

Callum McAuley

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Callum's Story

Hello, my name is Callum Ross McAuley and I was born in July of 1992 in Irvine, just west of Glasgow, Scotland. I lived in the United Kingdom with my family, until my father got a job opportunity in Basel, Switzerland, so we moved there when I was six months old. Suddenly, while living in Switzerland, my parents noticed something was off with my development. I had a difficult time communicating with them and couldn't hear them when they tried to get my attention when I was sitting in front of the television screen when I was two years old. One day, they made an appointment at the children's hospital, where doctors did several tests, and they told my parents that I was diagnosed with Communication Impairment which is part of the Autism Spectrum. That was the moment when it changed my life forever. The doctors found the cause of my hearing problem was due to me having an ear infection called glue ear, which is a special type of fluid that blocks the eardrums, so they recommended to my parents that I get surgery to resolve this problem.

Having a learning disability was a challenging journey to go through in my life, where I had to attend speech classes to improve my language development at the International School of Basel. They recommended to my parents that the United States have a better speech program, physical and occupational therapy for my learning disability. Luckily my parents were supportive of this decision, so they decided to move from Basel, Switzerland to Sussex, New Jersey in August of 1998 for better opportunities for my siblings and I which involves getting the support I needed to overcome this challenge. From my perspective, it was difficult for me to process this huge change of moving to a new country that I haven't visited, but luckily my parents had the opportunity to explore in order to have a better understanding of the state they are going to live.

Over the years living in Sparta Township, I attended speech classes from elementary through high school to help improve my learning disability. It was difficult at first because I have trouble with my social skills with meeting new people at school. Sometimes it made me feel frustrated and sad that I couldn't get a simple word out every time I needed help with an assignment, making new friends or even getting someone's attention. I felt so alone and isolated from everyone that my disability was like a living curse I couldn't get away from. It was hard enough to express my emotions to the people I care about, but my family kept me going through the difficult times.

For example, there was one time when I first started taking speech classes over one summer break at Helen Morgan School, where I did an activity which involved pronouncing certain words and I got upset and cried underneath the table because it was difficult. During that time, I remember the speech therapist kneeled down and popped her head and told me in a calm voice that she believed I can do it, then I took some deep breaths and waited until I was ready to try again. As a result, I wiped my

tears away and sat down at the table, where I kept trying to complete the activity which shows on the right step to overcome this difficult path I walk on. Not a day goes by that I wish I could give my seven year old self who could barely talk a big hug and reassure him that he is loved by the people around him during that moment in my life.

Luckily, there were many teachers, case managers, paraprofessionals who supported me and they never gave up on me, therefore giving me faith to believe in myself and become the person I am today. The lessons they taught me when I attended at school, I have passed on to the next generations of students as a paraprofessional. Those people I want to thank are: Conncetta Mangiaracina, Gulay Maffia, Ginny Krieg, Jayne Heinz, Patricia Bracken, Mary Piccole, Janet Ferraro, David Gorecki, Lucan Farrell-Ingham, Judy Natale, Gail Shawger, Deborah Corso, Janice Huettenmosser, Daniel Trappe, Jennifer Melick, Ryan Lollgen, Susan Sawey, Patty Perna, Angela Risoli, Sandra Ward, Patricia Easton, Michael Martone, Diane Leiher, Suzanne Coursen, Judy Hart, Pam Conlan, Michelle Winegar. Christine Carr, Craig Merrill, Brain Neal, Tara Kane, and Janet Sullivan.

No matter what the odds are against you of having a disability within the autism spectrum or not, you always find a way to overcome the impossible with the support of your teachers, paraprofessionals, friends, and family members to help you through life challenges in life. These are the foundations of what all people with autism need to have which are: to believe in yourself, always find the positive sides, and have the ambition of what you want to do, making any dream into a reality.