

# Acknowledgements

I have wanted to write this “book” about my life and growing up for the longest time. Finally, one day I decided to just start typing. I decided that I wanted to tell the more pressing and important details of my life first and then in subsequent eBooks, share other stories. After a few months I was finally able to get this eBook finished. I would like to thank the editors of my writings Nancy Saylor, who was the main editor, Charne Kreamer, and Shawn Jenkins. I would like to thank Charne for designing the cover of the book. I would like to thank my parents Joshua, and Shirley for raising me and putting up with all they had to during the most trying times of my life. I feel that they definitely have unconditional love for me for being able to withstand everything. I would like to thank Shawn Jenkins and Nancy Saylor for believing in me and helping me in anything that I set out to do, including going racing at the local track later this year.

# Chapter 1: The Beginning



My mother always wanted a little girl and her and my fathers were trying for the longest time to have a second child together. My father had two other children, Trent and Dawn, from a previous marriage. I also had an older brother, Edward from his second marriage with my mother. My parents tried for another child and in the late winter/early spring I was finally conceived. On December 4<sup>th</sup> 1987, I was born at Frederick Memorial Hospital on West 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Frederick, Maryland. I do not remember anything about this

other than what my parents, particularly my mother told me about this day. I was born five minutes into the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, and if I was not so stubborn we are quite sure my birthday would have been on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

My earliest memories are pretty spotty and they are made up of many different happenings such as being at the doctor's office, going to speech therapy, going to preschool. I do not think I really started to keep any kind of regular mental record of my life until I was three or four years old. From what I have been told I had a very difficult time with learning to talk as my words were not very clear. It was of course suggested by my physician, Dr. Menocal, that I see a speech therapist. I am pretty sure that things were complicated by the fact that my small ear canals would get loaded with ear wax and I could not hear very well at all times. This was similar to giving me the same issues hard of hearing or deaf people have in not being able to hear themselves talk, and therefore not be able to have clear language. I do not like to hear myself talk, and kind of contribute the delay in clear language to this issue.



Two of my biggest, well three of my biggest fears as a child were getting my blood drawn, going deaf, and riding in an elevator. Yes, I was terrified of

riding an elevator but I will touch more on that at another time. That could be enough to write a chapter in itself. Getting my blood drawn was always interesting and remained that way until after I graduated High school. When I had to get blood drawn as a child it was an affair of kicking and screaming. My mother would have to hold me still. There was this building in Frederick that my family would go to that had about four stories to it and had what I would call a “Futuristic” look. Everytime that my parents would take me near that building I would be terrified that I would have to get my blood drawn. I can elaborate at another time, just like with the elevator issue about how I finally was able to overcome the fear.

I developed a great joy of Siamese cats as a child. I feel the biggest thing that influenced that is the fact we had a Siamese cat named Ti. I would sleep with him and play with him. I am not sure he enjoyed the “play” part as I was often pretty rough with him. Ti was about seven years old when I was born and would lay with me in my crib. I think that is some of the attachment that I had with him. Today, I have a Siamese cat named Smokey and his brother, Taz, who is also a Siamese cat.



Because of my speech issues it was also thought that it would be best if I were to attend a preschool to meet other children my age and learn socially from my environment. My mother never had to put me into a preschool or daycare because she ran her own at home daycare program. She, however, did not have many children that were my age. Most of them were older, middle and high school students. My mother tried me at a church preschool but they were not able to do well with me as I would constantly cry when my mother left my side. My mother pulled me from that center and tried me at a new daycare center in an office building. She would keep me there half of the day and once it was lunch and then naptime she would come and get me, for two reasons. The first is that there was not anything going on after naptime, or really during naptime that it was worth paying for. The other reason is that she knew that I would not cooperate in naptime and would cause trouble.

In my early years I took a large interest in trains and railroads. I am not very sure how this came about and I know it is very common for people on the spectrum to have such interests in trains. I would get so excited when I was

around trains. My parents would take me on train rides and I was bought countless cheap electric trains, which got destroyed at one time or the other with my curiosity of how fast they can go, or because I didn't put them away properly. Every year, my parents would take me to Brunswick Railroad days, a local railroad event in Brunswick, MD. Again, I was so excited when I was around railroad related things that I could not explain it. I never

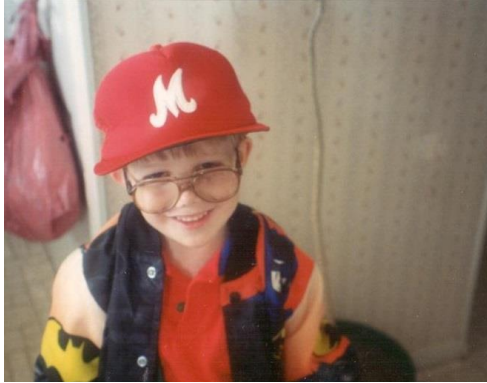


thought that this fixation was odd either. I guess the popularity of model trains made me feel at ease, or maybe I just did not ever think about it being strange. It was just being me. I always wanted a good model train layout, but everything I would get would get destroyed and/or my father did not make enough time to

start something with me. It turns out that there is a connection in my family of railroading; as many relatives on my mother's side of the family worked for and had a strong history in the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Once I got into Elementary school, first in kindergarten class and then into first grade, I knew I was different. I did not know what or why, but I knew I was different from the rest of the children.

