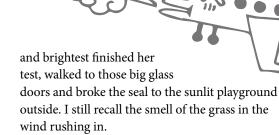




Overcoming the Immunity to Intelligence

(or... How I Created the Bujo)

by Ryder Carroll



Slowly but surely, the students began to trickle out until finally one of the twins passed my desk on his way out. Bad sign. Eric and Eddie were twins similar in both appearance and cruelty. They were the hair-pulling, ball-punching, booger-flinging, tantrum-throwing duo. Their only apparent gift was the alarming depths to which they could plunge their fingers up their noses. So when Eric—or was it Eddie?—walked by me with a wicked smile on his face, I got worried. How was he done? I wasn't even close!

Finally, the entire class was out enjoying the glorious day, save two: a frustrated teacher and yours truly. She walked over and asked how I was doing. I told her I just didn't know the answers. She looked at me seriously, and then a sly spread across her face.

"I've got just the thing," she said, walking over

HE DAY OF THE BIG TEST
was brisk but bright, charged with
that hopeful electricity of spring.
It was one of those invigorating
days where it feels unnatural to be
cooped up inside. Our teachers must have felt the
same way, because they had an idea...

The classroom housed three classes that usually operated somewhat independently of each other. Today, however, the teachers made an announcement that all classes were going to take a math test together. The terms were that you could go play as soon as you finished the test. This was new, different, and exciting!



It was one of the few tests that we kids eagerly grabbed from the teacher's hands as they walked around the room passing them out. The room grew silent save for the frantic scratching and tapping of pencils on paper. A little while later, our best



to her desk. She opened a drawer and pulled out one of those glass staffs filled with colorful metallic star confetti suspended in clear fluid. She walked back over to my desk and said: "This is a magic wand, it will make you super smart so you can find the answers!"

Magic?! My problems were solved! The relief washed over me as I closed my eyes and raised my little head, eager to receive this magical gift of intelligence, which I so clearly lacked. Flourishing the wand above her head, she gave me her best abracadabra ending with a "Bam! Now try."

Brimming with excitement, I looked back down at the test and... nothing. Not. A. Thing. Frantically, I dug deep inside, maybe it was hiding somewhere. It wasn't. The excitement curdled instantly into sheer panic. There could only be one reasonable explanation for this: I was so stupid that I was immune to magic. When she saw the look on my face she came over.

"What's going on?"

"It didn't work! It all seems even harder now!"

"Oh, well maybe I just used the wrong spell. Let's try this again."

Again, she whipped the wand around casting another spell.

"Bam, that should do it."

It didn't. Neither did the other three spells she tried. Finally, deflated, she said, "Don't worry about it, just go ahead and play with the others."

I did worry, and the last thing I wanted to do was play. I sat on the at the end of the ramp leading out of that dark classroom and watched as my classmates enjoyed the sun. It was the first time in my life that I realized with blinding clarity that something was different about me, and not in a good way. This wouldn't be the last or the worst of my scholastic failings, but it was the first.

ver the years my learning disability found me in special classes, summer schools, the butt of many jokes, and so forth. It all culminated when I started meeting with specialists, who eventually diagnosed me with attention deficit disorder. This was back in the late eighties or early nineties. At the time there were not a lot of resources available to help manage the condition, and in many ways, I was left to my own devices.

Over time, I honed those devices by studying my disabilities. It started with note taking. I spent years trying to frantically copy down everything the teacher said, but I couldn't write fast enough. Additionally, while I was copying everything down, I was mirroring what was said; I was not absorbing it. I became discouraged and gave up taking notes, and resorted to what I liked to do best: draw. To my surprise, doodling during class greatly increased my ability to absorb information. By doodling, I was occupying a part of my mind that needed to be entertained.

Not surprisingly, this behavior drove the teachers up the wall except for one, who realized that I could answer most questions only while I was drawing. Though I may not have been looking at them while they taught, I was in fact listening. She shared her findings with some of my other teachers who tested her hypothesis. It proved to be true. Well, most of the time. So, they let me draw.

