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RED & BLACK ... & DIFF-abilities

 I'm getting so frustrated and don't understand why this has to be so difficult.

I have no clue what you are talking about, but only need to know if this is a venting session or do I actually need to pay attention?

 This is serious. I feel like I'm having to do battle getting everything sorted out for Natasha. It's bad enough that she's a freshman in high school and was only recently diagnosed with a number of learning disabilities. You'd think that the focus would be on moving forward in the right direction, but instead I feel lost in an education system that seems more interested in procedures than results.

You expect a system that is pre-occupied with preparing students for tests versus life to change because this is now a personal matter for you?

 I know "preparing students for life" is one of your soapboxes. But this is my child - your niece - NOT a statistic. And I still can't help but wonder what would have happened if you hadn't learned about the Dan L. Duncan Children's Neurodevelopmental Clinic. What if we hadn't had Natasha independently tested?

Have you forgotten that I learned about the Clinic while on a "blind date" with someone who had taken his son there? So, if you want to play the "What If" game ... "What If" I had not been set up on a date with Tim?

 Then I'd have continued to pull out my hair in frustration, not knowing if she was just being lazy and unmotivated, or if there were learning disabilities. But now that we have the facts, I'd hope that everyone would want to focus on setting Natasha up for success, not more failure.

At the risk of sounding like an attorney, I am guessing that some of the people you are dealing with may be concerned about the fact Natasha had been tested by the school for learning disabilities, the symptoms were noticed but never pursued, and it only came to their attention after you - at your own expense - had her tested at a highly regarded clinic.

 That may be true, but right now there's nothing I can do about the past, I have to focus

DISCLAIMER: We are real people. We are not claiming to be experts in any given field, but rather are becoming experts of our own lives.

on "what now." And as a mom, I hate that Natasha's going to have more challenges and hard work ahead of her than someone without disabilities, although I know that her disabilities aren't as bad as so many other children.

This may end up being the best thing that ever happened to Natasha.

 That's what you said to me when Nick got fired.

Exactly. And, years later you realize that I was right.

 Except that I don't understand how having learning disabilities can be a good thing.

She now knows that not everyone learns the same way, and that you cannot assume they do. She is learning how to deal with challenges, and that if she really wants something she will have to work at it. But that it will take the right kind of work - not just hard work. She sees that some people are willing to try new things while others hide behind doing things the way they have always been done. I think those are all extremely valuable "life lessons" that usually are not learned until much later in life. If at all.

 Wow. I never looked at it that way. But is it wrong for me to wish that she didn't have to struggle so hard for things that come so much easier for a lot of other kids?

Says the straight-A student who admits her education did not prepare her for life. Traditional teaching methods have basically remained unchanged and are designed to work with the majority of students. But what about the other students, like Natasha, whose brains function differently? They claim Einstein never bothered to memorize his telephone number because he knew how to look it up. I am not saying that Natasha is (or is not) a genius, but your basic "drill & kill" and "sit & get" does not work on critical thinkers.

 That would certainly explain why extra tutorials haven't helped her. More of something that doesn't work is a total waste of time. In fact, it just made Natasha even more

frustrated. Combine that with the fact we now know that, amongst other learning disabilities, she suffers from attention disorder, and it makes things even worse.

Plus, she has the queen of blah-blah-blah as her mom. Think of all the years you tried talking to her about school, and tests, etc. and droned on. You probably lost her attention in the first few minutes before you even got to the issue at hand.

 Cute. Although probably accurate. But what I find fascinating is that although she loses her attention after a short time, she can spin on a dime, and then focus with no transition needed, and almost laser-like precision, on the next topic.

Which is an incredible strength. They have found for most people multi-tasking, or constantly taking breaks to look at emails, is not efficient as their brains need time to get "geared back up."

 Well, her "weakness" is going to be a real gift if she continues to pursue her love of music, and her desire to work in the field of music production/technology. From what she has explained to me, and I admit that most of it goes over my head, you have to be able to think quickly and adjust. But what I find amazing is that after three years in orchestra, she only recently told me she can't read music.

What I find amazing is rather than getting discouraged and quitting, she just listened and learned. And, developed her own numbering system to help her with the music. Which may explain why she likes the bass guitar so much - sheet music is linear, whereas guitar music follows more of a numerical system. Think of it as "geometry in motion."

 Which may explain why I liked the piano and the harp. You can just study the rules and apply them. Which is why good music "students" can sight-read piano music. Funny thing is someone recently told me that many famous guitarists can't read music - from Paul McCartney to Eric Clapton! It's like a Who's Who of classic rock musicians. I can't help but wonder if they had other learning disabilities.



Tina "Red" Pennington and Mandy "Black" Williams are sisters and co-authors of "What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!" The informative, entertaining book discusses values, priorities, relationships, financial literacy and much more.

Feb. 19 - Prisoner's Family Conference (Dallas)

Feb. 21 - Morgridge Family Foundation (Denver)

March 8 - Share Fair (D.C.)

UPCOMING APPEARANCES

For an up-to-date listing of all upcoming public appearances, please go to "Future Appearances" at www.redandblackbooks.com.

My question is why are they called "disabilities?" People have different strengths and weaknesses. Which is a good thing. Imagine the world if everyone was an engineer. Or a used car salesman. Why not say that people who have different skill sets and abilities have DIFF-abilities, versus making them feel like they have shortcomings?

 Where do you come up with this stuff? But I'm sure there have been many people who felt like they were "lesser" people because of being labeled with disabilities. Which is why I find it incredible that Natasha seems to have an innate understanding that she's just different, not better - not worse, than others. She understands that she's a square peg, and the school system is trying to get her to fit into a round hole. It won't fit.

Technically it will fit, but it requires that the diameter of the circle be larger than the diagonal of the square. Basic geometry. But I understand your point.

 Talk about DIFF-abilities! You couldn't just agree with me?

The thought never crossed my mind.