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Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism

THE autism puzzle

Linking information for the Autism Community
June 2010

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A Beauty to Be Found: Dave Hamrick and Lindsey Nebeker on Life, Love and ASD

Dave Hamrick is a 30-year-old meteorologist with the Hydrometeorological Prediction Center. Lindsey Nebeker is a 28-year-old musician, photographer, writer and disability rights activist. Both live in Washington, D.C. Both were diagnosed with high-functioning autism.

The Autism Puzzle: When did you first find out you were on the autism spectrum?

Hamrick: I was about eight years old when I first found out that I had autism. I attended Camp Easter Seals in Virginia. I noticed that most of the other campers were in a wheelchair or had some other type of disability. The camp counselor told me that everybody who attended camp had a disability. I protested that I did not have a disability. It was at this point that my mother explained to me my disability was called autism.

Nebeker: I found out by accident. I was about 10 years old when I found the records in my family's home office. I knew about autism early on in life since my younger brother was also diagnosed with autism. However, when I saw my own evaluations, I was in disbelief. Shortly after, my parents sat me down and reconfirmed my diagnosis of autism. Initially, I was in denial. After intensive early intervention treatment, I tried to go through childhood and young adulthood pretending I was typical. However, it wasn't until the final semester of college that I accepted that autism is always going to be a part of who I am. To me, autism is like a rose – sharp thorns, tough stem . . . but when the flower is in full bloom, there is a beauty to be found.

The Autism Puzzle: Tell us about your high school experience.

Hamrick: I attended a private high school in Williamsburg, Virginia. The biggest challenges I faced were trying to be universally accepted by all of my peers and getting decent grades in English class. Once I was in high school, I was pretty much IEP-free except for 12th grade. The accommodations I received were extra time on tests, testing in a distraction-reduced environment and access to notes. My main accomplishments were making the honor roll, being elected school secretary and achieving the rank of Eagle Scout.



Lindsey Nebeker and Dave Hamrick.

Nebeker: I was never on an IEP, and I didn't have a 504 plan. I didn't know I qualified for accommodations and wish I could have benefitted from them. Transitions were not pleasant, but I was used to them. Every two to three years, my family would move to a new state or country. I also moved out at the age of 15 to attend boarding school, where I received my high school diploma. Because of all that, my transition to college was a breeze. I was in the National Honor Society and received the John Philip Sousa Award upon graduation.

The Autism Puzzle: What was your college experience like?

Hamrick: I initially attended Christopher Newport University before transferring to North Carolina State University. I was able to work with the Office of Disabilities Services to receive permission to take tests in a distraction-reduced environment, such as out in the hallway or in a vacant classroom. However, there were many times when I did not need these accommodations.

I graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in meteorology, and I was awarded a teaching assistantship during graduate school.

Nebeker: I applied to five different colleges and universities, and to my surprise, was accepted to all of them. I finally decided on the College of Santa Fe. Like my previous schools, I did not disclose my diagnosis to the college or work with their office of disabilities. I wasn't aware of the accommodations that were available to me. Also, even though I was beginning to accept my autism, I never really brought it up to my friends or instructors, because I wanted to go through the college experience like any typical person. By then, I had an easier time making and keeping friends, so I was able to "blend in" better than I did in high school. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Technology with a minor in photography.

The Autism Puzzle: What was it like seeking employment after college?

Hamrick: Trying to find a steady job was a challenge. It took me about a year of searching before I was hired by the National Weather Service in 2006. I do not have to deal with the public directly, which makes the job less stressful. I am currently a surface analyst and have aspirations of becoming a forecaster. I thoroughly enjoy this work and plan to stay with the National Weather Service for the rest of my career.

Nebeker: Locating ideal employment has been an issue for me. I have worked

in the education, retail, and investment/banking industries, but continue to dream of a career as a recording artist. Since moving to Washington, D.C. I have met with legislators on Capitol Hill, attended meetings sponsored by disability organizations, and participated in advocacy training programs. I also sit on the Board of Directors for the newly formed Autism Women's Network.

The Autism Puzzle: Tell us about your relationship.

Hamrick: Lindsey and I have a wonderful romantic relationship. We do have very different lifestyles. For example, we like to eat meals at different times, go to bed at different times and have different tastes when it comes to interior decorating. One of the compromises we have had to make is regulating the apartment temperature. Because of that, we each have separate bedrooms. Our relationship has helped to make me less introverted and more open to making compromises.

Nebeker: Dave and I have a strong love for each other. We have different interests, rituals, and sensory tolerances, but are willing to accommodate, which comes from a deep and authentic understanding of where the other person is coming from. Having a partner who's autistic was never on my list of dating requirements, but there certainly is a benefit to finding a partner who can really relate to you. We give each other permission to maintain an individual lifestyle. The work involved in maintaining a healthy relationship serves as a constant reminder for me to be less self-centered and less introverted.



WALK NOW FOR AUTISM SPEAKS

Sunday, October 10
Value City Arena
at the Jerome Schottenstein Center
Registration opens 8:30am Walk begins at 11am

Register today at:

www.walknowforautismspeaks.org/columbus
call: (609) 228-7317

Did you know...

- ⚙ Today, a shocking 1 in 110 children is diagnosed with autism.
- ⚙ 1 in 70 boys is on the autism spectrum.
- ⚙ A new case is diagnosed every 20 minutes.
- ⚙ There is no medical detection or cure for autism.

Family Teams, Corporate Teams, Individual Walkers, Agencies and Organizations, Virtual Walkers... Join us as we walk in support of research and awareness to bring hope to everyone affected by autism.

Walk With Us | Form a Team | Volunteer | Sponsor



AUTISM SPEAKS™

Everybody needs to be heard