The issue now was that I was listening, but I had no notes to study from. My memory isn't great, especially when it comes to information I'm not particularly interested in. The next step was figuring out how to take notes and draw at the same time. That's when I started using short-form notation, or bullets. I would absorb the lesson, then write out what seemed to be most im-

portant. It didn't work all the time, but my notes became orders of magnitude more effective.

The breakthrough back then wasn't that I had discovered how to take better notes. It was that I had succeeded where



my teachers and doctors had not. It allowed me to understand that I could be more than a victim of my condition. I had it within me to solve my own problems. It in no way made me a wonderful student, but it provided me with the much-needed sense of agency. It gave me hope.

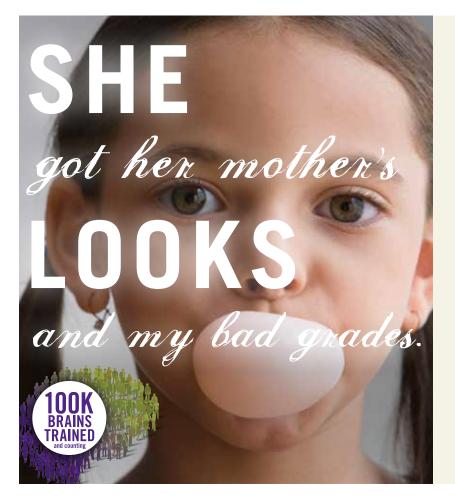
or years I kept testing out new tricks and approaches to stay organized. Most of them failed, but when something worked, it really worked. It was and is a journey of self-learning, which allowed me to clarify and play to my strengths and weakness. It eventually resulted in me creating what I decades later called the Bullet Journal® method.

The Bullet Journal® method is a mindfulness practice disguised as a productivity system. The productivity system is designed to help you organize information. The mindfulness practice, though, encourages iterative problem solving through reflection. It allows you to keep track of what worked, what didn't, and gives you the freedom to design your own tools. It's become a global phenomenon that has allowed me, the last in my class, the kid immune to intelligence, stand on a stage at Yale to give a TEDx talk.

No matter what your situation or challenge may be, you always have power to take action. You have the choice, you can be the victim of your condition, or you can see your challenge as an opportunity. The opportunity here is to better understand yourself, your strengths, and your weaknesses. This will allow you start testing the tools and habits that will allow you to grow. Though you will undoubtedly fail often along the way, as I did, you will also prevail. You already have everything you will ever need, but a lot of that is untapped potential. The only person who can truly unlock that potential is you. It's your responsibility to show up and put in the work. With time, you can and will learn what works for you. Yes, it's hard work, but despite how

A digital product designer living in Brooklyn, New York, Ryder Carroll is the inventor of the Bullet Journal (BuJo). He has worked with companies like Adidas, American Express, Cisco, IBM, Macy's, and HP. He's been featured by the New York Times, LA Times, Fast Company, Bloomberg, Lifehacker, and Mashable. He recently gave a TEDx talk on intentionality. Learn more about bullet journaling at www.bulletjournal.com.

you may feel, you're worth it. 4



Did You Know?

Students who struggle with attention issues often struggle with memory and processing speed — the skill that determines how quickly the brain processes information. If you or someone you love struggles to pay attention, finding the root cause of the struggle is key.

One Test Lets You Discover the "Why" Behind the Struggle

The LearningRx experience begins with a one-hour brain skills discovery test that assesses how well the brain learns, thinks, and performs. Weak skills are then targeted and strengthened using intense (but fun!) mental exercises.

Lasting Results in Less Time

Our personalized, one-on-one brain training programs are usually completed in six months or less, and deliver lasting results.



Call 866-BRAIN-01 to find a LearningRx near you and to schedule a brain skills discovery test



Visit www.learningrx.com/attention

