior and applying to college right now. I can't wait to give it to him!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · Oct 8, 2015 4:05pm



Michelle Fontenot

It is good that you are a shining example to other students on the spectrum, but it is even better when you can help educate "neural normals" on how not to have low expectations of people with ASD.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · Oct 7, 2015 5:13pm



Mark Coren · Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)

Congratulations, and thank you so much for sharing your insights and experiences! I have several family members on the spectrum who are just starting their college experiences. Before I was in the picture, they did not have the benefit of a diagnosis nor a support system that adapted to their individually unique needs. Your story will resonate with them.

I applaud your determination and perseverance. I have no doubt that your sharing will strengthen even more lives. Stay strong and forgiving...your example is inspiring!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · Oct 7, 2015 4:57pm



James Christie · Thames Valley University

Good luck, and please look up DEAR MISS LANDAU if you're in need of the odd spot of inspiration.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · Oct 7, 2015 7:45pm



Lillian M. Lynn · Cleveland State University

Congratulations on your successes. You definitely give hope to others on the spectrum as well as their loved ones.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · Oct 8, 2015 3:15pm

[Load 6 more comments](#)

 Facebook Comments Plugin

Huffington Post Search

[Advertise](#) | [Log In](#) | [Make HuffPost Your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)
[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)
[Archive](#)

Copyright ©2015 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved. 2015©

Part of **HuffPost Education Group**