



# **FROM TORMENT TO TRIUMPH**

My Journey from Failing to the Honour Roll

# From Torment to Triumph

## By Matthew Turton

**“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUMBLING BLOCKS AND STEPPING STONES IS HOW YOU USE THEM.” – UNKNOWN**

As a kid growing up with three learning disabilities, failure was no stranger to me. My parents did their best to hide it and shelter me, but I knew—deep down, I knew I was a failure. It didn’t matter that everyone else thought I was smart and intelligent; I knew I was different. When I was four years old, I refused to write my name like everyone else who’d put their names on their craft so the Sunday school teacher would know whose it was. When my mom asked about it, I told her, “Don’t worry, Mom, she knows that the only one without a name on it is mine!”



MATTHEW TURTON, VP OF BREAKTHROUGHS, AS A CHILD

Just imagine how it would feel to be a 9-year-old boy, sitting at your desk. No matter how hard you try, you can’t write and you can’t focus. As a little kid, I thought something was wrong with my pencil because the words just wouldn’t pour out like they did for the other kids. It didn’t take long to realize my pencil wasn’t the problem. As adults, we’re pretty good at avoiding situations that make us look bad; but as a child, your weaknesses are easily exposed when you can’t keep up with the rest of the class. Every child expects to be successful when he starts school. Some become withdrawn, while others act out when they have learning disabilities that prevent them from succeeding.

It was obvious from a young age that my brother and I wouldn’t do well in a traditional classroom. According to a local mental health hospital, I was the worst case of ADHD they had ever seen. I also had dysgraphia, which made writing extremely difficult to the point of physical pain. My brother had five diagnoses and two psychologists who predicted that he would never read, write, or have a job. My mother knew that unless we dramatically changed, neither one of us would be able to function in the world, so she decided to homeschool us. Despite her background as a teacher and a psychiatric nurse, homeschooling my brother and I was not an easy task because neither of us was able to

concentrate. Every night she would pray for guidance about how to help us succeed in life. Her faith and determination that we would have a better future gave her courage and patience to persist.

With the last of my brother's diagnoses and being told there was no existing help for our extreme challenges other than medication, my mother launched into 7 years of research looking for answers, traveling North America, and consulting and training with doctors, ground-breaking specialists, and experts, spending thousands of dollars attempting to help us. We did every program you can imagine (and some you can't). My dad took a second job, and mom picked up a part-time job to fund the research. She read every night for 1-3 hours for 7 years. When I was ready to give up after another failure, she just pressed on to find the next piece to our puzzle.

Even though I couldn't write, I was a ferocious reader. Every week I would get ten new books from the library. I picked up a book from the shelf one day, and after reading several chapters, I went to find Mom and said, "Mom, I have ADHD."



**"Thanks to Breakthroughs my son no longer struggles in reading"**

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Thanks to Breakthroughs my son no longer struggles in reading, organization and other brain skills. We are looking forward to a successful high school career!

**Deanna Koller**

Mother of Sebastian (age 14)

It was devastating that at the age of 15, it would take me more than an hour to write 3 sentences with enormous effort. I didn't have the skill to organize my thinking to get the words on paper, even though I was very gifted in other areas. Something as simple as cleaning up my room was a big challenge. It was like telling a blind person, "Just open your eyes and look around." If you don't have

the skill, you just can't do it. Every day my mom would practice with me to specifically target and develop the parts of my brain that were responsible for the Dysgraphia and Expressive Language Disorder (my inability to write). It required a lot of patience, determination, and persistence on both our parts.

There are moments in life that seem frozen in time—your first bike, your first kiss, your wedding, holding your first child, and other such events. January 25, 1999, was a momentous day in my life! That day I wrote a full page in 15 minutes. That day I had my breakthrough! Our home exploded with celebration, tears, and relief. It had happened! I could do it! The last 7 years of dedication had finally paid off. It was worth it after all!



MATTHEW WITH MOTHER PAULINE AND BROTHER MICHAEL

Now that I could write, my parents signed me up for the second semester, and I joined the tenth grade class without the teachers knowing anything about my past learning challenges. I didn't want to just squeak by and find out later that they were just passing me along. It was hard work, but I got 72% and 74%. We had a pizza party to celebrate!

Years earlier, when I was 11, Mom and I had spent an exhausting day looking for new pants. After an unsuccessful shopping trip, my mom decided to splurge and take me out for lunch. She asked

me if I had any idea what I wanted to do when I grew up. Just thinking about that moment still chokes me up. I looked at her and I said, “Mom, I want to do what you do, because someone needs to tell the kids they’re not stupid.”

