



First Person: EMILY

A Journey Toward Success

The day my child became special started out like any ordinary day. She was a toddler and attended a very prestigious preschool. It was the biannual parent–teacher meeting, which had been the norm since she was an infant. My husband and I were excited to see her drawings and scribbling that marked the beginning stages of writing. The normal pleasantries were exchanged, and then we began looking at Emily's work. At some point during this exchange, I noticed that the teachers were somewhat hesitant or nervous. The topic was color identification. The teachers stated that Emily wasn't retaining color identification. She did not associate the word *green* with the color green.

The suggestion was made that we needed to have her tested. The teachers stated that probably nothing was wrong, but if there were some issues, then the earlier that intervention began, the better it would be for Emily. Since Emily was almost 3, the school system provided testing free of charge. To be honest, I handled this situation like any grown-up mature adult—I cried and cried.

I began flashing back to some early warning signs. Emily walked and talked later than most other children, and she would get confused when I would say, "Go get your toy in the living room." She also didn't understand the concepts of up/down, above/below, behind/in front of, and so forth, and with that our journey began.

The test results confirmed a learning disability. Emily was also eligible for speech–language therapy. Although the school system provided free speech–language therapy, the location to my employment wasn't convenient. Therefore, the decision was made to hire a private speech–language therapist to come to her preschool two days per week. Therapy was fairly smooth at first as I waited for this therapist to "cure" my child. She would share funny stories with me but always seemed to focus on Emily's disability rather than her abilities. She also failed to fully communicate with Emily's preschool teachers.

This therapist soon relocated to another state, and we started working with a new speech–language pathologist. Emily and I immediately clicked with her. She laid out a plan of action and regularly met with Emily's teachers and me. She e-mailed me after each session and would tell me the great things Emily achieved during the session. She loved Emily, and most important, she saw her abilities.

As I am writing this, it has occurred to me that I am writing all about what I went through. I haven't

appropriately introduced you to the special girl that I am writing about. Her name is Emily Grace, and I am proud and honored that God chose me to be the mother of this special girl. She is 10 years old and doesn't meet a stranger. She is kind and has always been the caretaker of all her friends. When she sees a friend, she almost knocks her down with big hugs. Seeing Emily, you would never know she has a language impairment. She doesn't look a certain way; in fact, she is a beauty! Now back to the story.

Emily began kindergarten and a totally new experience. This time, however, she had an instructional support teacher, a general education teacher, and a speech–language pathologist. I became increasingly familiar with the individualized education program (IEP) process. Emily loved school.

Emily entered the first grade and continued to be happy. She is very social but at the same time well behaved. She would raise her hand and answer any question her teacher asked her. The problem was that Emily would give an answer that didn't pertain to the question or the subject being discussed. She would give an answer that was related to the last thought in her head. Her teacher suggested that maybe Emily had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). So off we went to her pediatrician and another battery of tests with a neuropsychologist. The testing indicated that Emily did indeed have ADHD. We placed her on medication but nothing changed, and we switched medication again and again. Still nothing changed. Emily, however, changed—this fun, social, laughing girl was quiet. My husband and I made the decision, against the wishes of her teacher and neuropsychologist, to remove Emily from medication.

Teachers who are not familiar with Emily's disability think she is not listening. Directions are hard for her. Something as simple as "Get your books out and write down your homework assignments" is a hard concept for Emily to follow. The teacher doesn't know that for Emily she needs to say, "Emily, open the book," and once the book is opened, she has to point to the homework assignment and say, "Write this down in your book."

Reading comprehension is extremely difficult for Emily. She reads at a level higher than her comprehension. She can read a paragraph, but when asked what she just read, she would repeat some words from the last sentence of that paragraph.