

# Just in Time for School— Where's the Ritalin?

Marlenea La Shomb

## Surviving & Thriving with ADD or ADHD

With ten wonderful grandchildren, I know the joys of being a grandparent—each one an individual surprise. If you aren't there yet but will be someday, you'll be in for a fun adventure! With all the labeling of childhood diseases these days, you may have one who is considered as AD/HD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), a chronic condition that includes attention difficulty, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness.

My co-worker, a naturopathic doctor and massage therapist, and I had a discussion the other day about how we loved learning but hated being in school. Just 40–50 years ago, many of these “dis-ease labels” didn't exist, but we agreed that had they existed, both of us would have been diagnosed as AD/HD, with some dyslexia thrown in for good measure, and probably put on prescription meds—the most common of which, still today, is Ritalin.

Instead, back then, both teachers and students creatively found ways to cope with our overabundance of energy and apparent lack of focus, until eventually as adults, we could find our way into the mainstream of life, having made it through an education system that does not accommodate for the physically active, “give me fresh air please and wide-open spaces,” personality types. Today, we put



this type of child in a building, under harsh lighting, we tell them to sit still in a chair and to breath stale air for months into years on end.

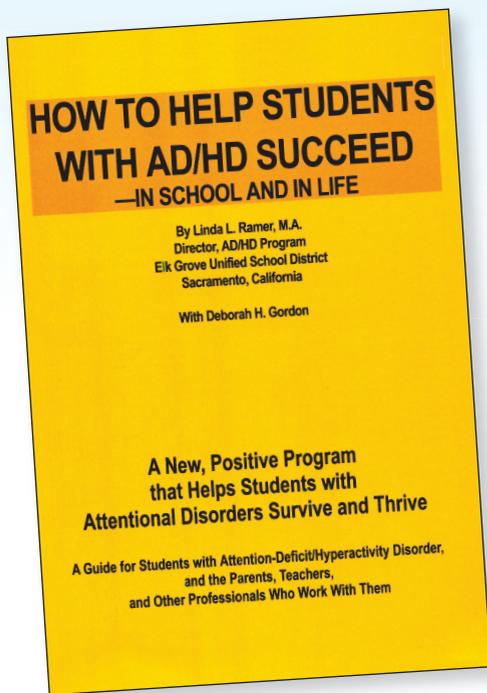
I can still close my eyes and remember how it felt to me like I was suffocating to death! Yet as soon as I got outside I would be fine again. In class, I would look out and think, “if only we could have class outside.” I learned early that when the teacher let me pick my desk, I did better sitting by the window where I could at least see the sky, the trees, and the changing weather. Children with AD/HD need to move!

My first-grade teacher, after lunch recess, would read to us. I loved being read to. As my hands were busy coloring away, I could sit quietly, my mind focused on every word of the story. Until one day, she looked up, called my name, and told me to put the coloring away—that I could not possibly do both things well, listen and color, at the same time. Of course, I did as I was told, even

though I knew I could tell her every word of the story. Years later as a multi-tasking mother of four, I was so glad I didn't believe her!

The only way I got through high school was to keep my body moving and my brain focused through creativity. It was first-hour PE, then a shower, so I could sit through second-hour English or History. Right after lunch it was gymnastics, then classes, then last period was dance—with Home Ec. and Art in between. Three PEs a day made it possible for me to sit through my other classes.

So when my grandson Zachary was born, soon scaling couches, jumping off bookcases, and running like the wind—all before most toddlers could barely toddle—you could imagine my heart-felt concern as to how he would make it through his school years. Sure enough, by the end of kindergarten, the teacher and principal called my daughter in and said, “Do something! Get him on Ritalin or find him another school!”



your school tells you to take your drugs or don't come! Zach continued, "On days when I forget to take my meds, I'm happy inside—I like me. And when I take them, I'm not happy. When asked to do something, I just say 'sure,' with no want to do it."

In all these diagnoses, have we ever thought to ask these kids how they feel on or off their meds? Having gone to the parent-teacher conferences and having heard their viewpoint, I quickly saw how it's not the student or the teachers, it's the system putting these kids in a box when they're more hard-wired to scale mountains.

I found a lot of info nowadays on the subject of AD/HD, yet very little from the child's perspective—until I met Linda L. Ramer, M.A., a language, speech and hearing specialist in the elementary public schools. In 1992, she saw the urgent need to help AD/HD students and their teachers and she built her program. Her passion for these kids led to her book, *How to Help Students with AD/HD Succeed—in School and Life*, along with her lectures and seminars.

Linda's innovative and much more positive approach helps students survive and thrive, giving them support and skills, improving

their self-esteem, and teaching them strategies to navigate through a system that doesn't acknowledge their needs—above all, teaching them how to advocate for themselves. She empowers them with a list of their "hidden treasures" (see box below). She shows them the unique skills that they have, how to take control over their lives, and how to express themselves so they feel heard and understood.

This is our future of great inventors, creative thinkers and achievers, like Einstein, Disney, and Michael Phelps—all who had "learning disorders." These are our firefighters, smokejumpers, rescue teams, and linemen, our athletes and talented performers—or our prescription-med drug addicts. It's a choice.

If a child or grandchild you know appears to have AD/HD, I encourage you to read Linda Ramer's book for hope, solutions, and a whole new perspective. ■

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My frustrated daughter followed the routine: a doctor's diagnosis and Ritalin prescribed, so they let him back into first grade. My daughter gave him the summers off from Ritalin but back-to-school was back to Ritalin.

Years had gone by and I had the opportunity to spend this last winter with Zachary. In a heart-to-heart moment one night before bed, he shared with me, simply put in the words of a 13-year-old, "Grandma, I don't want to be a doped-up dude!" I'm thinking, good point—the DARE program tells you to say 'no' to drugs, yet

## The Hidden Treasures of AD/HD

- ★ **People with AD/HD have heightened awareness. They are the eagle-eyed observers of the world.** *John Lennon, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Gen. Patton, Napoleon, Leonardo da Vinci*
- ★ **They are creative and innovative—the divergent thinkers of the world.** *Albert Einstein, Walt Disney, Louis Pasteur, Jules Verne, Bill Gates*
- ★ **They are persistent and resilient. They keep trying until they get it right. They have a willingness to keep working to improve, to come back again and again, to take setbacks in stride and keep right on going. Once they make up their minds to do something, they will!** *Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Michael Phelps, Terry Bradshaw*

- ★ **They have high energy, which can be channeled for good use.** *Justin Timberlake, Paris Hilton, Adam Levine*
- ★ **They have a wonderful, often delightfully devilish, sense of humor.** *Jim Carrey, Tommy Smothers, Woody Harrelson, Cher*
- ★ **They live with gusto. They have the capacity for huge enjoyment of their experiences, and plunge into things with abandon.** *Michelle Rodriguez, Will Smith, Robin Williams, Steve McQueen, Tom Cruise*
- ★ **They are great fun to talk to, one-on-one.** *Jay Leno, Channing Tatum, Caitlyn Jenner, Whoopi Goldberg*
- ★ **They have a desire to fit in and to be successful, wanting to please their parents, teachers & bosses.**

*Names above include those with reported learning disabilities, including AD/HD, Asperger's, and/or dyslexia. —ED.*