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The Quest for *Piece of Mind*

The best way to get to know someone is to identify with that person. Although the case study was about myself, it has about it a feeling of commonality. I was surprised at how many elements, even details, of this study are repeated in the lives of dozens of the adults with whom I've worked who grew up with unidentified ADD.

The following section provides some insights into accurate identification of ADD. Rather than try to instruct you in making a clinical diagnosis (which has its own accuracy limitations anyway), you'll find anecdotal and experiential information designed to bring you closer to what it feels like to have ADD. It's laid out in some detail in order to assist you in developing an ADD perspective that you should be able to use as a pretty accurate identification system.

A quest is a wonderful thing.

It defines you.

It gives purpose to your life.

Merely making the decision to embark on a quest feels good in the sense of commitment it carries with it.

A quest for identity is another matter entirely.

Of the two basic questions of existence:

What is the meaning of life?

and

Who am I?

the former conjures up images of great debate and truly wondrous adventure while the latter connotes a sense of personal confusion, almost desperation.

However, what is it we all seek if not identity?

Our houses, our clothing, our choice of livelihood, our means of transportation, or the lack of any or all of these and innumerable other things is identity. If we feel we are without it, then we direct our full energy toward getting it.

Inside the *mind* of Attention Deficit Disorder.

This journey may be a truly unusual and elucidating experience for you. Or you may find *yourself* described in some detail in the pages that follow.

Either way you should either be better able to

understand and work with people who have Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or you should find solace as explanations for your own self-concerns are finally examined, explained and managed. As you read through these pages, you should either become more empathic or relieved.

The purpose of *The A.D.D. Quest For Identity: Inside the Mind of Attention Deficit Disorder* has been to create a deeply personal understanding of both the perspectives that people with ADD have and the pressures they feel. What you will discover is that this problem, ADD, is easily comprehended by any who take the time to explore it. For most of us the qualities that create the differences that make up ADD are present, albeit in lesser degree. Furthermore, as for this book very practical suggestions are made about what can be done.

For the purposes of this book both Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are abbreviated as ADD. If I refer to one or the other specifically, I'll use the term that denotes the one to which I'm referring. I have also dropped the periods in the abbreviation for the sake of simplicity. Therefore, when you see ADD, think A.D.D. or A.D.H.D. depending on context. (If you shrewdly noticed the periods in the book title, I left them there since you hadn't read this chapter yet.)

Another convention I've chosen to use is placing a brief italicized section before each chapter. This allows me to make some informal comments about each topic that I either would like to emphasize or felt was important but didn't get stated

in the chapter itself.

Since ADD affects males and females (about 3 to 1) as well as children and adults and since many of the qualities of ADD can be found in a large portion of the population, seeing life through the eyes of ADD should not be a daunting task.

The A.D.D. Quest for Identity: Inside the Mind of Attention Deficit Disorder brings into our most personal spotlight the unique perspectives and filters that ADD imposes on the minds of those whose identity will always be a quest.

As we journey into these minds, your identity will never be in doubt. Try to recognize anyway the self-doubts and inner conflicts that characterize essentially every moment in these people's days. Take a few of your own moments to reflect on their feelings and perhaps identify with them, and you will likely find elements of yourself.

Some of this may be surprising, even shocking. Most of it should have the familiar ring of something that at least touched you deeply. The methods and techniques should have the comfortable rightness that accompanies logical thought.

These are not the mysteries of ADD. The enigma is based more on not looking closely enough than on understanding what we find when we get there.

The Quest, therefore, begins with an introspective breath. For in the mind of ADD you will find the need to be everyone. And in the mind of everyone resides the qualities of ADD.

Think of it as a roller coaster ride. You know you're OK, but it can still be a scary experience.

Fear Inside the Mind

There's a secret to this letter. I found writing it personally beneficial because it's actually from me. I'm fortunate to have this forum for these feelings. I hope that by reading this you find something meaningful as well.

