

My Experience

When I look back at my life, I do not see one event that explains everything. I see patterns that have followed me through different parts of my life. I have always been energetic, curious and social. I like people, friends, music, movement and having things going on around me. At the same time, I have always needed time in my own world - somewhere I can listen to music, create, breathe and not think so much about how I am being seen. For a long time, I did not understand how both sides could exist at once. Now I am starting to.

Growing up

As a child, I reacted strongly. I could be impulsive, angry and end up in conflicts. I sometimes did things adults found difficult, and I know there were times when my behaviour was not okay. At the same time, how I was met mattered a lot. If someone got angry, raised their voice, pushed harder or tried to control the situation, I often became more activated. If someone stayed calm, took me out of the situation or gave me space, I could come back much faster. At home, that did not always happen.

I could ask why, try to understand or simply say no, but situations could become much bigger than I expected. I was very aware of people's expressions, tone of voice and body language, and if I felt that someone was angry, disappointed or upset with me, it could stay with me for a long time afterwards. Often, people focused on what I did, while what happened inside me before the reaction got less attention. Because of that, I gradually started finding my own ways to understand and handle what was happening inside me.

My sister

My relationship with my sister has not always been close. We have lived very different lives, but I have always wanted her to be okay. I want her to have good friendships, feel seen and feel that she belongs. I think about what her life will look like when the people closest to us are no longer here. I want her to have people she can trust, things to look forward to and a life that feels like her own. As I have understood more about myself, I have also started thinking more about the small ways I can help - letting her cry without always trying to fix it, letting her leave when she wants to, and giving her time and space.

I also want to create good experiences with her and help her feel heard and have some control over her own life. At the same time, I have to take care of my own capacity. I want to know her better and be there as her brother without losing myself in the responsibility. I think both things can exist at the same time.

When something started to change

Toward the end of primary school and the beginning of my teenage years, some patterns began to change. I was also living with epilepsy, which started when I was about nine and continued into my early teens.

I became more particular about certain things. I preferred crunchier foods, like greens, while softer or mushy textures became harder to enjoy. I felt uneasy when the wind moved through the leaves, but still liked returning to familiar places in the forest. Around eleven or twelve, music became a much bigger part of my life, and I could spend hours disappearing into my own world. As I got older, I also became less interested in clothes and mostly wanted simple, comfortable things like hoodies and sweatpants.

Something changed socially too. Earlier, when something upset me or made me feel threatened, I often went straight into defence or attack. Over time, more of it went inward. I became more vulnerable, cried more easily and could feel deeply hurt and then angry if people laughed at me. I also became more aware of feeling different. I thought about what to wear, how to act, what other people expected and how their minds worked. It felt like I was standing slightly outside things, trying to understand them.

That began to change after secondary school, when I entered better environments and met good people. I had more room to be myself and could make mistakes without the whole situation becoming something bigger. People could correct me without making me feel wrong as a person. Slowly, I learned that doing something wrong did not mean there was something wrong with me.

Learning myself

Even with those better experiences, I still spent a lot of energy checking other people's reactions. If I did not know what was expected, I watched what others did. Afterwards, I could replay situations and wonder whether I had misunderstood

something, missed what someone meant or said something differently from how I remembered it.

Because I did not always receive explanations I could use, I began figuring things out myself. I watched, tested, adjusted and gradually built my own social map. In unfamiliar situations, I could find myself thinking:

How am I supposed to be here?

I noticed tone of voice, body language, humour, roles, status, who had influence and what happened when certain things were said. At first, adapting could feel fake, as if I were constructing a social version of myself. Later, I learned to remember how it genuinely felt when I was relaxed, having fun and naturally social, and bring some of that feeling into situations where it did not appear on its own.

Over time, more of the real me became part of that social version. It was still adapted, but it was also me. In a way, I had built a social interface.

School had never really suited the way I learned. Once I left, I learned more through experience, observation and working things out for myself. I paid attention to people, conflicts, vulnerability, power, group dynamics and the difference between what people said and what they did. Through that, I developed an understanding of people and relationships built from real life.

Some of what I learned was not healthy. Understanding how people react can be used to understand them, but also to influence them, and I tried some of that when I was younger. I learned how the same words could have different effects depending on timing, insecurity, guilt, humour, status and intention.

