

## **OUTSIDE THE BOX (Part 1)**

by c.e.chapple

Schools have always rewarded conformity, with stringent rules about behaviour, academic performance and social interactions. Those expectations can pose barriers to people with physical challenges or for the neuro-diverse. Even more challenging is the fact that instruction is largely auditory-based whereas many people, particularly aboriginal or indigenous peoples, or the neuro-diverse, are visual-kinetic learners.

My own family has had (and still has) multiple generations of people who were very much outside the box on many levels. I know very little about my mother's mother's family except that they were Anishinaabe and came from the Gaspé, but my paternal ancestors were a motley crew. One of my ancestors rode in the same boat with Guillaume de Normandie when he landed on the beach at Hastings and began his conquest of England. One ancestor was a privateer. Another was a highwayman who was drawn, quartered and hung at Charing Cross. Yet another followed the Duke of Monmouth and was subsequently stripped of lands and titles for treason. My great-uncle was a card shark. One of my cousins won a Juno. One branch of my family got their titles and some lands restored and live in Powderham Castle. Some cousins raise racehorses while others are dairy farmers. My grandmother refused to wear "old lady clothes" and wore Fuschia and turquoise and tangerine, a vivid flirtatious grand dame until the day she died.

Many members of my family have been writers, artists, sculptors, or musicians. The medical diagnoses have included Bipolar, ADHD, ADD, and Asperger's. The most common epithet applied to us all is "eccentric" which can be positive or negative, depending upon one's point of view.

I am an elder now and the world is a vastly different place, encompassing changes that are not wholly welcome to me. When I was very young I attended a one-room schoolhouse. Each row of desks was a different grade. The advantage to this was that children who were "gifted" could eavesdrop on the next grade's lessons, often being able to "skip" a grade as a result while children who struggled had the opportunity to have a "refresher" whenever they needed. As well, we had spelling bees, were taught the rules of grammar and punctuation, memorized the multiplication tables, and did multiplication and division in our heads. I have never needed a calculator, Spell-check nor Grammaticheck. I am inclined to think that academic standards are not what they once were. Certainly, children performed far better in small classrooms where they could receive more individual attention from teachers.

Of course, not everything was good about those "good old days" and I was frequently bullied once I began attending larger schools. As a child with undiagnosed Asperger's, I was called "teacher's pet" and "brown-noser." The gold and silver stars on my papers were poor compensation for never being able to understand jokes, always being the last to be chosen for teams, almost never being invited to parties or for sleepovers, always being the butt of jokes. By high school, I was so deeply depressed and angry that I began failing in school, began hanging with the "wrong crowd" while the teachers insisted I was "not working up to potential", was "incorrigible," while never once suspecting that other things were causing me to "act out".

My father had been Valedictorian of his high school and had won a scholarship so he reacted with anger and contempt to a shy, awkward, clumsy daughter who had to go to summer school, never got asked on dates, and had next to no friends. My stepmother, a product of her generation, thought that punishment was the only answer. Eventually, leaving home was the only way to save myself.

Did things get better, you may ask? Heck yeah! I learned to “think outside the box” and it has led to me being a happy, creative and productive older woman who is living the life I want.

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### About the Author

I am both a mother and a grandmother, from southwestern Ontario and currently residing in Victoria, B.C I have two degrees, one of which is in Honours English from the University of Western Ontario. I have been writing since I was eight years old, and have had numerous pieces published in anthologies, literary journals, newsletters, newspapers, and online. Writing has kept me sane in a crazy world. I am 65 and was not diagnosed with Asperger’s until I was 45, after a lifetime of never fitting in, and suffering from both depression and social anxiety. I am also a multiple survivor of abuse, much of which would not have occurred had I been identified as a child. I am also a status Metis, a member of both BC Metis and the Painted Woodland Metis Tribe of Ontario.

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