A footnote to this open letter and to this whole section could be that had fortune or Divine intervention or something not been with me, I would be in a much worse place right now.

Dear Mom and Dad
and, for that matter,
Dear Teachers,

It's important to me that you understand how I feel. It'll be years before I can talk about the things I'm thinking today, and by then the damage may already be done.

You see, I know I've developed a reputation as either a screw up or a bad kid.

I'm not.

I know that some of my teachers really don't know how to handle me. I see it in their eyes. I know I frustrate everyone at one time or another. I can feel it.

I know so

many people think I'm lazy. And I especially know how upsetting I can be to all of you. They said I tested positive for Attention Deficit Disorder so now I've got a label.

The thing is, I'm not trying to hurt anyone. When I sit down to do my homework, I have every intention of doing it.)

At least I used to.

Something has happened. Now I look out my window. I start thinking about all kinds of stuff, things that make me feel good. Like the few things I do at school that work out. Like those times when I get a really good grade or when some extracurricular activity really clicks for me.

The strange thing is when

that happens I don't know why. It just happens. Even if it appears that I've really applied myself (I don't know what that means, but my teachers say it all the time.), I haven't. I just did something that felt right, felt good. And I have no idea how I did it or how to do it again.

Even while I'm writing this letter, my thoughts are being dragged away by the voices I hear next door, by the radio, by the conversation at lunch today, by the thousands of other thoughts vying for my attention. I shut my window but not before looking outside for a while. Because this letter is so important, I kept coming back to it even though it took hours to write.

About my homework: I know. I put it off. And when I finally do it, half the time I just don't bother to hand it in. I'm tired of feeling stupid.

I'm tired of feeling like everyone else knows what's going on except me. I'm tired of asking questions in class only to have my teacher get angry because she just talked about that very subject. I'm tired of everyone, and I mean everyone, thinking that I screwed up on purpose.

Don't you think I'd rather get good grades than be made to feel stupid all the time?

Do you think I actually enjoy being punished for acting out or not doing things?

Maybe I do. The pressure to

perform the way you want me to makes me feel crazy.

My most frustrating problem is having to look in your faces when you ask me why I did something bad or wrong or got bad grades.

If I knew, I'd tell you.

It seems that at least with punishment I get acknowledged. I know that sounds crazy, but I always feel like I'm on the outside anyway.

And please don't tell me how bright I am. I've heard that so much, I just want to run away when you say it. If I'm so bright, why are my grades so bad?

And why is everyone always angry at me? I feel like all everyone does anymore is punish

me. Well, I found something I'm good at.

I can get grounded, lose privileges and get detention better than anyone. Sometimes you look like you're either going to cry or strangle me. That used to scare me. That used to make me feel like I was the worst kid around. I don't feel anything anymore when you do that. It's just another event in my confusing life.

If you could look inside my mind, you'd see a jumble of thoughts all running around screaming, "Think about ME!" And I do. I think about all of them. All the time. Lots of those thoughts feel really good to me. I feel like I could make some of those work out real well. Some of my ideas are pretty

exciting to me. But it feels like no one's paying attention to me anymore.

Except to be angry.

You don't have to be angry at me. I'm already angry at myself. You don't have to punish me either. I'm doing that too.

What I need is reassurance.

I need to know that you trust me. It'll take some time for that to sink in, and I may test it, but, hey, it's been a long time living the other way for both of us. I need to know that despite all my so-called mess-ups you still respect me. I need this because I'm not sure how to respect myself. Most of all I need to know that you won't give up because every day I think about that very thing.

I feel, lonely in a crowd because I'm, always different. Trouble is I'm not different physically so everyone just expects me to do what they do.

I'm trying to do all the things you want me to, but I have to do them my way. When I do it your way, it just doesn't work for me.

But I am trying.

Just acknowledge that and eventually I'll hear it. Maybe we can work together. Maybe there's some way, not necessarily yours and not necessarily mine, that'll let me be as smart as you say I am.

Just don't give up.
Please.