My childhood was upset by a mad cocktail of depression, ADHD, and mild Asperger’s Syndrome. I was always very high functioning, but I remember feeling out of place at parties, events, and gatherings. I hated having the attention of a group; I felt exposed, naked, and I shut down. I would often “hang out” with my brother and his friends, but that mainly consisted of me just following them around, never fully engaging. Instead, I was off in my own world, thinking about something else, never really being present. When I got upset, I would cry. Sometimes, this would lead to a full breakdown, with screaming and hitting and crying, often culminating with me sobbing into my pillow for as long as I felt I needed to, often for hours. My parents were putting their full attention on getting me the help I needed. They enrolled me in a charter school for my last two years of elementary school, and every Friday my mother and I would drive hours across the state of California to meet with a doctor for an hour, and drive all the way back. But even with all of that special care, there was no easily accessible school that had the proper support and staff to facilitate a child like me. So my parents uprooted us from our little mountain town, and we settled in Northern Virginia.

I spent the next three years at a school that specializes in helping in the development of children with learning disabilities, particularly those on the Autistic spectrum. We were taught social skills, mental coping strategies, and behavioral expectations. I didn’t particularly enjoy it, but to say that I flourished was an understatement. By 8th grade, there was nothing more the school could give to me. So I jumped off into the deep end; rather than staying there for my high school years, I decided I wanted to go to a “real” school. I think my mother described it best: “It’s like he’s going from kindergarten straight to college!” I may have well been, as while I could manage the new workload, to complete a one hour assignment took three, not due to any difficulty, but due to how easily distracted I became. At the time, I was a freshman, and the distraction got worse as the year moved on. My parents became upset with my performance, and in response, I explained to them that I wanted to fail. When I said this, I was just trying to get out of an uncomfortable situation so I could go play videogames, and I never really gave it much thought after convincing my parents, against their better judgment, to let me experience failure. And then school was over before I knew it. 2 A’s, and everything else… yuck. I was horrified with myself. I felt *terrible*. I made a vow to myself that I would always stay vigilant while I was working and I would actively keep myself from straying. And it was all of my own doing. I was more motivated than others because I allowed myself to fail, allowed myself to see how a little absentmindedness can have serious consequences. I know how it feels, that sinking feeling when you know you could have done something, but didn’t. And I never want to feel that again. That is more than enough motivation for a lifetime of hard work, and as a result, my sophomore year ended with a GPA of 3.9. This motivation eventually extended to more than just work. As a senior, I am more social, more outgoing, and more open than I have ever imagined myself becoming. When I am at parties, I still feel a little awkward, but if I want to be there and I can keep myself entertained, I can have a very good time. When I have the attention of a group of people, I use that as an opportunity for whatever I am scheming. And when I am upset, I raise my voice instead of exploding, and communicate what it is I feel. But had I not had these ailments in my early childhood, I would never have had to struggle as much, to feel as much, or to learn as much as I did. I would be physically and mentally weaker, I would have never allowed myself to fail, and would be less motivated, and a worse person for it. So I am grateful that my childhood was upset, because in one way or another, it has allowed my future to be shaped into anything I can imagine.