



Our survival skills become our talents

Martin was a scrawny kid when he was in high school. He wasn't that tall and he wasn't that strong. He didn't excel at any athletic activities and was an average student. By normal high school rules, Martin would be considered a target. A target for bullies, a target for ribbing from other students or even teachers.

But no one laid a finger on Martin. Not ever. And the reason was simple. Everyone liked Martin because he was funny. If anything, people enjoyed having him in their class - students and teachers alike.

Something deep inside Martin's brain knew he couldn't compete on a physical level or academic level so, in order to survive high school, he developed a fantastic sense of humor. Now, as an adult, we refer to Martin's sense of humor as his gift.

I grew up with ADD and thank goodness no one diagnosed it. If they had, I wouldn't have been forced to learn the skills to survive. Unable to focus, I too had to learn how to get through high school. My still-forming mind and personality could have taken me in two different directions - I could have become a victim of my weaknesses or I could figure out a way around it.

At an early age I learned to help others. I had to...I needed their help in return. I learned to talk, develop a charm and a curiosity for what others were doing. It wasn't an option. If I didn't do the reading for my English class because I couldn't focus long enough to get it done (no matter how much my parents yelled at me to concentrate) I'd still need to know what the reading was about for class the next day. So I'd ask someone...and we'd talk about it.

It was because I lacked a natural ability to focus that I learned to spend more time talking about subjects instead of reading about them. I had to. Without it, I'd fail. This survival skill carried me through college also. I rarely cut class in college. If I didn't go to class, I'd have to read the books and that would be the end for me. I spent hours talking to colleagues and professors after class - learning. And thank goodness I did...because I don't think I read a single book in college.



As an adult nobody looks at my skills as survival skills, they look at me and say “what a talent you have.” When we’re young, the things we learn in order to survive become our talents when we’re adults.

Richard Branson suffered from terrible dyslexia as a boy. As an adult, we hail his ability to rally people and solve problems. A “talent” he freely admits was born out of a need to survive as a kid.

The greatest thing any parent or teacher can give a child is the support to solve their own problems. The goal is not to force a kid who struggles to work harder at being like everyone else. The goal is help a kid who struggles to find a work-around for the specific thing that’s holding them back. The skills our children learn to overcome adversity when they are young will become their talents when they are older. And it is these talents that will invent and build the products and companies that will help and inspire the rest of us when they’re older.