

A Journey of Hope



By Laura M. King and Rebecca M. Padencov



TWO PERSPECTIVES



OUR ADHD JOURNEY BEGAN IN 1993, when Rebecca was three-quarters of her way through kindergarten. I remember when the diagnosis was first suggested to me by a classroom aide. I was insulted. I had no idea what ADHD was and I was sure *my* darling daughter could not possibly have such a thing! The kindergarten teacher suggested I do some research. I immediately bought the book *Why Johnny Can't Concentrate* by Robert A. Moss, MD, and read it thoroughly—quickly followed by *Driven to Distraction* by Ned Hallowell, MD, and John Ratey, MD. I was finally starting to believe there might be something to this. She could not follow complex directions (but she was only five!) and she could not remember her colors (but she was still a baby!) and her schoolwork was never completed (but she was still new to this school experience!) I had no idea what to think—she was my first child.

[Rebecca] I have no memories of this time. Memory is a difficult thing for me. I have gaping holes in both long-term and short-term memory. A lot of my memories from this time in my life come from stories, pictures, and home videos.

[Laura] A visit to our pediatrician proved extremely beneficial. She was living through the same experience with her own son and recognized the symptoms in Rebecca. She gave me a multitude of questionnaires for the school to complete and a few worksheets for home, but in the end the diagnosis proved to be ADHD, primarily inattentive (although it was not called that at the time). The resulting treatment was stimulant medication—dexedrine at the time—and I was terrified!

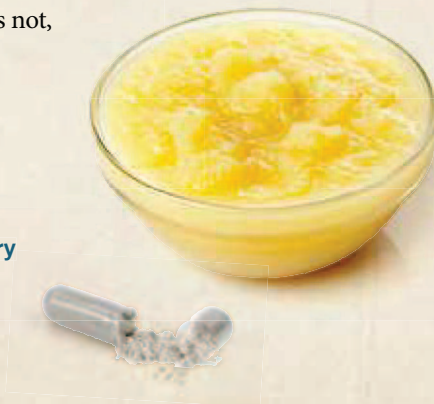
I will never forget what it felt like to make the decision to give my five-year-old child an amphetamine. There were many tears and fears—would it help her, would it change her, would it hurt her? I decided to trust the doctor (and said many prayers that I was making the right decision). Ultimately, Rebecca thrived on medication. It took a while to get the right dosage, but once we did, her focus and concentration improved. It was not, however, a cure.

I wouldn't have paid attention to any of this at five years of age. I did as I was told. I remember the doll house in the psychologist's office, but nothing of the original testing. I do have a single memory

snapshot that I know for a fact is real. They didn't make doses of that medicine small enough for me. I distinctly remember my mother breaking open the capsule onto wax paper and measuring out the correct dosage and putting it into applesauce. Looking back, I'm so grateful for that small, painstaking, effort.

There were still many things Rebecca could never do—memorize multiplication tables, complete timed arithmetic pages, tell time on an analog clock, copy work from the board, or take standardized tests. We were very lucky to be able to have her in a private school, in which we could work with the individual teachers to offer her whatever she needed to succeed. One teacher quizzed her orally, another gave her a multiplication table aide for math tests. Another teacher gave her copies of the notes, so she would not have to re-copy them from the board. All in all, she did very well in elementary school because of this nurturing environment.

After school was another story. There were no extended-release medications she could take, so we had to rush her a half dosage of medication by 4:00 PM *every* day, so she could complete her homework and after-school activities. Any later than that and she would not be able to sleep. Those years were very stressful for us as working parents trying to meet that deadline.





Third grade is where my memory kicks back in. I remember trying to cheat on a spelling test because the letters got all jumbled on the journey from brain to pencil tip. I remember the special pencil with multiplication tables my fourth-grade math teacher gave me so I wouldn't cry during tests. I remember watching my teacher's mouth moving, only to hear the clock ticking, and staring out the window wondering what it would be like to be a bird. I remember my dad magically appearing with my extra dose between 3 and 4 PM every day. I never realized, until recently, what a hardship that was on my parents. That's a lot of logistics for one little person!