## Chapter 2: The Hardest Time



The most difficult time of my life is definitely the years between the fourth grade and the beginning of high school. There were so many things that happened during this time of my development. In early elementary school, about the second grade I was diagnosed with having Attention Deficit Disorder. My parents did not tell me really what it was directly, but I can remember hearing them talk about it in

different ways. I remember staring into space when I was in early elementary school but did not know why. My parents brought this up with my family physician who ordered multiple tests including a CT scan of my brain as it was originally thought by school staff to be possibly a seizure disorder. All of my tests came back negative for seizures and I was diagnosed with ADD. I was prescribed the popular stimulant named Ritalin which only made things worse for me. I went from staring into space to, staring into space even more. My appetite was destroyed and I would not eat. I do not know how I was taking in calories because I would not take anything in. At school I was always terrified because they would have rules at lunch time where you had to eat your lunch and the staff would patrol, making sure that all kids were eating. I would have my lunch packed and would waste a lot of food my mother made by not eating. I would hide my lunchbox under my arms, being afraid of getting into trouble. Ritalin was eventually discontinued and I went on my way without being medicated. I struggled through elementary school learning the typical curriculum and I did not like school. It was just a place that I had to be for some reason. Everything went on normally, for me at least. Home life for me during those years were probably the smoothest that it would be for the next several years. It did consist of having violent fights with family and what my mother would call “Fits”. My mother claims, and I do vaguely remember this where she wanted to watch



the Oprah show and I wanted her to turn it to some cartoon show. My mother did not do that so I bit her and did not let go. She had to pull my hair to get me to let go. Like I said, these years were the less trying times. Just wait for late elementary school.

Once fifth grade got around I was having more and more issues. My mood issues got worse and I got more violent at home. My parents would try to discipline me and it did not always go so well. See the next chapter about what happened when my parents tried the “Old School” way of punishment. I was having so many emotional and anxiety issues. One day I started to feel compelled to walk up and down the stairs at my house to the second floor to turn on and off a light switch. It was never ending. I felt that something bad would happen if I did not go up and down so many times. Once I got to that number and I was more than tired, I would feel compelled to do it even more. It was very scary, not knowing what was going on. I also had some issues where I was afraid of a doll my parents had in their bedroom. So badly, I would actually talk about it in school. I would even talk to the doll. The doll was a Wonderbread give away and it was plush. It was not like Chucky the killer doll or any other one like that. It was just a plush doll. No plastic or porcelain material. As more and more things like this would come up, the school counselor suggested that I seek therapy. It was also a fact that my primary care physician did not feel comfortable managing my case alone anymore. In April of 1998, I met John Barnett, a licensed clinical social worker. We talked about all of my issues and it came to John that I had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. John recommended my parents to buy a book called “*The Boy Who Couldn’t Stop Washing: the Experience and Treatment of Obsessive-Compulsive*” (Rapoport, 1991) to better understand the symptoms. It also helped, kinda-sorta, that “*As Good as it Gets*” was released onto home video. The movie definitely showed the symptoms of O.C.D. but it also showed it in a person who was not a nice character in general. I think he had more than just O.C.D. and could be on the spectrum as well, but was not a good portrayal of someone with autism or OCD because people would generalize that all people on the spectrum or with OCD were mean people. Knowing what to call my group of symptoms was so helpful as I was not afraid as much anymore and could take my compulsions less seriously. I started to see a psychiatrist for my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and was prescribed medication but was not successfully treated. Eventually my problems became worse than just having OCD.

The transition to middle school from elementary school was tough. I went from being in a classroom of the same students everyday, to having to switch classes and being in a larger school. That, and I had to get up much, much, earlier. Now, that was a real bummer for me. I still did not like school, if I have not already inferred it in this paragraph already. I was still bored with it and would much rather be at home. Later in this eBook in the chapter on Rebellion, you will see how I dealt with being bored in the beginning of middle school. My mood disorder got worst in middle school to where I was having violent fights with a member of my family, rather my parents or my brother almost on a weekly basis and non-violent arguments on a much more frequent basis than that. I started to see a new psychiatrist as my original one left for another practice (seemed to be the going thing with doctors). This doctor was having difficulty handling my situation and would threaten to put me in the Jefferson school, which was a residential school for children with mental illness who cannot live at home. It was very scary for me because as I mentioned earlier in the eBook, I LOVE my parents and wanted to be home, I just could not help myself as far as my mood and behavior went. IT was like telling the cat not to eat the mouse. Each time he would know it was wrong, but each time you tempt him, he will get the mouse. I was out of control and I knew it. I was diagnosed with having "Mood Disorder" as well as an "anxiety disorder". My medical record today says that I have Bi-Polar disorder but I disagree as I do not have the issues that most people with bipolar have. Today, I hardly deal with many mood issues as I did as a child and teenager; they just got better. Most of the fights that were with my brother were to protect my parents from me when an argument was getting to the point that my brother thought it would get violent. Some of the fights had to do with him wanting to be a dick with me because he did not understand why I was treated differently. If he did some of the things that I did, he would have easily been killed...just kidding, but yes, it would not have gone well for him. Making friends was also rather difficult for me and, like I spoke of in the friendships section, I mostly hung out with other kids on my street who would take advantage of me at any chance and would laugh and tease me. Middle school I was more focused on wanting to go racing and how I was going to get my racing simulator NASCAR RACING





by Papyrus that I always wanted to play. While NASCAR and any racing was my number one joy, anytime that I was taken to a NASCAR event with my brothers and sister it was not a pleasant time for anyone. Being of a big size I did not enjoy walking or the heat very much, (I still do not like walking or the heat as much), but I can surely handle about 100 times of the walking from when I was a preteen. When we went to the NASCAR events, mostly in Dover International Speedway in Dover, DE, we would park off the track site as it would be so crowded and we would have to walk probably about 2 miles to the track. To me it seemed like a marathon. My family did not like to stop as often as I did and I would often make a fuss about it which included crying and screaming. It got to be that it was much easier not to take me to the race, even though I loved racing. It sucked having that thought going round my family. but I can totally understand. They could have made things a little easier, like maybe closer parking, and keeping me cool, but I do not think they thought of that or understood my need for that. Maybe I did not know what I wanted or needed either in those situations. NASCAR tended to be the event that I would act up the most as I had went to a baseball game with my brother and father and had no problem with the walking at that event, I think it also was at night.

