

# PUZZLE PIECES

Spring 2001



**Notes from the Director  
Newsletter Introduction  
Meryl Lipton, M.D., Ph.D.**

Are there really more children with learning disabilities now or are the children the same but our expectations different?

Is there some toxin that is causing the increase in neurobehavioral disorders? Are affluent people trying to get the easy way out for their children?

These are but a few of the many questions I am regularly asked. Parents who bring their children to see me wonder about the increased number of children being diagnosed with learning problems. Teachers, principals and school administrators also wonder why there are more special needs children to educate.

There are many answers to these questions. Some key one's include increased awareness, improved diagnostic capabilities, changes in societal expectations and more.

One of the wiser responses to this important set of questions comes from Arthur Levine. Let us know what you think after reading his thoughtful essay. ■



## Tomorrow's Education, Made to Measure

*Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College,  
Columbia University*

A growing number of America's children are being identified as having learning disabilities that affect their ability to use written or spoken language. In 1987, a federal task force concluded that approximately 5 to 10 percent of the population had this sort of condition. Today about one out of every eight school children (a little more than 12 percent) is enrolled in programs for the learning disabled, and the rate of participation is increasing.

Between 1980 and 1998, the number of students enrolled in special education in New York City more than doubled. In Greenwich, Conn., 19.8 percent of students are learning disabled. And the Dalton School in New York City found that 36 percent of its kindergartners had learning problems.

Critics use these statistics to charge that the "learning disabled" label has become a fad, a classification that is being over-applied.

They complain about the expense. Special education costs between two and three times the amount of traditional programs.

They cite a rising tide of litigation as parents battle with schools to get their children proper support.

They criticize the unfairness of such programs, since affluent families are more likely than less wealthy ones to take advantage of accommodations for the learning disabled, like time extensions on standardized tests.

And critics charge that mainstreaming of learning disabled students the trend toward including them in traditional classes creates disruption.

The critics are wrong. What we are witnessing is not a fad, which will pass or whose excesses will be corrected. We are witnessing the start of a revolution that will transform American education forever. It is part of a revolution we are undergoing in every other aspect of American life.

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### ***Students with learning problems are revolutionizing our schools***

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The United States is shifting from an industrial society to an information society. Among other things, this means there is less emphasis on mass production and more customization of products and services.

We can see these changes in retailing, for example. In the clothing business, stores are offering their customers personal shoppers to assist them in creating wardrobes, traditional off-the-rack shops are promising customized clothing built to the body of the shopper, and online software allows a shopper to create a computer scan of his or her body and then use that image to customize 25,000 fashion design details into purchasable clothing. Web sites even permit shoppers to examine, in fine detail, the button design, stitching and fabric weave of brand-name clothing.

The increase in the number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities is very much part of this same phenomenon. Our school system was created for an industrial society and resembles an assembly line. Students are educated by age, in batches of 25 to 30. They study for common periods of time, and after completing a specified number of courses, they are awarded diplomas. It is a notion of

# Made to Measure

(continued from front cover)

education dictated by seat time. Teaching is the activity that occurs during the time when students are in their chairs.

The expectation is that the typical child at any age can master the material taught in the traditional 180-day school year. Those who are capable of mastering the material more quickly or more deeply are classified as gifted. Those who are unable to learn it as speedily or in the same fashion as their classmates are said to have learning disabilities. In this sense, special education, except for the gifted, is regarded as a deficiency on the part of a child.

In an information society, this model of education works far less well than it once did. Indeed, in the years to come, the educational system may become, by necessity, increasingly individualized. First, our children are diverse in their abilities, so we need a more varied curriculum. Second, through advances in brain research, we are discovering how individuals actually learn, and this will allow us to develop the educational program each child needs. Third, new technologies that provide different pedagogies and learning materials are burgeoning.

We are heading to an era in which schooling will change profoundly. The teacher will not be the talking head at the front of the classroom, but the expert on students' learning styles, the educational equivalent of a medical doctor. Children will no longer be grouped by age. Each student will advance at his or her own pace in each subject area through individualized tutorials, student-centered group learning and a cornucopia of new technology and software.

Research has long documented a variety of learning styles, but as we continue to discover more about the brain, a growing proportion of students are likely to be diagnosed as learning disabled. Eventually, the nomenclature will change, and we will recognize so-called disabilities for what they really are differences in how people learn. Rather than call them learning disabilities, we will call them learning differences.

