

Still Standing After Living 59 Years with Undiagnosed ADHD

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My name is Greg and I intimately know how devastating it can be to live with undiagnosed ADHD. I grew up in the sixties and seventies before ADHD was widely known. Looking back at my dysfunctional home, it is evident that both my parents had ADHD. Since ADHD is highly genetic, it is not surprising that I inherited it.

As a child, my parents gave me lots of love, but they were often distracted. I lacked parental guidance and supervision and often got into trouble. I talked excessively in class, failed to complete homework, and had difficulty staying focused and was regularly punished for my misbehaviors. I was forced to sit in a chair outside the classroom, miss recess, or got swatted with a paddle (a common practice at the time). In the eyes of my teachers, I was just a problem child.

Since people viewed me as a “bad” kid, my friends were the “bad kids” as well. In junior high, I started using marijuana to stop my racing thoughts and allow me to relax. I continued smoking pot, even though illegal, for most of my life as a way to self-medicate.

Despite being frequently in trouble at school, I scored high on scholastic tests. School administrators and teachers kept telling me, “You have so much potential.” They thought the school work wasn’t challenging enough for me. They put me in the MGM (Mentally Gifted Minors) program but when I failed to complete the homework and acted out in class, I was expelled.

When I was in high school, my father had left the family. My mom didn’t notice I was experimenting with illegal drugs. In my junior year, I got incompletes in every subject and was sent to a juvenile correction facility. I started weight training while incarcerated and began to turn my life around.



When I returned to repeat my junior year in high school, a physical trainer on staff taught me proper nutrition and the correct way to train for bodybuilding. I enjoyed the vigorous exercise and spent hours a day working out in the school weight room. Exercise improved my brain chemistry. I could think clearer and got straight A's the last two years of high school. I also got a good part-time job.

I thought this job would become my full-time career, so I didn't go to college after high school. My job paid well, but I worked the graveyard shift. I stopped going to the gym. The lack of sufficient sleep and little exercise caused my ADHD symptoms to flare. The feeling of being uncomfortable in my own skin returned. Taking amphetamines made the uncomfortable feelings go away and allowed me to continue working the night shift.

When twenty-four years old, I was arrested for drug possession and fired from my job. Getting a decent job with a criminal record seemed unlikely, so I started my own business, a landscaping business. I mowed lawns as a kid and figured a landscaping business would pay the bills until something else came along. My business proved a success and quickly grew.

I got married and had two children. My work provided a lot of exercise and drinking coffee throughout the day kept me focused. I smoked pot in the evening to calm my racing mind. By 28, my responsibilities along with marijuana blunted brain, became too much for me to handle. I got behind on my taxes and made business mistakes that cost me my landscaping business. My wife and I and our two daughters moved in with my mother. I know she wouldn't have turned us away, but it was a burden on her. I felt like a failure as a husband, father, and son.



I desperately searched for answers on how I could live a better life and participated in several personal development programs. I learned how to better manage my emotional states, how to create and follow a routine, and to eat only nutritious foods. My new habits enabled me to earn a degree in computer science. I graduated near the top of my class although I spent twice the time and effort of the other students.

I worked in sales while going to school. It was an ADHD-friendly job. I went from one sales call to the next, talking all day, with minimal follow-up or paperwork required. I was quickly promoted and soon was making more money than if I pursued a career in computer science. The product I sold was about how to run a successful business, so it taught me a lot.

Eventually, I started a business incubation company and surrounded myself with people who kept things organized. It grew to have more than 100 employees and helped start several eight-figure companies. Because of my business success, CyberTek college, which launched some of the first instructor-led online classes, asked me to become its chairman.

During this successful period in my life, I fathered two more daughters and bought a lovely home. It seemed like I was finally using the potential people told me I had as a youngster. Then, I made several ADHD-related mistakes, and everything fell apart. By 2010, I was forced to claim bankruptcy.

I started over again, using all I learned from the personal development courses about managing my moods and emotions. I took another sales job and worked my way up the ladder to an executive position and I earned equity in this promising company. However, my undiagnosed ADHD was not suited for that position. In 2019, it was mutually decided that I should leave the company.

The pandemic brought new challenges. I couldn't go to the gym. All my routines were changed. My troublesome behaviors flared again. In 2020, I finally decided to talk with a psychiatrist. He recognized my ADHD and prescribed appropriate medication.



Taking medication was like putting on glasses and seeing clearly for the first time.

Shortly after my diagnosis, my four adult daughters were diagnosed with ADHD. If I had only known soon, we could have avoided so many struggles. I deeply regret that I wasn't emotionally present for them when they were growing up as, I believe, it has left them with lifelong scars.

I was born with opportunity, good health, and intelligence, yet struggled my whole life because of undiagnosed ADHD. I sadly think of what I might have done with my life and how different the lives of my wife, children, and grandchildren would have been if I had received an ADHD diagnosis as a child. My inability to stay focused at high school prevented me from going to college. Not being a college graduate reduced my opportunities in life. The several times when I failed to control my ADHD behaviors resulted in the loss of millions of dollars, dollars I earned when I practiced the habits that keep my ADHD behaviors in check. More than once my net worth went from seven figures to a negative number.



I had a supportive mother who encouraged me, believed in me and nurtured my self-esteem. I know that my life would have been more tragic if people hadn't steered me to personal development programs and supported me when I failed. There are many children and adults with undiagnosed ADHD not as lucky as me. Without the support I received, I would be in prison, a drug addict, or dead. That is the fate of too many kids today who have undiagnosed ADHD.

I am lucky my undiagnosed ADHD only cost me money and relationships. I was involved in seventeen automobile accidents. These accidents caused my financial and business setbacks. It is a wonder I didn't die or kill someone.

I know how much easier life is when ADHD is appropriately treated and managed correctly... and how hopeless it feels when it is not. That is why **I joined the board of the Inattentive ADHD Coalition. (www.iadhd.org)**. I want to make people aware of how damning it is to go through life with your ADHD undiagnosed.