And then there was homework. Rebecca could not remember which books to bring home each day, so we bought a second set to keep at home. She also daydreamed through most tasks, so someone, usually me, had to sit with her while she completed her work and ensure she stayed on task. On average, this took about two hours every night. She never watched TV or used a computer probably until the middle school years, because she ran out of time every night just trying to keep up with her homework. Every night she packed for the next morning and put her backpack by the door. We also used a folder for transporting notes and homework, so that everything was in one place. If she needed reminders during the day, she used the alarm on her watch. There were no smartphones or texting.

Homework was the worst! It only took me four times of calling my friends to get the math questions before we asked about having a set of books at home. That was a slightly embarrassing time for me. I had to keep track of which friends I called so they wouldn't figure out that I forgot my books. I hated not watching TV. I missed all the shows my friends were talking about. I only started using a computer in middle school because it was

required for class projects. I packed my bag every night and put it by the door because it took me so long to get ready in the morning we'd be rushing out the door right at the time we needed to leave!

Rebecca endured a few rounds of psychological testing during her formative years, mostly so she could be eligible for accommodations in high school and college. She also took medication—eventually mixed amphetamine salts, extended release—every day, even during summers and vacation. The private high school she attended had a program for learning differences, so she had the benefit of extra coaching, study skills classes, and extended time for tests. If she wanted, she could have a special note-taking computer (no tablets yet) and other resources to help her with her studies. High school was a good experience for Rebecca. She developed friendships, got involved with the drama department and did very well in her classes. Her “learning to drive” experience was a year later than her peers, but she seemed to do better because of it. She has always been responsible. Next was college and that seemed so scary to all of us.

I've taken many medications—I can't remember how many, but mixed amphetamine salts (in several forms) have been coursing through my veins for the majority of my life at this point. When the extended release formula was put on the market, it was like a miracle! High school

was a great experience, but was not the typical high school you would see on TV. I made friends

very easily for the first time in my life. (Maintaining those friendships after graduation is another story.) I hated having to wait to learn to drive.

I didn't have a designated parking spot my senior year, but because I waited, I had no car accidents, whereas most of my graduating class had at least one.





Rebecca received extended time for the SAT, but this put her in a separate room, alone, for five hours. She never complained, though. She was accepted to five or six colleges, but chose the one that catered to her learning differences, gave her a scholarship, and offered a mentor for the first year. Amazingly, she decided to become a teacher—an interesting choice, since the academic world was such a struggle for her. She completed her bachelor's degree in four years, a dean's list student, a class officer, and a certified teacher. She worked as an elementary teacher for a few years, but has determined that classroom teaching does not play to her strengths. She has recertified for early childhood education and hopes to work with preschool children.

I decided to become a teacher in the hope that I could make the life of at least one child better, especially a child who might have a learning difference like me. If I had it my way (dropping every class that gave me difficulty), I'd still be working on my bachelor's degree. My mother put it nicely by saying classroom teaching doesn't play to my strengths. To put it bluntly, classroom teaching displays my biggest weakness—multitasking. They don't teach you how to do that during teacher training. I had to teach every subject, answer emails, plan lessons, discipline students, grade papers, and do a huge number of other time-sensitive tasks. I became completely and utterly overwhelmed. Having my own children and being a stay-at-home mom has made me realize I prefer teaching the little babies.

Now that over four years have passed since her graduation, I am happy to say Rebecca is married to a wonderful man who understands her uniqueness and she has identical twin daughters. She is beautiful, creative, patient, and has an interesting sense of humor. She still has her challenges every day, but she has learned how to cope—still with medication—and survive. We are very proud parents! 🍷

Laura M. King is the married mother of two adult daughters and grandmother of three adorable toddler girls. She is recently retired from the federal government where she spent thirty years as a manager, with a special emphasis in career development and workforce planning. She has a BS in personnel management from the University of Baltimore and a MS in technology management from Johns Hopkins University. As the mother of a child with ADHD, she has learned a great deal from the experience and hopes she can share some lessons learned with other parents.

Rebecca M. (King) Padencov is the mother of identical twin daughters. Becky graduated from Stevenson University in 2010 with a BA in elementary education and is close to completing a master's in teaching at Loyola University. She was married in June 2011. Before the babies, she taught third and sixth grade, as well as subbing in a number of other classrooms. She also has extensive experience teaching in preschool environments. Becky lives with the challenge of ADHD every day, but always finds her creative, fun side and makes the best of each situation.

