



### Early Years

My disability became apparent early in my childhood. In November 1987, my parents received my first preschool report card. My report card had the following 10 preschool activities:

- 1) Shares willingly with classmates
- 2) Follows simple direction
- 3) Takes part in singing and finger plays
- 4) Leaves hands to him/herself
- 5) Is comfortable in the school setting
- 6) Sits quietly on the line
- 7) Is willing to complete projects
- 8) Is confident with new situations
- 9) Communicates well with peers and adults
- 10) Follows school rules



**A photo of Seth Anderson and his mother that appeared in the *Des Moines Register* when he was a child.**

Each activity had two grades, “Satisfactory” and “Needs Improvement”. The teacher checked the “satisfactory” category for one activity but left all of the other categories blank. At the bottom of the report card, the teacher wrote, “I cannot bring myself to the point of marking “Needs Improvement” on each of the above lines – Seth does need our help in all of these areas! Preschool should be a pleasant experience for a young child.” I had many problems interacting with other children at preschool. Rather than playing with them, I would avoid them by going into an adjacent room where the lights were turned off and sit in a corner all by myself. My teachers told my parents they had never had a student do this before and were at a loss on how to handle the situation. My parents were very worried about me and about my future.

The following year, at the age of four, I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and was placed on medication to help me with my hyperactivity and lack of attention. My mom and dad enrolled me in Apple Tree Preschool and things improved a little but I still struggled significantly with social interaction with other children. Some days I would cry for almost 8 hours straight at preschool. On my bad days, the director of the preschool would call my parents to come take me home and my mom and dad would take turns leaving work to pick me up at preschool. My teacher at Apple Tree, Joan Koch, was very patient with me and spent a lot of time helping me because she realized that I was extremely bright and she knew that in spite of my disability, I was trying very hard to improve. I had an intense interest in dinosaurs and my parents would reward me for good behavior at preschool with a new toy dinosaur as a form of positive reinforcement. This helped me make small improvements in my social development.

I continued to struggle daily with social interactions during my elementary school years, but in spite of my social difficulties, I received very good grades. I give a lot of credit to my elementary school teachers, Ms. Jane (Daniels) Hutton, Ms. Pat Brown, Ms. Marta Keiran and Ms. Nancy Jennings for believing in me and going the extra mile by providing me structure and positive reinforcement every day.

When I was in the sixth grade, I was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) by four separate psychologists.

AS is a type of mild autism and approximately 75 percent of persons with AS also have ADHD. I started to make improvements with social skills thanks to Mikala Goulart, a very kind disabilities counselor, who had never heard of AS before. I had a class every week with other students and we worked on social skills. It was through this class that I made many friends. I also had a 504 Americans with Disabilities Accommodation Plan which gave me extended test time and the option to take tests orally due to fine motor skill deficits caused by my AS. My parents also recognized early that they needed to strongly encourage me to be active in school activities such as band and swimming because these activities would help me develop social skills. Thanks to many excellent teachers, therapists, and disabilities counselors in the Des Moines School District and the Johnston School District, I continued to make social improvements in spite of my disability. I also received excellent private counseling from psychologist, Grace Percival.

## **College Struggles**

After graduating from high school, I decided to attend an out-of-state college which was located nine hours from home. This was a very daring venture for someone with a disability such as mine but I was very determined to succeed. I did well academically during my first two years at college. However, during the second semester of my junior year, I hit a major “bump” in the road. I was required to pass a Structural Geology class and 50 percent of the grade was drawing maps by hand. I received an “incomplete” grade for the class because of my fine motor skill deficits and the fact that I did not receive an accommodation for this class from the university (as I was entitled to receive). After receiving some guidance from John Hirschman, a disabilities guidance counselor at Iowa State University, and following writing a four page letter of complaint to the president of the out-of-state university, I finally received my accommodation which came 18 months after starting the class. I finished the class and received a passing grade. I then moved back home and finished six remaining classes at Des Moines Area Community College and Iowa State University. I received excellent disability accommodations and guidance from both John Hirschman and Lynette Plander, ISU, and Hollie Coon, Disability Services Coordinator at DMACC and had an excellent learning experience! In 2009, I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Geology. With a lot of hard work and by persevering through some tough discriminatory circumstances, my dream of achieving a college degree had been accomplished!!

## **Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Referral**

In 2009, Jule Reynolds, Staff Assistant for United States Senator, Tom Harkin, referred me to the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) office. Monty South, an excellent counselor with IVRS, placed me in a customized training program with DNR Field Office 5. Jane Mild, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Coordinator for the IVRS customized training program also worked with me in conjunction with Mr. South. Jane did a fantastic job helping me with resume writing and interviewing skills, something I had difficulty with due to my disability. Monty South helped me tremendously by encouraging me and keeping up on my work experience progress by communicating with me and my supervisors at Field Office 5 during the training program. Monty and Jane both deserve a lot of credit for my success!! I could not have been successful without their assistance!!

Because of the IVRS Customized Training Program, I had the pleasure of working with all of the excellent staff members of Field Office 5 of the DNR. I accompanied each staff member on field investigations and learned about the following environmental program areas: air quality, animal feeding operations, storm water, solid waste, water supply, wastewater and underground storage tanks. Thanks to the guidance, patience, and expertise of Field Office 5 staff, I learned about each program area and gained valuable work experience which helped me gain permanent employment. While working at DNR Field Office 5 as a part of the IVRS Customized Training Program, I was encouraged to test for the EPA Certified Visible Opacity Reader and was certified on October 7, 2009 and have kept my certification current since that time. I also completed 40 hours of Hazardous Materials Technician Training in December 2009 while working at DNR Field Office 5.



**Seth is now an adult and working as an environmental specialist in the Emission Inventory Section of DNR Air Quality in Polk County.**

**He has a B.S. in Geology and completed his coursework at Des Moines Area Community College and Iowa State University.**

**Seth worked with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselor Monty South, M.S., CRC in the Polk County (now West Central) Area Office.**

Each staff member at DNR Field Office 5 voluntarily spent many hours training me and I would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge each person. They are: Jim Stricker, Supervisor (retired), Dennis Appelhons, Kate Bason, Chuck Furrey (retired), Janet Gastineau, Bill Gibbons, Bill Gross, Dave Perry, Ted Peterson and Jeff Theobald. Their assistance, patience and training through the IVRS Customized Training Program were truly instrumental in helping me attain employment. Thank you everyone!!

## **My First Permanent Job!**

On December 13, 2010, I was hired as an environmental specialist in the Emissions Inventory Section of the DNR Air Quality Bureau. My supervisor is Jason Marcel and I work with a great staff consisting of Nick Page, Marnie Stein, and Krysti Mostert. I enjoy the work that I do!!! I know my work experience through the IVRS Customized Training Program with the staff at DNR Field Office 5 was one of the key reasons I was able to obtain this wonderful position at DNR Air Quality!!!

I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Jule Reynolds, US Senator Harkin's Office; Mr. Monty South, IVRS; Ms. Jane Mild, DNR; and all of the exceptional staff members of DNR Field Office 5 for the assistance they gave to me. Without your guidance, patience, training and direction, I would not have been able to obtain my dream job at DNR Air Quality. Words cannot express my gratitude and thankfulness to each and every one of you!!

Based on this positive experience, I am convinced that Iowa leads the nation when it comes to educating, training and employing persons with disabilities!!

Sincerely

Seth Anderson