Middle school was not much of an enriched time with my studies. I knew that I wanted to race cars, but I also had doubts in that I was going to get to do that because my parents were not making any sort of effort to realize my dream. I understand why it was hard because it costs a good bit of money and they had no clue of where to get started. I wanted to become a computer technician and gained an interest in computers, mostly because I wanted to play my simulator. I was able to obtain a copy of my favorite simulator and I would install them on school computers and would play it on my downtime. There was a teacher that I had in the sixth grade that I would revisit in the seventh grade during my lunch time just to play my racing simulator on her computer. On some days I got to go to the computer lab and used the faster machines that played my simulator even better. I installed my simulator on whatever computer I had the chance to use. I took a woodworking class where we had a computer lab and I would install the game on those computers and play it. Because the program was not used by everyone and because it was not typical to be used on the school's systems, I was of course blamed for any computer issues that would arise. I felt and still feel it was nonsense.

## Chapter 3: Rebellion

As a preteen my parents and teachers faced many challenges with me. One of these challenges was rebellion. I would rebel against authority for different reasons, but all had one thing in common, and that was a “you can’t control me, I’ll show you” attitude. First, I had a lot of behavior issues both in school and out. At home I had issues with things from not wanting to do my homework, not doing my chores or fighting with my siblings when either they were jealous and annoyed about how my parents dealt with me. One instance of rebellion was a time when my father wanted to discipline me with his belt after I was being a pain over a school assignment in the fifth grade. The fifth grade teacher, Ms. Gothelf, wanted us to write a book report and I needed to use a thesaurus. I wanted to use a specific thesaurus that the school system had and I had access to in my classroom. My parents and I looked through several stores, including many local book stores: we were very unsuccessful in finding this book. I really wanted this book and was upset. The secret is that I really did not want to work on this report



anyways and just wanted to get this book for some reason. I guess I thought it was neat for some odd reason to have a copy of a book we used in the classroom. My parents made me use another book and tried to make me write the report. It did not go well as I was throwing a tantrum. My father wanted to have me bend over and strike me with his belt. I am unsure as to

why I even bent over but when he went to strike me with the belt I turned around and he unintentionally smacked me just above the eye with the belt. I had started to scream, and when going into the bathroom to the mirror, my parents noticed a huge welt above my right eye. My mother then decided that it was best not to go to school for a few days as it would make some suspicion and they would be investigated for child abuse. I was more than happy to stay home and play my Nintendo 64. One of the practices that I used in “Getting Even” with my parents was to make a big deal on how they punished me. Of course, because my parents grew up in a more simple time and a time where you would not dare to talk back to your parents or any

elders, they believed in using a more physical means of discipline such as “Spanking”, or to me it was often just a backhand slap from my mother, I decided that I was going to use this fact to my advantage. I would often meet with my school counselor in elementary school and I would tell of my home life, including how my parent’s “Beat Me” That triggered great concern among the school staff and one day during my lunch time, I got to have a lovely meeting with the Frederick County Department of Social Services over this matter. During this meeting I quickly told a more accurate and less fluffed up story of what happened, maybe even told a few lies as I realized the danger involved of being temporarily or permanently removed from my home. As much trouble as I had at home during that time (most brought on by things neither my parents or I could help) I knew in my heart that my parents really loved me and wanted what is best, and given my individual situation they were not always sure how to handle things.



Another place that I showed rebellion was in school. I have talked about how I was rebellious with my parents; let me tell you how I was with my teachers and school staff. This account was in middle School. I have mentioned that I did not like school very much and found it boring earlier. One way that provided me a way to stretch and get me away from the

boring classes was to ask to use the bathroom. For whatever reason, I felt that if I could go to the bathroom and hide out it would make things a little less boring. I do not think that I did anything in the bathroom that was any better than just staying in class where we were supposed to be learning about something. I started by asking to use the bathroom in my first period history class. There, it was either get up and take a walk (to the bathroom, of course) or fall asleep without even recognizing that I had passed out. Usually I would be looking at my teacher, Mr. Lineger, instructing my class and the next thing I know he is at my desk slamming his hands down shouting “Wake Up”, this was not very pleasant and could not be controlled. I would ask to use the bathroom in almost every period of the day. This

tactic worked for a few weeks until my second period math teacher, Mrs. Trio, caught on to my strategy for getting a break from class. One day I asked her to use the bathroom and she said “no”. I felt that she did not have a reason to deny me use of the bathroom and in order to “get back at her” and prove her wrong I would wet my pants. It felt good to know that I could “Show her” she was wrong and not to mess with me. No sooner I wet myself that day, I was sent to the health room so I could have my mother called to come and get me. I quickly figured out an easy trick to get out of school. I continued to wet then on out, especially when a teacher raised his or her voice to me. This led to the school support staff to ask my mother to keep me home from school until further notice. It was probably the best thing that I could have heard at the time that I did not have to go back to the boring place they call a school. This would have been in the November of 1998 and I stayed out of school until January of 1999 when the school special education staff had a meeting and decided that they should put me into self-contained “Special Education” classes part time. My mother originally did not want anything to do with me being in special education as she felt that the bullying and teasing that I was dealing with already would only get worse. I am actually not sure how much worse it really got. It could have helped to be in mainstream classes as I would have had more exposure to the regular education students, but at the same time it was my own behaviors that were my worst enemy. I was put into Mrs. Beach’s sixth grade special education classroom where I thrived. There was just something about Mrs. Beach that really provided some kind of happiness. I think the fact that she really worked with our class, and engaged us in what we were learning really made me happy to be there. She was also very nurturing and I do have to say that she was and well, still is very pretty. Her presence made everything okay. I was also still working with an at-home instructor whom I also very much liked. She was a lot different from Mrs. Beach but she really could engage me in the learning experience. Sadly, Mrs. Beach did have to leave my middle school as an instructor as she had some personal matters to attend to. I was a very emotional person at that time in my life and I can remember overhearing that Mrs. Beach was leaving and how I was extremely upset for the rest of the day. Luckily, I received that News right before it was time for me to leave for the day and I dealt with my emotions at home. I still wet in school for some reason during my time with her but it was very few and far in between that this happened. We had to go on a field trip to collect and study rock samples from around Frederick County, MD and Mrs. Beach drove her car along with the school bus in case I decided I was going to wet myself. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade

were more extremely difficult times for me, as I have talked about in the previous chapter. I did let the school know that I was wetting on purpose but I tended to keep doing it anyway as a way to tick the teacher and school staff off and to get attention. There was another thing that I contemplated in doing is that of “running away”. One time I was going to hide somewhere in my childhood home such as a closet in the room that I played my Nintendo in so I would not have to go to school and my parents would be extremely worried about me. I would also use to threaten to commit suicide, especially during arguments with my parents to try to get them to feel bad and to leave me alone and get my way. The rebellious time of my life was really limited to late elementary school and middle school; I did not have much of a problem with it in high school once I was able to get things sorted out.