At the moment, the old education system is dying and a new system is being born. For those of us living through the change, it is easier to see what we are losing than what is emerging a system of customized education for each of our children.

We must make the transition as short and as painless as possible. The largest mistake we can make is to cling unquestioningly to the existing model of schooling. We need a new vision of education one that recognizes the unique way every student learns. ■

# The Pearl Rieger Initiative



Rush Neurobehavioral Center has launched a new and exciting program called the Pearl Rieger Initiative. Named for renowned psycho-educational diagnostician and founding member of RNBC, this program will train professionals under Mrs. Rieger's supervision to become preeminent leaders in the field of neurobehavioral disorders.

Mrs. Rieger received her bachelor's degree in speech and language pathology and audiology from the University of Michigan. She went on to receive a master's degree in educational psychology, psychoeducational diagnostics, and language and learning disabilities from the University of Chicago. She has over thirty years of experience as a psychoeducational diagnostician, including supervising learning disabilities testing at the University of Chicago and Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center,

among other institutions. She is a member of many professional organizations, including the Council for Exceptional Children and the Learning Disabilities Association.

Mrs. Rieger is the consummate professional who makes children feel at home, allowing for the most accurate evaluation to take place. She expertly integrates the child's assessment and then clearly describes the child's strengths and weaknesses. Her sensitive and effective communications to parents allow them to understand their child's learning issues and feel good about themselves and their child. She guides the child, their parents and teachers toward creating school and home environments which optimize the child's cognitive and social/emotional growth.

The goal of the Pearl Rieger Initiative is to enhance the knowledge and abilities of professionals in the diagnosis and management of childhood learning disabilities.

The results of this initiative will enable Rush Neurobehavioral Center to help perpetuate Pearl Rieger's knowledge, evaluation methods and styles of communication and treatment to other professionals who will help children of future generations.

For more information on the Pearl Rieger Initiative or if you wish to make a contribution to support this program, please call (847)933-9339 x224. ■



*Founded in 1997, the Rush Neurobehavioral Center is a unique multidisciplinary team committed to serving the medical, psychological and educational needs of children with neurobehavioral problems with a special emphasis on children with social learning disorders. The center develops innovative approaches for diagnosing and treating these children. It conducts research on pediatric neurological and neuropsychological disorders and shares the knowledge acquired through the center's diverse activities with lay and professional communities.*

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## Learning Disorders and Disorders of the Self in Children and Adolescents



We are pleased to announce the release of a new publication, *Learning Disorders and Disorders of the Self in Children and Adolescents* by RNBC staff member, Joseph Palombo. Please join us Thursday, October 4, 2001 at a book signing-open house to meet author Joseph Palombo. Mr. Palombo will also discuss his book at a RNBC Ground Rounds presentation on Wednesday, October 10, 2001. For more information on either of these events, call (847) 933-9339 x222. The following is a release from publisher, W.W. Norton:

The relationship between learning disorders and the development of the self is complex. However, clinicians who work with children with learning disorders must have a way to think about this relationship if they are truly to be of help. This book presents a theoretically integrated conceptual framework, based on psychoanalytic self psychology, to understand and treat children and adolescents whose development has been derailed by learning disorders. It addresses the concerns of two audiences: psychotherapists who treat children and adolescents with learning disorders, and professionals, such as neuropsychologists, clinical and school psychologists, and learning-disability specialists, who are involved in the assessment and remediation of children's learning disorders.

Taking as his starting point the principle that all psychopathology must be understood from a developmental perspective, Palombo conceptualizes disorders of the self as occurring at the intersection between the context within which the child is raised and the neuropsychological strengths and weaknesses he or she brings to that context. The desire for a cohesive sense of self and coherent self-narrative is a central motive organizing the child's development. When a child has a learning disorder and the relationship between the child's context and neuropsychological deficits is out of balance, the effects are seen in school performance, relationships, sense of self, and self-narrative.

To illustrate his conceptualization, Palombo uses five common learning disorders: dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, executive dysfunction disorder, nonverbal learning disability, and Asperger's disorder. The probable effects of each disorder on development of the self are described, along with extensive case illustrations. The author then discusses treatment issues, including how and when to recommend psychotherapy, how to think about the treatment process, and how to work with the parents of a child with a learning disorder.