And so my life path was set. It took 7 years of persistent practice before I was able to control my focus. At first I did it by squeezing a ball in my pocket, but later I was able to attend 3-hour Psychology lectures at a university and run our company—without the ball. I learned to develop the parts of the brain that were responsible for the Dysgraphia and Expressive Language Disorder (the inability to write), and now I receive 85 to 98% in my writing assignments at the University of Waterloo. As the Vice President of Breakthroughs, I am doing exactly what I had envisioned as an 11-year-old boy: I show children that they are not dumb and that they can succeed. I speak at teacher conferences and help parents understand that every child can succeed by developing the right brain skills.



**“He started off two grades behind his classmates and after 18 months he was caught up.”**

We have seen great changes in our son’s academics and behaviour beyond regular maturity. The special education and classroom teachers have both said they have never seen any student advance so much in such a short time. He started off two grades behind his classmates and after 18 months he was caught up. Next year he will no longer be in a modified program for reading and writing at school. Thanks Breakthroughs.

**Denise Coffey**

Mother of Paul (age 9)

## There are five important lessons I learned on my journey that I'd like to share with you:

### 1. IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT:

Some things in life we have no control over. Blaming yourself or God keeps you focused on the problem. Instead, you need to shift your focus to the solution. It is what it is, so what are you going to do about it?

### 2. SOME PEOPLE MAY NOT GET IT:

We see the world through the functioning of our own brains and assume that others think the same. Don't assume your client, spouse, or child has the same skills you do. Something you find easy might be soul-crushingly difficult for them.



**“Matthew was the first person I have ever met that explained to me in his own words, exactly how I was feeling about learning.”**

When I got the results of my Assessment I finally, for the first time in my life, understood why I had always struggled with learning. A short time after, I began my sessions. I was told that it would take some time before I would begin to see results. Within a few months I started to see some big changes in my reading and maintaining material that I was studying. Because of these small results, it really pushed me to continue with Breakthroughs. This is not just a place where they help to train your brain, they make you feel important. I feel like I have a second family with Breakthroughs. I am never pushed beyond what I can handle; and because of that, it really does drive me to want to complete this program and come out successful. And, I know that I will.

**Nekoda Campbell**

Bus Driver

### **3. YOUR ABILITIES DON'T DEFINE WHO YOU ARE:**

Despite a high IQ, excellent verbal skills, and a psych assessment placing me in the gifted range, every time an assignment or test required writing it was a guaranteed "F." I wasn't dumb, but I was unable to express my intelligence in the way that society expects. We all have strengths and weaknesses—acknowledge both, but don't accept your weakness as permanent.

### **4. TRYING HARDER DOESN'T ALWAYS HELP:**

It doesn't matter how hard you try to lift 200 pounds—it's probably not going to happen. In fact, you'll probably snap like a twig. If your skill is too weak to be successful in an area, just trying harder isn't going to help. You may need to look at the problem from a different perspective. Or you may need to develop strength by starting with less weight and gradually build your muscles.

### **5. FIND THE REAL CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM:**

Instead of looking for ways to avoid an area of weakness, tackle it head on. Discover what level you can successfully function at and develop the underlying skills. For example, when you are trying to learn the multiplication tables, weak memory skills may be the reason it's difficult. Therefore they need to be developed first. You will see far better growth and development exercising your brain at the level of success than at the point of failure.

Your brain is incredible! Just the fact that you are reading these words is lighting up vast portions of your brain. Science has finally caught up to the point where we can literally watch our brains grow, change, and develop. And the best part is that it doesn't have to take you nearly as long as it took me. Every brain has areas of strength and weakness. What are you going to do with your weaknesses? Will they be stumbling blocks or stepping stones? The choice is up to you!

**If you or your child is struggling to learn,  
know that change and success are possible.  
I encourage you to take action.  
Don't wait!**

Chronic failure dramatically affects self-esteem, produces behavioral problems, and causes resistance to education. For more information about how you can get your breakthrough, visit [www.GetYourBreakthrough.com/warning-signs](http://www.GetYourBreakthrough.com/warning-signs)

**AND GET YOUR FREE COPY OF THE WARNING SIGNS CHECKLIST.**

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## About the Author



As a child who struggled to overcome learning disabilities himself, Matthew Turton always knew he wanted to help other children learn that they weren't dumb. Now an Educational Therapist and Vice President of Breakthroughs in Learning & Careers, he has worked over 15,000 hours with children and adults with learning disabilities. He shares the experience and wealth of knowledge he has gained during his journey as conference speaker and workshop leader.

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