## Chapter 4: Making Friends

Friendship has always been very important to me and I have always valued a great friendship. If you ask my best friend Shawn, he will tell you that “Eric does not like to lose friends”. Early on, I cannot really say that I had any true friends, I had what you would say were acquaintances that just would spend time with me. When I was in elementary school I often spent time with Thaddeus (who is a very distant cousin of mine) and Matt who was best friends with Thaddeus. I would engage in activities with these kids from elementary school until high school, when we went our separate ways. Oftentimes when I spent time with these kids it was because I did not like spending all of the time alone just playing video games. Yes, I did enjoy video games but I felt the urge to get out and socialize. We would usually play a game of football, or some other outdoor game. All of us were really into pro wrestling and we would play on the trampoline at Thaddeus’ house. When playing together, whether it was outside or playing video games, they would always take advantage of me in some way. If I did not know something about the game we were playing they would take advantage of that. In middle school, Pokémon and Magic cards were very popular trading card sets. These cards are actually used in card games but a lot of the children I knew just collected and traded them. Some of these cards would bring big money and you could simply buy a pack of cards for a few dollars. One time they were going to the store and I knew that they were going to buy cards. My mother had given them a few dollars to get me a pack of cards in which they had already opened and took any valuable cards out of when they returned and gave the cards. I was also often teased by these kids. There were some other kids that I hung out with that were buddies of Thaddeus and Matt. One boy I did play with as a child, Mark T., but after a while he was not very nice to me, partly I think because of issues at home he was dealing with himself. Another boy, Allan, would treat me decent but it was usually only if Thaddeus was not around. Thaddeus was from a kind of “Stuck-up” family. They felt that they were better than many of the other people in our neighborhood and Thaddeus had that kind of attitude with him. Whenever I got to see Matt alone, he would treat me so much better and fairly than Thaddeus would. We would spend time playing video games like Madden NFL football on the Nintendo 64 System.

I would often spend time with my neighbor Tommy when I was in late elementary school and middle school. He was two grades and about three

years older than me. We both also were into video games and pro wrestling. We were neighbors, but the thing is with Tommy is that he would not want to acknowledge he was my friend around other kids in the neighborhood or at school. He did not want anyone to know he associated with me. I do have to say, even though he was not a true friend, we did have a blast together.

Since I was a small child my parents had me involved in some kind of sport such as baseball or basketball. I played baseball as a very young child until the coach I had one year told my parents that he did not want me on his team. From a competitive standpoint, which was where he was, I can totally see why he did not want me, because I did not want to be there and I was not interested. However, baseball at this age is more for social growth and the



development of values. I played basketball for a few years and in middle school I met a kid named Mark D. that I shared a basketball team with. He happened to also be in special education classes (Self-contained detention center like classes) but with the sixth grade students instead of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade class that I was in. We both shared interest in pro wrestling and like all boys our age, video games. We started to hang out with one another and eventually became inseparable. Earlier in our friendship I had a lot of issues with worrying about losing him as a friend by being annoying or etc. I guess you can say that I was just self-conscious about being me. I had never

had a “True” Friend and it was something that I did not want to lose. I probably got on his nerves by saying “sorry” so many times over nothing. Our friendship grew very much, however. I can remember many times where we spent the night playing video games, sometimes on two different systems right next to each other. I would play my NASCAR racing games or Madden football while he would conquer some adventure game on another system. We just genuinely enjoyed each other. He accepted me just like I accepted him for him. There were times that we both saw the worst of each other. Although he was not diagnosed Autistic, he had severe ADHD

and also had issues with his mood where he would throw tantrums. We went to different high schools as there was a new high school being built in our community and I was a grade higher than he, so I got to stay at my school while he went to the new school as a freshman. We worked at Pizza Hut together for a while but as he started to date, and go to college it was difficult to see each other as often. Also in high school he got some new friends and became close with them. Today we are still great friends but unfortunately we do not get to see each other as much due to our busy schedules. Mark is an example of a great friend; we both had problems in school with similar things so we just came together and supported one another.

Mark D. was pretty much my only really friend in high school, I did have a friendship with my “peer buddy” Cheryl that I met through our Best Buddies chapter. Cheryl was and still is a really beautiful girl who was on the cheerleading team at my high school. She is about 5’6 in height, has brown hair, brown eyes, and one of the most beautiful smiles you could ever see. She was super nice and decided that she wanted me as her “Buddy”. I was very amused that she, someone who was very popular with many at my school would select me to be paired up with, let alone even participate in the program to begin with. We started seeing each other outside of school and did activities such as make cookies and go to movies. I became really attached to Cheryl VERY quickly. I wrote her almost every day by email and her response would make me happy every day. Even though I was not sure how I liked Cheryl and did enjoy her. She had a boyfriend, now who is currently her husband. Like I said, I was unsure how I felt about her but I just really liked her. I respected she had a boyfriend. Cheryl was not only a friend, but she was a role model for me. She was a grade higher than me, and almost two years older than me. Most of my peers in my special education program were not college bound nor had a set career path. She was a leader among the student body, as she held roles on the class executive for her graduating class. I really tried to be like her and fixated about what she was about. I was still my railroad and racing loving computer tech self, it is I just wanted to be like her. My first car was a 1995 Buick Le Sabre; she also had a Buick Le Sabre. She applied and got into Juniata College in Huntingdon, PA, I also wanted to go to Juniata College, but not for the right reasons. I thought the campus was beautiful, and they had no shortage of railroad activity, so I definitely felt as though I wanted to go there. Needless to say, I did not get it to the school. I actually think that was a great thing in being that they did not have any programs there that would really align with