It is inevitable that child therapists will see children and adolescents with learning disorders and that learning-disability specialists will encounter children whose self and relationships have been shaped by neurological deficits. With this interdisciplinary book in hand, these professionals will be able to understand and treat children with these complex disorders.

**About the author:** Joseph Palombo is founding dean and faculty member of the Institute for Clinical Social Work, Chicago, faculty member of the Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Therapy Program, Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, and research coordinator, Rush Neurobehavioral Center, Rush Children's Hospital, and the Department of Pediatrics, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, Chicago.

Mr. Palombo received an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Humane Letters from the Institute for Clinical Social Work for his contributions to the field of clinical social work. He will be presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award, by the National Membership Committee on Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, at its annual conference, which will be meeting in Chicago, in March 2002. The award is in recognition of "a lifetime of achievement in clinical social work, particularly the interface of clinical social work and psychoanalysis."

**Scheduled to be released and will be available in stores and through the RNBC Resource Center this September.**

## Accepting Myself: Moving Through the Five Stages of Loss

When parents learn their child has a disability, they often react to it as a death. Although the child is alive, certain hopes, dreams, and ambitions are dead. In order to help their child, parents must grieve, rage, and finally move toward acceptance. This process is mirrored in the person with the disability. Like his/her parents, the person with the disability must find a way to accept his/her unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. The person with the disability must come to the fact that his/her life may never be ordinary, but it may be extraordinary.

I officially learned I had learning disabilities when I was ten, almost eleven. I sat on my bed while my parents talked to me about the diagnosis, feeling bewildered and depressed. What was a learning disability? Did it mean I'd never have friends or ride a bike or do well in math? All I knew was something inside me was wrong forever. There was no denial at first. I think most kids with learning disabilities know something about them is different. I knew because I was clumsy, and couldn't play sports well. I knew because I struggled to learn how to write and do math. I knew because I had no friends, and stood on the fringe of groups, longing to step inside the circle instead of always being out in the cold. Hearing it called a learning disability just gave the difference a name, and a feeling it was lodged inside me, eating at my heart and soul.

After knowledge came grief—a deep empty grief. I longed to expel the learning disability, to rid myself of the difference. I spent many years mourning for myself. I'd see something I'd want to do, and would rage at my own impotence, and grieve at my failure. I envied others, and kept thinking if I tried hard enough or found the magic formula, I could be "normal" too. I tried for many years. I tried to do the dance steps I couldn't learn. I tried out for the auditions I never passed. I tried to befriend people who found me strange. And at each new failure, I would mourn and withdraw more and more until the anger and grief merged to become depression. Bargaining rose from the despair of depression. I needed to believe in a higher power, someone who could protect and help me. Every night, I'd pray, "Dear God—please make these learning disabilities go away. Please let me be like everyone else." But nothing happened. I prayed on every birthday candle, every wishbone, every star. Still, the learning disabilities remained.

I raged, cried, and mourned for the loss of a part of myself I had never known. Finally, I turned to denial.

I was sure I had been mis-diagnosed, that the doctors were wrong. After all, in high school, I was doing better. I had a few friends, my grades were excellent, and while my coordination and visual/motor skills were still not great, I functioned well in day to day life.

Still, a part of me always knew the learning disabilities were there. I didn't try out for sports teams or for cheerleading, knowing I would never make the grade. I still felt my hold on academics and friends was tenuous, and I didn't know how to interpret success any more than I had interpreted failure.

Success and failure were mysteries to me. Since I generally tried hard and had a good attitude, I wasn't sure why the same methods that brought me negative feedback in middle school were now working in high school. When I went to college, social and academic problems returned, and I was equally mystified and frustrated by this new turn of events. Academic problems disappeared as I adjusted to new expectations, but I still couldn't fathom how I contributed to my own successes and failures. Life seemed random and often punitive, and this added to my



*(continued on inside back page)*

# Partnership with the Chicago Public Library

RNBC's pilot project: The underlying focus of this partnership is that with information and promotion of better understanding, children with neurobehavioral disorders will benefit from earlier diagnosis and improved outcomes.

## Edgewater Branch Speaker Series

**Tuesday, May 8, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Susan Hall will present "Straight Talk About Reading." Susan is co-author of a parenting book called *Straight Talk About Reading*.

**Tuesday, June 12, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Airing of RNBC's film, "A Celebration of Differences." Introduced by Ceil Rothbart, RNBC Advisory Board Member, parent and Executive Producer of this award winning film.