As I got older, it became less about whether something worked and more about trust, respect, boundaries, the relationships I was creating and the person I wanted to be. I learned that I could make a mistake, apologise and try something different without turning it into a judgement about who I was.

That also helped me understand other people. I began noticing what happened when someone felt exposed or vulnerable. Could they remain curious and present, or did they withdraw, attack or shift the blame? Did they need to win, or could they handle being wrong? Sometimes that first reaction told me a lot about where their defence went.

Familiar people as an anchor

Looking back, familiar people gave me a social anchor. With the same friends, I knew the humour, roles and where I stood. If unfamiliar people joined, I still had something familiar to hold onto and did not have to work out the whole setting from scratch.

Now, groups often change before I really get to know them. Then I have to work out the tone again, how direct I can be and where the conversation can go. Without a shared activity or interest, small talk can feel manual and I may search for questions just to keep it moving.

That can use a lot of energy. I can want connection and like the people around me while still becoming tired from everything I have to process.

My grandmother and the place where I could land

That need for something familiar was also there in my relationship with my grandmother. She was very important to me. I trusted her, and she was one of the people I felt I could turn to. Our relationship was not perfect, but she still became an important source of safety and familiarity. I had a room there that became an anchor for me - somewhere I could withdraw, get some distance and sort things out in my own time. It gave me a clear sense that I could stop for a while and let things settle.

Over time, I learned more of my own signals and that not everything can be thought away. Some things have to be felt and worked through. For a long part of my life, a lot of that had to be done consciously. I had to notice what was happening, work out what I needed and find ways to bring myself back into balance. I got better at it over time, but it still took effort.

Work and being allowed to learn

Work gave me another kind of experience with the same thing. At OSO, I was allowed to try, fail, learn and move on. I found out that I could do a lot when I had enough time, decent conditions and people who let me learn. Being good at something stopped meaning that I had to get it right straight away. It meant having room to ask, try, make mistakes and keep going. It also made a difference when people understood that some ordinary things could take more out of me than they

looked like they should. Being met with understanding instead of pressure made it easier to learn, adjust and keep going.

When a lot changed at once

Then, a few years ago, many of those familiar parts of life changed at the same time. My grandmother passed away, and with her I also lost the place where I had learned to land. The room and the sense of having somewhere to stop were gone. At the same time, I was renovating an apartment, working and trying to keep everyday life going. People helped me, and I am grateful for that, but they also had their own lives. I did not have one clear place where I could fully lower my shoulders. I was on my way somewhere new, but I had not landed yet.

Many of the ways I had handled things before no longer worked the same way. I was exhausted and low on energy. Part of me was still stuck in what had happened, while life was already asking me to move forward. It felt like the old road was gone before the new one existed.

When the apartment was finished, but I still had not landed

Eventually the apartment was finished, but finishing the practical part did not mean I had landed. I had a home, but I still needed somewhere I could fully let go and not carry everything alone. I needed someone behind me - not to solve my life, just to be there. When I did not feel the safety I had hoped for, it hit me hard, like lightning through my nervous system. The grief after my grandmother, the exhaustion from the renovation and everything I had not processed seemed to open at once. The practical work was over.

The experience was not.

A friendship that was also difficult

During that same period, my friend became very important to me. He was there, helped me and gave me company when I really needed someone. I looked up to him. That matters because I do not want to make the relationship black and white. He was genuinely important to me when I was very vulnerable and needed someone to lean on. At the same time, I think I was very open to being shaped by the environment around me. I had lost many of my old anchors, did not know who I was supposed to be in everything that was new, and spent a lot of time with him.

I have always been good at reading environments and adapting to them. During that period, parts of his way of thinking and acting slowly became part of how I acted too. Not because I wanted to become him, but because I mirrored the environment I was in. If the relationship was built around defence, power, competition, status or protecting yourself, I could start following those same rules. Some of that became part of my mask. I think I was living on two tracks at the same time.

One track adapted to the environment and did what seemed needed to function there. The other held onto something deeper in me. A part of me still knew that some of it did not feel right, even if I did not know what to do instead. I think that protected something important. I did not become the environment, but it affected me. That is part of what makes the friendship sad to look back on. I needed him, trusted him and looked up to him because he had really been there for me.