my goals other than computer science, which I definitely would not do well at as I am a computer tech., not a programmer. Of course, Cheryl did graduate and she moved on to college. We stayed in contact with one another through letters and visited with each other when she was home for break. Because of awkwardness of our friendship and my fixation with her, she eventually told me that she did not want to see me again. There was nothing “creepy” other than me wanting to be like her and be as successful as she was in her academic career. She also was so happy. Another thing that would be awkward about the friendship, I would think, is the gifts that I would get her for Christmas, graduation and her birthday. They were not huge gifts as I did not have a lot of money, but they were big for not having a lot of money. I treat all of my friends and romantic interests the same way, so it was not specific to her. When she told me that she did not want to see me again, I had bought her a “Friends” sitcom boxset that was kind of pricey. She took my gift and I believe we did meet one more time at a Roy Rogers but that was it. That was back in 2004. I feel that she could not accept me for me and had a hard time just understanding the way I felt towards her.

Another story about my social awkwardness and its ability to make people want to not give me a chance as a friend and accept me for me is with my former friend Megan B. I met Megan B, when she came to work in The Buddy Project’s computer tech internship program. Immediately her and I started to become friends and we had many long conversations about almost everything. I took her as a very down to earth, innocent, non-judging girl that I could have a good friendship with. I actually wanted to see if we would be a romantic match but at the time she had a boyfriend, and I was dating Nicole. I love Nicole and I was not going to do anything to mess up what we had, and again, Megan was taken. So as time went on and things happened like Nicole and I breaking up and dealing with my mental issues stemming from that, Megan also broke up with her boyfriend and we started talking as friends. She would volunteer during her school breaks with The Buddy Project and we would do things outside of work such as going hiking and to lunch. Megan graduated college and she did not have a job, so I offered her a job to help her out since she was my friend. I also needed some of her talents for the job, so she had a reason she was hired. We started spending a little more time together and I asked her to my high school reunion. It was a really big deal for me and she accepted. I was so excited, but nervous about it at the same time. As the summer past some issues caused strain on our friendship. Megan was having issues performing

in her job and was getting frustrated about the stress she had undertaken. Work was work, so I did not take anything personally. We had plans to hang out on the Fourth of July and about two weeks before that she mentioned that an old friend from school had asked her out on a date before and she had accepted, but he was not following through until then. Immediately during that conversation my heart just sank into my belly. We had plans that Friday evening to go to a special needs karaoke event which she had to cancel because the World Cup was going on and that guy wanted to take her to a bar/casual dining establishment in Frederick with his friends to watch it. She invited me to go with them. I decided that I would write Megan and tell her how I felt and if there was any possibility of us being something more than friends. This was on a Thursday that I wrote her and on Friday was the soccer game. On Friday, something arose at work and she was pretty "Short" with me, and irritated, so I felt that she was uncomfortable with the email I sent her, which was not inappropriate as it just asked her if she seen anything more and that I really liked her as a person. I ended up going to the sports bar with her and her buddies and she was nothing but nice to me that night and in fact, wanted to go hiking with me that Sunday, and later in the day, go to a winery I had gotten her a gift certificate to. I was more than excited to hear that. She said she would let me know the next evening about if she was able to go hiking with me as she had plans in Baltimore Saturday. I was playing cards with my family and I had heard nothing from her. I decided I would text her, she would not respond to my text asking her how her day went so then I just told her to let me know so I would know what the plans were for Sunday. I received nothing and then I worried if she then saw the email finally and she was upset. She sent a short message to me saying that she did not want to do anything Sunday because she had school stuff to take care of. I was still worried about how she felt about the email (she had to have read it by now, right?) that I had mentioned it and it did not go well. She had no clue what I was talking about and she then decided to tell me that she did not want me to text her anymore about personal things and only about work. I expressed that I really valued her friendship and I liked to be able to reach out to her, and then she said that she only wanted to see me to do things such as lunch and maybe hiking but that was it. I told her that I just wanted to know about that email and she did not even read it yet. She read it and sent me an email stating that she only saw me as her friend and boss and nothing more, she understood there was some miscommunication, but she wanted to leave the same restrictions in communication. Later she acted like she wanted to cancel plans on the Fourth of July but she would not tell me, so I bluntly

asked her about it and told her I understand after the situation if she wanted to cancel. She then made the situation worst and told me that it was inappropriate that I had asked if she still wanted me to go and that now she did not want to go. From then on until the time she decided her job was too stressful due to her workload (I was helping her in her job) and wanted to quit she was very nasty with me even though we stopped talking about the issue. On the day she got her last paycheck she came and left every small gift I have gotten her since I knew her and later on I found out she had unfriended me on Facebook, all over me just telling her I thought she was a nice person. I felt like I was being punished for showing interest in her. Imagine if you told someone you wanted to be their friend and get to know them more, and they tell you to “F&ck yourself”, that is how it felt to me.

I feel that the true definition of a friend is my friend Shawn Jenkins. I met Shawn back in 2012 when I sold a computer to him. It was a Super Bowl Sunday and he came later that day. I remember him making his way down into the basement where we work on and sell the machines. I was thinking that he was probably the biggest man that I ever saw, and I am fairly large myself. I showed him the computers we had offered for sale and we choose one that I felt suited his needs and saved him money. We talked for about two hours and I talked about my current crush, Kristen, who I was



going to take to the St. Agnes Hospital gala. Kristen also bought a computer from me two months before that. One of the things that I asked him, and could be taken as VERY rude (Shawn did not care much) was if he had considered Bariatric Surgery. He had told me about how he had considered it and doing the prerequisites towards getting insurance coverage at University of Maryland, but his surgeon had left the hospital and he did not care much for his dietitian. We talked for about two hours that evening.

