

Outside the Box (part six)

by c.e.chapple

As stated in my previous article, I went back to school late in life, along with my husband. Although initially it was based on mobility for us both, a counsellor determined that there was much more going on with me. I could not concentrate on the lectures if students were talking or rustling papers or tapping pencils or I did better on my own as opposed to working with a group. I feel certain you get the idea.

The University of Windsor sent me for extensive testing, and it turned out that I have Asperger's. Finally, a reason for my difficulties in life; too bad it took until age 45! The diagnosis meant I could get assorted academic accommodations and I went from B's to A's. Classes and exams were far less stressful too.

My spouse and I applied to Kings College (now Kings University College) under the senate of the University of Western Ontario. Both of us applied again through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), only this time I asked for accommodations, not only for my mobility issues, but for my Asperger's, social anxiety and panic attacks.

For my Asperger's I asked for and was granted a separate exam room, a proctor, use of a computer to write exams, extra time for exams, a tape recorder for some classes or a note-taker where taping was not permitted, and professors were asked to use overheads and to do some handouts. Additionally, I was granted an assigned seat in each class. The end result? I achieved a BA in Sociology, at age 45, from Kings and an Honours BA in English language and Literature from UWO.

I applied and was accepted into the Fast-Track Social Service Worker program at a neighbouring college in London. I was the only Metis student to apply and the oldest student as well, older than the professors. Having had the experiences of escaping homelessness, being both a client and a volunteer in many community programs, and having lived on First Nations reserves, I felt that I had a lot to offer to the community.

Sadly, not every school is well-versed in offering proper accommodations for students with special needs. I applied through SSD and although I met with all my professors, I ended up being bullied, despite the profs being social workers. The students claimed I was "leering at them", and said they feared I would "go postal" and I was forced out.

I reapplied and was supposed to write my exams on my own, in a separate room, free of distractions, and with other additional supports. Next thing I knew, one prof started giving us surprise in-class quizzes and asked for my suspension when I cried and left the room.

I wish that I had fought harder, appealing to the Ombudsman, or contacting the media. My message to you? it is not a privilege but your RIGHT to ask for accommodations.

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.