**Tuesday, July 10, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Gail J. Connelly, M.S., CCC, Reading Resource Coordinator at The Latin School of Chicago. Learning disabilities specialist, multisensory structured language tutor, speech-language pathologist will present information on *Summer Reading Issues*, intervention strategies for parents to use in the home to remediate reading difficulties and perpetuate good reading habits over the summer, transitioning from school to summer break and back to school, etc.

**Tuesday, August 14, 2001 @ 4:15PM**

Airing of Video – to be announced

**Tuesday, September 11, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Michael F. Woodin, Ph.D. Dr. Woodin specializes in pediatric neuropsychology and cognitive development. He has a background in teaching. Dr. Woodin will present information on general learning and behavioral problems.

**Tuesday, October 9, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Mark S. Atkins, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry, Director of Psychology Training, Institute for Juvenile Research, University of Illinois at Chicago. Dr. Atkins will present information on behavioral approaches and interventions for children with ADHD. He will review their psychosocial needs discuss psychosocial treatment of ADHD in children. The focus of this discussion will be the role parents play with ADHD children.

**Tuesday, November 13, 2001 @ 4:15 PM**

Geneva M. Oatman of the Chicago Public Schools Office of Specialized Services will present information on the IEP process. She will also discuss programs and services available through the Chicago Public Schools.

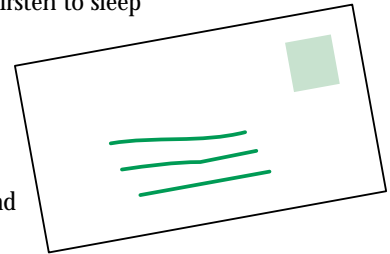
**For detailed information on upcoming events, RNBC partnerships or other RNBC outreach and education programs, call (847) 933-9339 x222 or x224.**



# Mailbag

Kirsten's Angel...a heavenly e-mail received from a patient's mother

Dr. Lipton, I was putting Kirsten to sleep last night. I asked her to imagine walking through the snow in the forest to her very own cabin. Inside the cabin was an angel that she could talk to and have a cup of tea with. We were describing the tea and the angel. I asked her to tell me what her angel looked like. Kirsten said, "She has white wings and a white dress, glittery shoes and a DR. LIPTON SMILE."



A letter received by a family who wishes to remain anonymous. This family has since become very involved in volunteering for outreach and education programs and in the RNBC Resource Center. It is because of volunteers like this family that we are able to continue to reach thousands of children, families, teachers and other professionals each year.



Our first experience with RNBC was a short clip of the "Celebration" videotape, which we saw on CBS. What a revelation! People expressing the experiences and frustrations that we have seen our daughter go through nearly all her life. Everyone (young and old alike) should view this videotape. Even those who do not have a learning disability would benefit from viewing this tape. They may have a better understanding of what others are experiencing.

This video has become very near and dear to us as parents since our only child has been struggling with a learning disability herself. Unfortunately, our daughter is old enough that her first signs of the learning disability occurred years before this problem was widely recognized. Resources such as RNBC were simply not available.

RNBC has a small library with a wealth of information on all types of learning disabilities, as well as a staff of caring professionals who are very knowledgeable and are more than willing to guide you. Their positive attitudes is if we don't have the information at our fingertips, we'll get it.

Our experience with RNBC convinced us that anyone who suspects that they or someone they love is in need of learning disability guidance, should take advantage of this valuable resource. RNBC will certainly do their best to help.

We would like to say "THANK YOU" to RNBC and those who have given their time and professional advice in guiding our daughter. You have given her hope for a much brighter future. ■

# CENTER SPOTLIGHT

**Michael F. Woodin, Ph.D.**, pediatric neuropsychologist, joined the RNBC family in September 2001. Dr. Woodin has a wide background in neuropsychology, school psychology, and education. He has held a variety of positions, including his current post in pediatric neuropsychology at the Rush Neurobehavioral Center as well as an elementary and high school teacher, special education administrator, school psychologist, associate diagnostic clinic director, university instructor and master teacher, and as an educational and reading publishing consultant. Dr. Woodin holds a B.A. in Education and Psychology from College of Saint Rose. He did Advanced Graduate Studies in Clinical/Developmental Psychology at Tufts University. Dr. Woodin earned a M.A. in School Psychology and a Ph.D. in Clinical Neuropsychology and School Psychology from Ball State University. He served as a Predoctoral Intern in Pediatric Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, and as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Pediatric Neuropsychology at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.