Shawn had an issue with his computer where it would not boot and obviously would not serve his purpose. He revisited with me again to swap out the machine for another and we talked for another two hours. He asked if The Buddy Project needed any help with anything and that he could volunteer. I had mentioned to him about our recycling program and how we could use help in that area and he is more than welcome to join us. We played phone tag a bit and there was some confusion on his part about how I told him to “just come” one day. I can remember trying to find his number and not sure which one was his out

of the list of numbers my mother would write down that did not have any name with it. Shawn finally started working with us one evening and I can remember we just kept conversation going just like when he was buying his computer. He would come at least once a week until one day he was here during a severe thunderstorm that left most of the Maryland area without power for days. I had offered him to spend the night in our guest room and from there on out we started spending more and more time together. In the fall of 2012 we decided that we were going to build a model HO scale train layout. We spent a lot of time working on the tables for the train layouts.

What I mean by Shawn being the definition of a true friend is that he believes in me, when others have doubts about things. He will do anything he can to help me make something happen even though he may not quite enjoy what we are doing. For example, he has helped me with reselling vehicles for The Buddy Project. Because he is so large it is difficult for him to get down on the ground and maneuver the way he needs to work on cars. He offered his resources at first, but later he actually needed to do manual work that involved being on the ground. Through him believing in me he actually found out that he can do this kind of work still and he was not as limited as he originally thought he was. We were able to get one car sold to a veteran in Hagerstown, Maryland for a low price, less than 1k and he was able to have wheels to get back and forth to a job. It was so exciting knowing that we were not only able to save the car from the junkyard, as many people felt the car should have went to, but also help someone get back on their feet at the same time. The reason we started selling cars is when I wanted to go dirt track racing and we wanted to make it a marketing project. We were able to acquire an older Pontiac Sunfire from a young man in Frederick but I felt it was in too good of condition to just tear it apart for racing. So we resold it and put the funds into The Buddy Project. Shawn is not into racing like I am, but he is learning about it just because he knows I love it and he loves me.

Yes, Shawn is overweight and he has health issues related to his obesity. I have set him up with the specialist at St. Agnes Healthcare where I volunteer/work in order to help him. He is scared, but I know enough about the procedures and the process (been through it twice myself) that I can help guide him through the journey. I love him very much and want the best for him. Yes, he is overweight and he has those problems and he is kind of lazy because of it (wouldn't you be lazy if you hurt every time you move?) He has a lot of judgment from my friends and family, particularly my parents, but you know what? I love him anyway and will do anything for him. Jesus

loves everyone, and it is what is truly in your heart and soul that matters. He has been called a woman, and people joke that we are gay, but I do not care. Just because someone looks different or has a disability, it does not make them who they are.

Another Best Friend of mine is my helper with The Buddy Project, Nancy. We have a different friendship than anyone else, but she wants what

makes me happy and what is best for me. She believes in me along with Shawn. She is my main helper and runs our I.T.

Internship program where we work with anyone who would like to become A+ Certified. We recently started working with The Arc of Frederick County on helping to support some of the people through our program.



Nancy is a hard worker and she helps with almost any aspect of the business. I would be lost without her help.

I have learned that everyone has their issues and some people deal with more such as a disability. I am friends with everyone regardless of how they look, talk, dress, or their age. I know I have my social issues and some small communication issues, mostly talking too much, but a true friend takes me for who I am.

## Chapter 5: The Transition

School was never fun until High School, other than the second part of sixth grade where I had Mrs. Beach as a teacher. Otherwise, I absolutely disliked school. Even though I did not like Middle School, the transition to high school was rather difficult. Noticeable things about me that were



significant during this change was the fact that I started to have poor bathing and hygiene habits no sooner that I started high school. I think mentally that is was really stressful on me going from one place to another. You could say that I was lazy and just did not want to bathe or brush my teeth but I feel that the laziness was mainly from the stress of the change in my life. Even though I was lazy and had the mental health

issues in Middle School, I still knew how to take a shower and brush my teeth every day. The drawing of attention also got much worse. I would do things like “pass gas” on the bus on purpose in order to get the other kids to laugh at me. Of course I would still say inappropriate things and pretend to be a lunatic in order to get attention. I would walk the hallways of the school and do things to get the attention of both students and staff. A big thing that students would do to me in the ninth grade was poke me. I was extra sensitive so I would cower and say “Leave me be” “Don’t Touch me” or “Stop”. I never hit any of the people who would do the teasing. I was taking an art class in the ninth grade and whenever the teacher, a young man named Fellows, would leave; the students would get up and push me into a corner of the room where they would poke at me and laugh at my reaction. They seemed to think it was so funny. There were staff who knew about this and some of them told me to stop crying about it when the students would do it. They would say things like “Stop” or “Grow-up” “Stop being a baby” I think that I, being Autistic, had a role in the sensitivity I had. Even today, I have issues when people try to touch my belly, and people, friends and family members will try to do it just to get a reaction out of me. I will laugh nervously, but really it is a rather unpleasant feeling. Along the lines of Mr. Fellows, the young, clean-cut, baby-faced stud; is that I got the feeling he