At the same time, I later felt that my vulnerability could be used against me. I also know I was not perfect in that friendship. I could react badly, get frustrated and say or do things I would handle differently today. Both of us played a part in difficult situations. But over time, the relationship cost me more and more. Things I was already insecure about were commented on or mocked. Boundaries were not always taken well, and bringing something up could turn into conflict.

If he felt exposed, he could take it personally, defend himself or turn the problem back onto me. Arguments could feel like something he had to win. At times, it felt like he was talking down to me instead of standing beside me. I became more unsure of myself: did I do something wrong, am I overreacting, is his reaction fair, or have I misunderstood again? Eventually, I had to end the friendship. But that also meant giving up something familiar. He had been company, a kind of safety, and a relationship I knew how to move inside.

Even when something familiar is unhealthy, it is still familiar. When I let go of it, I collapsed.

Between the old and the new

Ending that friendship became another dividing line. I had let go of something I knew I could not keep, but nothing new had been built yet. The old was gone and the new did not exist yet, so I was left in between. It was not only about the friendship. I had also lost many of the ways I used to understand myself and move

through life. Before, I could push, compensate, build a new system and give everything I had. Now, nearly everything felt manual. I knew what I wanted and could sometimes see the solution, but my body would not follow.

It felt like being trapped inside myself. Still, I kept going. I worked, kept relationships going, cooked, showered and did what had to be done. I did not run away. I held life together for a long time before my body made it clear that I could not keep doing it the same way.

An explanation that helped, but did not explain everything

Eventually I received an ADHD diagnosis, and it gave me words for a lot of things: my impulsivity, attention, energy, restlessness and motivation, and why I could function very well in the right setting and badly in the wrong one. But some things still did not fully fit, especially the way I orient socially, how much social situations can take out of me, my need for predictability, how strongly transitions can affect me, my sensory needs, and how familiar things become automatic while unfamiliar things stay manual.

There was also the way I could focus deeply on one thing and strongly resist being pulled out of it. As I kept trying to understand the parts that ADHD did not fully explain, I started to see another pattern too. A lot of the things I had struggled with for years began to make more sense when I looked at them through autism as well. It is not something I can say with complete certainty, but it has become hard for me to ignore how much of it seems to fit.

When I could no longer push

After I ended the friendship, there was a period of about a year where I was trying to keep going without really having anything new to lean on. During that time, I started to understand that I could not keep forcing myself through everything. One evening I sat alone drinking wine, which was unusual for me, and realised I was not okay. I needed help. Not long after that, I met Dina, and the following summer brought some good things back into my life too - time by the water, boat trips, friends and warm evenings. In the middle of everything difficult, there was finally something good to hold onto.

That did not mean Dina was there to solve me. What mattered was the warmth, closeness and having something good in my life while my capacity was still low.

When summer ended and I returned more fully to work, it connected me back to a period that had already been hard. I kept pushing even though my body was telling me to stop, and eventually there was very little left. I went into depression and burnout with very little capacity. Life became basic: I showered, brushed my teeth, made food and went to work. Those things became anchors.

Building something new

From there, building something new happened slowly. I started setting clearer limits around my capacity, and Dina became very important. As things settled, I had to get to know her again in a way, because she had met me when I was extremely vulnerable. That affected her too. She stayed beside me while I worked through old defences, learned trust and slowly found more of myself. I gradually learned that she accepted me. With more safety, things I had held down started coming up: grief, anger, exhaustion, love and gratitude. It is hard to put into words what Dina has done for me.

Not because she came in and solved everything or made life easy. She has stood beside me while I tried to understand who I am, what happened to me and how to find my way back. She has seen sides of me that were not always easy to show and stayed while I slowly found more footing. In many ways, she became a light in the darkness when I needed it most. Some things are not only about what a person says or does. They are about what it means to have them there - to be vulnerable without also having to defend or explain yourself.

Someone who could stay beside me long enough for me to find my own way back.

As that safety grew, I also started to see how long I had been focused on simply getting through things and adapting. Somewhere in that, I had lost some sense of who I was. Now I sometimes have to find my way back through small things that feel familiar - music, places, interests, people or situations that remind me of myself. A big part of that is learning to respect my own boundaries instead of pushing past them automatically. It feels less like becoming someone new and more like slowly getting access to myself again.

Part of finding that access again is building a clearer sense of what I want to come back to when things get messy. That means not saying yes just because I can, keeping space for the things I actually like, and respecting my own limits instead of

automatically following everyone else. I can listen to other people without letting their expectations replace my own.