Dr. Woodin  
with patient "David"

Dr. Woodin conducts research in the areas of neuropsychology, nonverbal learning disabilities, attention, memory, intelligence, the behavioral phenotype of those with the 22q11.2 chromosomal deletion including Velocardiofacial Syndrome, behavioral genetics, educational interventions, assessing children with anxiety disorders, psychosocial skills, learning disabilities, gifted learning disabilities, and ADHD. He has published multiple articles in professional journals across the fields of medicine, psychology, and education. In addition, he has conducted many formal presentations at the Annual conferences of such groups as the International Neuropsychological Society, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American Society of Human Genetics, the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the International Dyslexia Association, and the Council for Exceptional Children.

Dr. Woodin's clinical goal is to use his background in neuropsychology, school psychology, and education to best assist children, families, and professionals in the process of breaking free from the captivity and barriers associated with neurobehavioral disorders and learning differences. By increasing such knowledge and offering pertinent recommendations, he hopes that a child's unique assets, deficits, and learning style can be better understood and harnessed to help them achieve excellence, growth, and success in the areas of cognitive ability, thinking skills, attention, achievement, prosocial behaviors, and personal adjustment.

**Barbara J. Gaffen** has been an integral member of the RNBC family since June, 1996. Barbara served as sole chairwoman for our inaugural benefit, which was held on November 13, 1997 at the Drake Hotel in Chicago. The proposed attendance for the event was 230 people and the monetary goal for the evening was a projected \$100,000. Through her tremendous efforts, the benefit, which honored Mrs. Pearl Rieger and Dr. Steven Nowicki, was attended by 500 people and raised a total of \$260,000.



Needless to say, RNBC's first Benefit was a huge success. We were thrilled when Barbara agreed to act as chairwoman for our second annual Benefit which was held on November 5, 1998 at the Drake Hotel in Chicago. Honorees, Dr. Doris Johnson and Mr. Jack Sandner spoke to an audience of 325 people and \$300,000 was raised for the center that evening. Barbara had again shown her tremendous strengths and talents as a fundraiser. "Barbara has the ability to lead while encouraging input from committee members and supporting innovative ideas. She has a wide vision, an open mind and is always conscious that her ultimate goal is to fundraise and educate." states fellow board member, Ceil Rothbart. In 1998, Barbara agreed to chair the Center's third Benefit. This time, she teamed with fellow advisory board member and friend, Linda Jacobs. To accommodate our growing attendance, the November 18, 1999 benefit moved to a larger room at The Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago. Mr. Bill Jacobs and Dr. Martha Denckla were honored that evening with an attendance of 350 and a sum of \$360,000 was raised for RNBC. Together, Barbara and Linda co-chaired another successful event. Under Barbara's direction, the Rush Neurobehavioral Center Annual Benefit has become the most significant means of support and an event that hundreds of people look forward to every year.

Barbara holds a B.A. in Finance from Indiana University and a J.D from Loyola University School of Law. Barbara is the President of Property Tax Consultants, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in real estate tax reductions throughout Illinois. Her company's areas of expertise include commercial, industrial, investment and special use properties; and "upper bracket" single-family homes. Barbara is also President of Northbrook based Prime Property Investors, Ltd, a real estate investment, development, and brokerage firm. She is a member of the National, Illinois and Chicago Association of Realtors She has published numerous articles, and appeared on local television and radio shows, on the subject of real estate investment and assessments.

As a member of the Advisory Board of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center, we applaud her and thank her for her hard work and dedication. "My continued commitment" says Barbara, "comes from my need to help provide services to the children who are in need but may be unable to receive them. I just want to help make a difference".

Barbara lives in Northbrook, Illinois, with her husband Arnold and two children, Rachel and Jordan. ■

# RNBC's 4th Annual Benefit Dinner

...a glowing success!

RNBC's fourth annual benefit dinner which was held on November 16, 2000 was a great success. **Dr. Michael Breen**, Medical Editor, WBBM-TV Chicago, was our Master of Ceremonies for the evening. Dr. Breen's interest and enthusiasm helped to make the evening a powerful and dynamic event.