was a queer and that he wanted to get with me or had the hots for me. This kind of got out and it did not set well with him. He quickly nixed that rumor pretty quickly before it could spread by having a private talk with me telling me that he was not gay and it is not appropriate. Other things that plagued me during the transition were the fact that I did not like and get along with Mrs. Waller. She was a mean, strict, black skinny lady who really gave you an “introduction to high school”. She would purposely pick on the ninth graders, as I found out the year after ninth grade, my sophomore year. I did mature a lot and have better meds in my sophomore year, so she and I got along decent, but I feel it was also that she made a point to give the kids that “Introduction”. The funny thing is that she was a special needs teacher, so why did she want to be so nasty. I have to say that almost any freshman, special needs or not, needs a wake-up call when entering high school. It is amazing how immature some of them really are. Mrs. Waller I had for ninth grade English, or “English 9” as the correct term was. There were times that she would bully me so bad in the classroom by yelling at me that I would start crying, and loud. I can remember hearing the kids in the classroom behind ours laughing at whoever was crying, that would be me. I disliked Mrs. Waller so much and was so afraid of her that I would beg and plead with my mother to let me stay home. She was the worst teacher that I have ever had. Mrs. Cooper was a really nice teacher that I had for Math in the beginning of the ninth grade. I really did enjoy her but I remember always bringing toys into school such as model diecast stock cars or model locomotives that came from a cheap train set. I would use a laptop in Mrs. Waller’s class to help me with my writing. My mother had purchased me two old laptops off of eBay of which one was in working order. They were IBM ThinkPad’s and were black and white and ran Windows 95. My laptop failed me within the first few weeks of school. My mother decided to purchase me a brand new Compaq Presario Laptop from Best Buy. I was pretty excited to have that unit. I would play with it during class so I would not have to do my school work. I can remember the special backpack that my mother had bought me for the laptop and can remember all of the school books that a typical high school student had. My laptop, which had its own compartment in the backpack eventually the screen got smashed and needed to be repaired. Needless to say I was without that for a few weeks.

The greatest loves that I had coming into high school was that of auto racing, particularly NASCAR, and wrestling. I wanted to be a stock car driver and hoped that by that time that my parents could have had me racing Bandeleros, a type of large go-kart at a local track somewhere, or simply



take me to the Charlotte Motor Speedway where they had a program for sure, because I saw them on television and heard people talk about it. I LOVED racing so much and wanted to be a part of it. I loved every aspect about auto racing. When I did a science project I wanted to do it on something about the aerodynamics

of a car and drafting. I talked about NASCAR and racing earlier in this eBook, I will not talk more and more about it. I am sure as the reader you read enough about that. Yes, anything racing was my favorite. I would still even play with my little 1:64 scale cars on the front porch and had my own fantasy racing league. As far as wrestling went, my friend Mark and I were highly interested along with my neighbor Tommy and Shawn, kind of like my brother (my Dad's ex-wife's son). I would watch almost every episode of Raw and Smackdown. I would play "Smackdown" on the PlayStation 2. As talked about before, I would rather be playing my video games.

My violent outbursts and rough home life continued into high school. It was not until I saw Dr. Levy in Frederick that things got any better at all. Things got worst of course in high school from middle school because I least I was bathing in middle school. It seemed as if my behavior and my hygiene only got worse as I got into high school as mentioned before. I would sleep even more than I did in middle school. My embarrassing behavior eventually got my teacher, Mrs. Cooper, to call my mother and have her say that "Eric Needs to be embarrassed for once". I saw Dr. Levy and he also wanted to put me into a residential program but he wanted to try his own cocktail of drugs first. He warned that if this did not do the trick that he would have me put into a program. This was right before Christmas. Christmas came and of course what was under the tree that year was a PlayStation 2 and the newly released Xbox. My neighbor and I took up playing Madden NFL together while we were on break and we would build our own teams and play them through the franchise mode in which we would often challenge each other. It was so much fun to play. On The



PlayStation 2, WWE released “Smackdown: Just bring it” and I would spend more than enough of my time playing that. Once school started again in January I started to have these changes about me that were really hard to explain. I started to care more about my hygiene to where I would shower everyday as well as brush my teeth. I started to have more energy and felt much better, and I started to dress nice. I went from wearing jogging pants and a t-shirt and messy hair to jeans and a button up shirt and then I added dress shoes. From there I went to khaki slacks and a nice pullover, polo shirt. I started to carry my stuff in a laptop case instead of that backpack and I actually enjoyed being in school. I had goals and aspirations of becoming a computer technician. I started working on my prerequisites for the career and technology program that my school system offered. Best yet, of course I needed this to get into my technical program, my grades went from straight F’s to A’s and B’s. It slowly changed but I was so excited and so happy. My behavior and my academic performance changed so much that I was nominated for the AllFirst Student Improvement award that was offered to students whom changed 180 percent and made positive changes. I went to the luncheon offered at Ceresville Mansion, a really nice venue on the edge of the city.

That spring was a great time for me. I spent more and more time with my friend Mark and we spend that summer together at home. We would have my house to ourselves since both of my parents worked during the day. My mother worked a part time job at Pizza Hut, and my father worked a full time job at State Farm Insurance companies, as an auto damage estimator. Mark and I would just enjoy ourselves by getting in our in ground swimming pool, and playing video games. I am blessed that I was able to turn myself around with the help of the proper physician, medication, and well, motivation. I feel that the motivation was there all along because no sooner the meds started I was “Off to the races” with the changes I had to make. People would often tell me that medication cannot do it for you by itself, but it sure felt like it could and that it was. Looking back now, I just wanted to have a more successful, better and happy life.

## Chapter 6: An Exciting Time

One of the most exciting times of my life is my time volunteering and working with Best Buddies, a non-profit that provides one-to-one friendships and integrated employment. I was going to write a very long chapter about my experiences, but I had experienced so much that I feel by trying to cram it in to one chapter and into one book would not do it justice. So for right now, I am going to start with how I got into the organization, what it means to me, and how I got my job. Our Best Buddies chapter started at my high school, coincidentally, when I was a freshman. It developed over the few years that I was there, and then kind of went away once I graduated, probably because I was the backbone of the chapter towards the end. The

organizations' mission was so important to me because I knew what it was like to have a hard time making friends and be lonely. Once I was matched and realized this even more, the mission became so much more important. I saw many students who were isolated because of their disability, most of whom had communication issues where it was hard to follow the social norms. Friendship means so much to us as humans. We are such social creatures and friendship can help our morale in so many ways. It brings so much happiness to have a good friend and to be loved by someone. I always thought that I would be a computer technician in high school and own a computer shop where I would work from 8am-3pm every day and have a "normal" family life, if there is one. As I became more involved with Best Buddies and became friends with the staff in the Baltimore office; I knew I did not want to leave. Unfortunately, I was in my senior year of high school and I was unable to stay on and take care of my chapter. I did eventually try, but the school staff would not have it. My chapter eventually fell into the toilet, if you will. Back to the end of my senior year, I wanted so badly to work for this organization because I loved the people behind it and of course the mission. Being that I was not a



