I never fit in with the traditional classroom scene. I won’t even lie, I had some real issues as child, all through elementary school I struggled to play by the rules. I got into fights (mostly with teachers), argued, yelled, refused to go, and ran away. But despite working my self out by middle school, the system never forgot, it felt like I was never given a fair chance by the teachers, or my peers, I was always “that kid”.

Eventually my frustration with the strict rules, monotony, and lack of creative engagement reached a tipping point, so I took matters into my own hands and dropped out of high school. Some may have called it a reckless move, but to me it was a necessary step towards sound mental health.

But I still wasn't content to just sit back and waste my days away. I put in the hard work to get my GED and ace the SATs, showing the world that you don't need a high school diploma to be successful. And when I was lucky enough to be accepted into Clarkson University, I took it as a chance to prove that a dropout could still make a name for themselves.

My stupid decision to “opt out” of high school did leave me with severe gaps in knowledge. For two years I spent all my free time parked in front of a laptop going through four years of math on Kahn academy. But despite my non-traditional academic background and previous social pariah status, I still managed to entirely rebuild myself in my own image.

Un-restricted by my reputation as a troubled youth, I soon flourished; studied abroad, had internships, good relationships with faculty, president of the largest club, I even managed to permanently add to the campus by hand building a lean-to with some of my best friends. All things I never would have thought possible a few years earlier.

It was during my time at Clarkson that I discovered a love for the great outdoors and rock climbing. I was drawn to the physical and mental challenges each problem presented. The adrenaline rush of each climb became like a breath of fresh air after years of feeling suffocated by societal norms. I quickly became heavily involved in the outing club and took advantage of every opportunity it presented.

I went all-in on both my studies and hobbies, refusing to let my past define what I was capable of. I picked up a dual major, but I also decided to pursue my newfound passions climbing, hiking, and booling with my buddies. Incredible ascents and legendary trips became a weekly occurrence, with near unrestricted access to all the gear I could ever want (and free gas), I became an animal of near singular focus, climb.

I started taking bigger and bigger risks as I became more confident in my ability, placing less gear on leads, taking bigger falls, and you guessed it free soloing. Nothing difficult I would tell myself, just rehearsed easy flowing climbs. But the freedom of moving through the mountains un-tethered is unreal. Eventually I found myself on an unmarked chossy wall, thirty feet up, grabbing at a loose rock…

Soo any way, Six and a half years after I started, I graduated with two degrees and half a foot, but you know what? I still did it.

Now, as a relatively successful software engineer, I continue to carry my “wild card attitude” and “outside the box thinking” with me. I'm living proof that sometimes the biggest risks can eventually lead to the greatest rewards… or not.

And for anyone out there who's feeling trapped by societal expectations, my advice is simple:

fuck it, it all works out in the end.