**Dr. Stephen Nowicki, Jr.**, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Psychology, Emory University was awarded the Year 2000 Pearl H. Rieger Award. This award pays tribute to one individual each year who has made a significant difference in the lives of children with neurobehavioral issues. **Paul G. Vallas**, Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools, was awarded the Year 2000 Living Proof Award for overcoming his own early childhood issues which effected his learning.



Stephen Nowicki, Jr., Ph.D., and Pearl H. Rieger, M.A.



Paul G. Vallas, and Meryl E. Lipton, M.D., Ph.D.

Ms. **Abby O'Neil**, RNBC Advisory Board Member and founder of the RNBC Resource Library and Mr. **Sam Bezanis** of Sam Bezanis, Ltd., premier event planner for over 40 years in Chicago, co-chaired the event. Together, these two extraordinary individuals made our 4th annual gala a huge success. Over 400 people attended the benefit dinner which brought in more than \$325,000. Both Abby and Sam have agreed to co-chair **RNBC's Fifth Annual Benefit Dinner** scheduled to take place on **Wednesday, October 24, 2001** at 6:00 PM at The Four Seasons

Hotel in Chicago. Mr. **Irving B. Harris**, Chairman of The Harris Foundation, will be awarded the Year 2001 Pearl H. Rieger Award for his dedication as a philanthropist in supporting educational and clinical programs for children with neurobehavioral disorders. The 2001 Living Proof Award recipient will be announced soon. Save the date of October 24, 2001 and be a part of our 5th annual event. ■

*"A Celebration of Differences" is now available on Amazon.com. At that web site, click on videos, type in "A Celebration of Differences," and hit "go."*

## Upcoming Events

April 19-April 21: *Fifth Annual Professional Symposium on Nonverbal Learning Disorders*, sponsored by NLDA, Monterey, California

Fri., May 11: *Meryl Lipton, M.D., Ph.D. and Martina Eovaldi, Ph.D., LMFT present "Families with Neurobehavioral Difficulties" at the Family Institute, Evanston, IL*

Tues., May 15: *Professionals in Learning Disabilities Annual Dinner. Speaker- Ceil Rothbart, RNBC Advisory Board Member, parent and Executive Producer of "A Celebration of Differences"*

Tues., May 29, 6:00 PM: *RNBC Advisory Board meeting*

Sat., August 4: *Bridges to Learning Conference; Key Note Speaker Dr. Meryl Lipton, "Nonverbal Learning Disability—A Lack of Social Know-How," Boise, Idaho*

Thurs., October 4: *Open House and book signing by author Joe Palombo*

Wed., October 10, 12:30-1:30 PM: *Joe Palombo presents at RNBC Grand Rounds, Rush North Shore Medical Center, Sharfstein Auditorium, Skokie, IL*

Wed., October 24, 6 PM: *RNBC's 5th Annual Benefit Dinner, The Four Seasons Hotel*

Date, location and speakers—to be announced: *RNBC Fall Conference-Interventions for social-emotional learning disabilities.*

## Social Skills Groups

Twenty percent of children have brain-based learning disorders. Many of these children have social and emotional learning disorders or other neurobehavioral issues which effect ability to read nonverbal communication such as facial expression, body language, and other social cues. Many of these children have a difficult time developing friendships and maintaining relationships because of their difficulties with processing social and emotional information. These deficits prevent these children from functioning in normal social settings. Lacking these essential life experiences and skills, these children and their parents face extraordinary difficulties with routine activities and interpersonal interactions.

The staff of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center is committed to teaching "the language of social success" to children and educating and supporting their parents and families. Social skills groups and parent training, education and support groups are available throughout the year at RNBC. To learn more about these groups, how to have your child screened and placed, or for additional program information, please call Kate at (847) 933-9339, x222.



# MASTER PIECE

## The Grand Slam

Tracy Wertheimer

The Chicago Cubs have won the hearts of many baseball fans even though their spirit has been tested continuously. An average team, they have struggled for years. Like the Cubs, my learning disability has tested my spirit. The Cubs refuse to give up their athletic hopes, and I refuse to let my learning disability interfere with my fight for success. I have learned the qualities of a winner: patience, persistence, and self-advocacy. My fans are my family, teachers, and friends. Like the Cubs, I strive for victories and I will not surrender until I reach home plate.

