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Mom's Perseverance Helps Young Man Overcome LD

A grateful Jacob Landers tells how his mother's support and advocacy on his behalf led him out of struggles with school and substance abuse.

By Jacob Landers

We recently spoke with a young man who admires and appreciates his mother's support throughout his lifelong struggle with LD. The following interview is his tribute to her.

You've described your mother as a "walking miracle." Can you tell us more about how she's helped you manage your LD?

Jacob Landers: After my parents divorced when I was seven, my sister and I lived with my mom. Being a single parent is tough, but I know it was even harder for my mom because I really struggled in school and didn't believe in myself. By high school, I was still doing poorly in school. I discovered alcohol and illegal drugs and got into trouble. Through it all, my mom believed in me and fought to get me the help I needed. She carried me for many years and held out hope when I couldn't. She never gave up on me.

Your mother sounds like a terrific advocate. When did you first realize how hard she was fighting for your rights?

Jacob Landers: I had nearly failed fourth grade at a private Catholic school, and my fifth grade teacher there realized I might have a learning disability. My mom agreed to have me tested, and my LD was confirmed. Mom had me transferred to a public middle school that supposedly had a "special program" for kids like me. But once I was there, my grades didn't improve. It was during that first year of middle school when I realized how hard my mom was working to get me the help I needed. She appreciated what the teachers were trying to do, but she felt they weren't addressing my specific needs. She was always setting up meetings with the vice principal and teachers to try and figure out why my grades were still low and why my attitude was still negative.

It took years to get me into the right school. Despite my mom's belief in me, I'd given up on myself. When I was kicked out of high school, she was angry with me, but angrier with the school district for not providing the help I needed. Through it all, she reminded me that I wasn't stupid, that I just learned differently. She kept pushing forward and eventually had me placed in a private continuation high school where I succeeded.

What was the most important lesson you learned from your mother?

Jacob Landers: Mom taught me the value of perseverance, no matter how difficult life gets. She was a great role model in that way. That was her greatest gift to me.

Besides helping you with school, how did your mom encourage you to be creative, let off steam, or mellow out?

Jacob Landers: Mom always noticed that I was good working with my hands. I could take a bicycle or a lawn mower apart - and put it back together properly - without any instructions! So she always encouraged me to build and repair things around the house (mainly to make me feel better about myself, I think). She also encouraged my creative side. From the time I was 14, I kept a journal and wrote poetry. Mom always made a big deal about how talented I was and to this day encourages me to publish my work.

How do you think your mother kept her courage up and her stress level down?

Jacob Landers: She used to run in 10ks, and she trained by running almost every day after work. I think running really helped clear her head and deal with the stress of being a single mom and having a kid with LD.

Mom also spent time with positive people. She even stayed in touch with my former teachers and the vice principal who'd helped us and had faith in me. She didn't waste her time on people with negative attitudes. She also volunteered at my high school functions on occasion and was always involved with my friends in a way that showed she cared, but was not intrusive.

My mother has a wacky, off-the-wall sense of humor, too. She laughs loud and lives big. I think that's always helped her cope.

Did she ever use humor to help you cope with your learning difficulties?

Jacob Landers: She taught me that when times are tough, it helps to have a sarcastic sense of humor - to laugh at things that would otherwise discourage me. She always said, "It was better than having a sharp stick in your eye."

What would your mom say was the best Mother's Day gift you ever gave her?

Jacob Landers: Well, she was pretty excited and emotional when I graduated from high school. So many people never believed I'd achieve that. But my best gift to her was getting clean and sober and holding down a good job. She's really proud of me for that and brags about me in front of people. It's kind of embarrassing, but it's much better to see her happy than stressed out like she used to be. My mom stands behind me 100% and is without a doubt my best friend.