college graduate and the lack of funding in the non-profit world and with this organization, I started to work hard to make connections. I would be going to my second Best Buddies Leadership conference in Bloomington, Indiana where they let me go to do some advocacy speaking as well as to , just be there with the people I enjoy. There in 2005, I met Susan Garvey, who was the new state director for the Virginia office in Mclean, VA, just outside of Washington, D.C. The area where the office was originally served out of Baltimore until the need and the funding rose so there could be an office just for Virginia. I figured since the office was new, there could be room made in the budget for an office assistant. What I did not realize is that new offices and areas served in the non-profit industry usually do not have very big budgets. I continued to make friends with the new state director and attend meetings and help out with events. Everyone knew my agenda: I did make it clear, and that was to obtain a position in the new office. I live about an hour from where the old Virginia office is located and I was often discouraged by certain people (being that I have a disability and they thought it would be “too far” for me to drive”. One individual, I am not going to quote his name as he would be pretty frustrated with me, would start conversation topics related to how I should not work in the new office because of the distance and what have you. I was working at Pizza Hut and wanted so badly to work at the organization. I of course tried to downplay whatever he would think of. I do not know why he wanted to interfere with my dream of working for the organization that he volunteers his time to provide his service of photography for; he was paid for some of the work. Over the many months I helped with fundraising and awareness; hoping to be there when the money was there for my new position. I was told it was in the budget and it just needed to be funded. I continued to help, including with other projects in the organization such as the Miami Gala in 2005, which I will touch more on in the future as it was my first time to Miami, and that place has become pretty significant to me. My volunteer work and hopes of working for the organization in Virginia came to a head when we had the Valentine’s Day dance at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. That night, the goal was to raise a large amount of funds in which one of the things that it was going to fund was my position. I was so excited in the anticipation that I would be starting my new job. I was so sure that I had the job that I quit my job at Pizza Hut. I was surprised when the manager asked me why I did not give two weeks’ notice. I was flattered because I thought Pizza Hut was only employing me because my mother worked with the company at another location. I only worked there one or two days a week and thought it was just a favor they were doing for me. I quit the job and I

was so excited for my first day in the office. I drove to the office and spent the first day setting up my desk and helping with some merchandise inventory. I was told by Susan to not come back the next day because some things needed to be sorted out. It turns out that the money was not raised at the ball and she was unable to hire me. She called me on Presidents Day, which was very strange because they did not work on that day. I knew something was up when I got the call. I had already quit my job at Pizza Hut, and I was not going back. I decided that I was going to not give up and if I had to raise the money so I could work to help provide friendships to others who needed them.

I got to know Christian Metzger, the new state director in the Maryland office in Baltimore. My friend Kirk had left the previous summer



and Christian was hired. I made friends with Christian and I explained my love for the organization and the situation in Virginia. He told me that if I directed my fundraising towards the Maryland office that he would try to get me a job. I raised money by doing several events that included special “Dine-In” nights at local fast food restaurants, and pancake

breakfasts at the local Applebee’s. I raised a decent amount of cash and was planning a large event at my parents’ house called “Bar-B-Que for Inclusion” that I used my own money to plan. It was kind of a gambling situation taking a risk for hopefully a big reward for Best Buddies and myself. Planning for this event took several weeks and a lot of work. The day finally came, and well, it did not turnout so well. It rained all morning and pretty much washed the event out. Many people who were planning on coming did not show because it was outdoors and they figured that it was canceled. We had no rain date and we just lost most, if not all of the money that we raised. Fortunately, I received good news just a few days before the event. Christian was able to secure a grant from the state of Maryland, thanks to then governor, Robert Ehrlich. I was offered a trial position as an office intern with the Baltimore office and if it went well; I would be granted a permanent, part time position. The day I got that phone call was probably one of the most joyous days of my life. I was so in love with the

organization and the people that it was great to know that I would be able to spend my time with them doing worthwhile work helping others with disabilities. Many times I was told “Eric, It is just not in the budget” and many times people such as the photographer tried to discourage me. I worked hard to prove to them that I was serious and I wanted to work for the organization. I was very persistent and did not give up. I feel that if you want something and you want it badly, there is no easy way out, or way out at all, other than to work hard for it and do not give up. I think one of the biggest parts of the Best Buddies story is that of me not giving up and working for what I want, and what I want was and is to help others. I feel that is the most fascinating part about my time at the organization. I started as an intern on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2006, a very strange date, but I started non-the-less and worked over the summer on various programs and development projects. Development projects were my favorite because I loved to talk to people and tell them about the organization and the cause that I love. At the end of the summer, I was offered a permanent, part time position with the organization with the title “Administrative Assistant”. I was more than thrilled.

## Chapter 7: My Purpose

I find it more than difficult to come up with a proper closing for this short e-book. I was going to write a whole chapter on just The Buddy Project (would not know where to start with that), but I feel it has been scattered around this entire book and I have a lot of stories to tell in the future in other eBooks that get written by me. Closings in general have always been difficult. In college, I always could write a decent paper and state what I am trying to state, but the closing was the most difficult. I have been on an interesting journey so far in my life. I have helped many people and many computers, (and a few cars) see life again. I have helped people with gaining access to technology or being able to be a part of something that will further them, both personally and professionally. I am blessed that I was given the talents in both the creative area as well as mechanically to make a difference. It was a mere coincidence that I went through the I.T. Training that I did; and was really because of my love for racing that got me interested. I wanted a computer so I could play my racing simulator and I became interested in how they work. Being autistic and a tech let me put my ideas together to help the environment and the disabled at the same time. It has taken me a few years to mature and really find myself but I know in my heart that my purpose is that of computer refurbishing and/or recycling, working with special needs people, and working in the O.R. I have been truly blessed by God in that I am able to do what I do. Also, I would like to really thank my parents for everything they have been through with me and that they are so generous in opening up their house to my business. They have also invested monetarily by loaning me money for supplies.