With poor odds, every win contains a positive message, and every loss holds a lesson. Winning is a team effort. My parents and teachers have watched me as closely as faithful baseball fans have watched the Cubs. Everyone works towards a victory and when it happens, everyone is thrilled. As a young woman, I struggle with word retrieval. I am challenged to overcome my deficit by employing specific learning strategies to find the words I seek. Patiently and persistently I complete my assignments giving 110% of my effort. Advocating for myself, I seek help from teachers, peer tutors, and learning resources. I strive to prove that I am a true winner. I face a possible winning situation each day. I usually do well on each assignment and feel great pride; I try not to lose momentum. Regardless of what the day is like, or what my record is, I always stand up to the plate and prove that I can compete—just like the Cubs.

It would be easy to quit, but the Cubs never do. They can be twenty games behind with no chance of a championship, but they still do not throw in the towel, and neither do I. It may be hard to persevere, but the greatest fans in the world surround me. My parents, sister, teachers, and friends drive me to perform every day, and their encouragement pushes me to reach my full potential. The challenge may be tough, but a strong fan base drives the Cubs and me to success.

“Just wait till next year!” has been the Cubs’ famous rally cry for years. In some ways, this is comforting because it is okay to lose sometimes, but, in other ways, it is disturbing because no one wants to be labeled a lovable loser. I never asked for my learning disability, but I have never quit anything because of it. My disability is a challenge to which I rise daily and overcome. The challenge of learning has made me stronger and more willing to fight to the end. With a winning positive attitude, the Cubs and I will succeed.

*To submit a photo, picture, poem, story or letter for future Newsletter publications, please fax 847-933-4194, e-mail: [nbalantz@rush.edu](mailto:nbalantz@rush.edu) or mail to us at RNBC.*

## Accepting Myself *(continued)*

confusion. Over the years, I kept alternating between grief, fear, and denial. I went through some major depressive phases. Pretending you don’t have a learning disability when you’re dealing with it every day can be incredibly stressful. People thought I was lazy, silly, or self-centered. I rarely told anyone I had learning disabilities, since they usually saw it as an excuse.

Instead, I took unwarranted criticism, and sank back into depression, since I knew the criticism was unjust, but didn’t know how to change other people’s perspectives of me.

I cycled in and out of the phases of loss for many years. Finally, I decided to face my weaknesses head-on. That was the first step toward acceptance. I worked on social skills. I worked on visual/spatial perception. I worked on movement. I could see my limitations, but I could also see my progress. As I worked on my weak areas, I began feeling less helpless. Instead of feeling ruled by my learning disabilities, I saw myself as a complex person, with unusual strengths and weaknesses. As I accepted both my learning disabilities and my giftedness, I grew more self-confident. I began to feel I could make adjustments or ask for help. When I told people I had learning disabilities, I could say it with the

unmistakable ring of truth. By accepting my learning disabilities, I could allow others to accept them too.

Part of me still mourns for a typical life. Part of me still wishes all the pain, suffering, and bewilderment I endured never existed. But I treasure my ability to read and write, skills learned when I was inside by myself instead of outside with friends. I treasure my gentleness and compassion, skills learned from years of rejection. I treasure my patience, learned from years of struggle.

It took thirty years, but the denial, anger, grief, and pain of childhood is behind me. The acceptance of adulthood lies ahead.

**About the author:** Deborah Green currently lives in Arizona, where she teaches English to sixth and eighth graders. She enjoys singing, playing the flute and piano, gardening, and reading. She is the author of *Growing Up with NLD*, an autobiography that also includes information about NLD and a resource section. Ms. Green has lectured on NLD across the country, and will soon appear in a video about NLD that is currently being produced by Rush Neurobehavior Institute. Click here to read excerpts from or a book review about *Growing Up with NLD*. To order, please follow the information below.

**To order *Growing Up With NLD*, call 1-800-654-6623. ■**

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We welcome you to come visit our Resource Center, which houses a multitude of reference material on neurobehavioral disorders. Our shelves stock books as well as audio and videotape material. Due to the abundance of material and sources on the internet, we have decided to also provide a variety of internet web sites for you to browse.

While Rush Neurobehavioral Center is pleased to present information and references for parents and educators helping children with neurobehavioral differences, it is our policy not to recommend or endorse any specific reference source.

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- Schwab Foundation for Learning [www.schwablearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)
- [www.ocdawareness.com](http://www.ocdawareness.com)
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