

Welcome. My name is Natalie Phelps Tate

I think it might give you added perspective if I begin by telling you a little of my history as a student, and later as an educator, with Learning Disabilities. When I was six years old, out of the blue, I had a cerebral aneurysm which left me without any expressive speech, right-side paralysis, two visual field cuts and acute aphasia.

After my recovery from surgery, the hospital recommended indefinite institutionalization in a rehabilitation center. My prognosis for a normal life was grim. My parents weren't willing to give up without a fight and believed that my home environment could stimulate memory and recovery. They brought me home.

My parents took me to Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis for intellectual diagnostic testing because CID was adept at evaluating non-verbal children. Part way through the testing, CID's director, Jean Moog, came into the cubicle to observe. That afternoon she offered to adapt a World War One head-injury therapy to my needs and offered me a place in their kindergarten. It was a miracle. I spent several years at CID regaining my speech.

The worst of my paralysis responded to extensive physical therapy, but there had been irreversible damage to the language sections of my brain. In spite of intense work in a variety of remedial reading programs, I was not able to learn to read anywhere close to my grade level and some of the aphasia remains. I had "acquired" a severe learning disability.

I went on to attend Churchill Center & School (formerly Churchill School), an excellent remedial program for students with learning disabilities, also in St. Louis, Missouri.

My testing in middle school indicated that I would be lucky to graduate with a basic Certificate of Completion and that my parents had better investigate vocational training. Any notion of college was a joke.

Somewhere along the line I had decided that I wanted to be a psychologist and that required college, and a good one, as a first step to graduate school. By eighth grade, which I attended at Brehm Preparatory School, for students with learning disabilities, in Carbondale, Illinois, I had begun to develop strategies to make this goal attainable. Brehm taught me all kinds of strategies: compensation strategies, advocacy strategies, adaptive technological strategies, interpersonal strategies, whatever it took to learn the way my damaged brain needed to learn. And many of these strategies ultimately worked.

In sophomore year I decided to take a risk and leave the supportive environment of "special" schools in order to build a resume for college and I enrolled in my local high school, Horton Watkins in Ladue, Missouri. The decision proved a good one. The support and teachers were amazing and I flourished—of course with hard work.

Only a year behind my chronological class, I graduated from my local high school as a member of The National Honor Society with a 3.75 GPA, and was accepted early admissions by my first choice college, Bates College in Maine. Bates ranked as one of the top 20 liberal arts colleges in the country. I made Dean's List my freshman year and graduated in four years. Bates had a short-term semester in April and May. While many fellow students "played" during their free short-terms, I interned at my former boarding school for students with learning disabilities. That led to my choice of graduate programs.



Through my four years at Bates I had fallen in love with the state of Maine and I desperately needed a break from academics and a chance to recharge my batteries. I loved the weather and I adored the cold and beautiful white snow. I found a refurbished 1740s ferry inn on the Kennebec River and spent a magical year with my horses, dog and cat.

The following spring, I applied to grad school at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale in the Educational Psychology Department and was accepted. I started grad school January of 2002. In the summer of 2006, I completed my Master's in Educational Psychology, with an emphasis in learning disabilities, at the University of Illinois at Carbondale. I also worked at Brehm Preparatory School as a Transition Specialist Intern, evaluating the academic, social and emotional potential of our graduating students and coaching the students and their parents how to make the most appropriate post-secondary choice: vocational, two-year, or four-year college. After earning my degree, I taught psychology and career development classes at John A. Logan College in Carterville, IL.

I am presently director of Individual Learning Solutions Inc., (www.individuallearningsolutions.org or www.ilsinc.org) a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing services to and “coaching” students with learning challenges and their families. Our mission is to empower students with a wide spectrum of learning challenges to reach their full academic, social, and emotional potential by offering and coordinating of a variety of services. Our services include coaching, counseling, tutoring, family counseling, support groups, speech and language therapy, reading programs, educating siblings and parents about the child's learning challenges, school selection, post-secondary and career advising, and equine therapy.

We promote family wellness by addressing the needs of the whole “special” family and coordinating disparate services. Individual Learning Solutions envisions its role as a personal advocate from initial diagnosis through career selection. ILS can provide or coordinate the multitude of services students require throughout their academic career. We share strategies and knowledge with the special needs community through research, publications, and presentations. I married in 2011 and had my son, Harrison in 2012.

In many ways I have reached the goals I dreamed of so many years ago. It has been a long, but always rewarding journey.