Two periods that looked similar, but became very different

Looking back, I can see one main difference between two vulnerable periods in my life. The first still had good friends, supportive environments and my room at my grandmother's. I had somewhere to calm down and return to myself.

The second came after many of those anchors had disappeared. I was grieving, renovating, working and trying to keep going with very little energy. Without a clear place to land, I became more open to the environment around me. The outside part adapted, while something deeper still held onto what felt right.

The difference was not only what I was carrying, but what I had around me while I carried it. Safety, support and somewhere to stop changed which part of me came forward.

Familiar does not always mean safe

I understand now that familiar is not the same as healthy. I may know how to function inside a relationship pattern even when it costs me, because I know its rules and how to protect myself. Something can feel wrong without feeling unusual.

That was part of why I missed red flags when I was younger. Later, repeated patterns stopped looking like separate events. I could see what they had in common, and that changed things.

Needing the opposite to become familiar

Understanding that something was unhealthy was not enough. I could still be drawn to what I knew. What changed me was repeated experience with people who stayed calm, respected boundaries, admitted fault and treated vulnerability with care.

At first, healthier relationships felt unfamiliar because they did not match my old map. Over time, they became familiar too. Once I knew what the opposite felt like, the old patterns became easier to recognise.

Stopping the fight against myself

That new reference point also changed how I looked at myself. For a long time, I tried to fix myself. If something was hard, I thought I had to understand it, solve it or push through it. Over time, I realised some things were not going to disappear because I fought harder. Some of the things I had been criticised for growing up were also things I had genuinely struggled with. That was hard to take in. If I could not simply fix them, I had to rethink some of the conclusions I had made about myself. Today, I push myself less blindly. I still do what I have to do.

But I try to separate what really has to happen now from what can wait until I have more capacity. I work much better with something like:

This needs to be done sometime this week.

rather than:

You have to do this right now.

I still have responsibility, but I try to give myself some choice in when to spend the energy. The task itself costs energy; pressure, forced timing and fighting myself add another cost. That is why I can enjoy responsibility when I have some freedom in how I do it. I can be given a task and trusted to do it in my own time. Something costing energy does not mean I should stop doing it. The question is whether I can manage that energy in a way that lasts.

When I am tired

That becomes especially important when I am tired. Then I try to make life smaller and stick to things I already know, with fewer decisions and less social input. It does not have to be fun. The important part is that I can choose. I might clean, listen to music or do something familiar around the apartment. I need to check in with myself, do a quick inventory check and see how much energy I actually have left before I decide what makes sense to do. From the outside, that can look like avoidance. From the inside, it feels more like managing what I have left.

If I push through everything just because I technically can, I pay for it later. I have learned that functioning does not mean I still have energy left. Sometimes other people cannot see how tired I am, and sometimes I do not fully feel it myself while I am moving and doing things. Then I lie down and the nausea, heaviness,

slowness and exhaustion become much clearer. My body can know before my mind catches up.

Landing and finding flow

After a lot of stimulation, I cannot always go straight from being on to being completely still. I need a bridge: something familiar and low-demand that gives my attention somewhere to rest while the rest of me comes down. Music often does that, but cleaning, football or simply being alone can work too. What matters is feeling that the demand is over.

Football has helped me understand why this works. Before a match, especially while waiting in the changing room, I can have a lot of turmoil inside. Once the warm-up begins, the situation becomes clear. Everyone is focused on the same thing, the rules are familiar and there is always a next action. I no longer have to work out how to be there; the situation tells me.

For a while, the world becomes smaller and I can be present instead of navigating everything manually. That can leave me calmer afterwards too.

Structure, freedom and having a road

The same pattern shows up in everyday life. I do best when I have enough structure to know what is going on, but still have some freedom inside it. I need to understand what is happening, what matters, and what comes next. Once I have that, I can usually find my own way through it. When that structure is missing, everything can feel much bigger. There are more choices, more things to think about, and more I have to work out as I go. When things become clearer and more familiar, I need less information and more of it starts to happen naturally.

That is why a simple plan can help so much. If I know what I am doing next, I can follow the track instead of having to build it while I am already moving.

That need to make sense of things also shows up inside my head. Sometimes it feels full of open boxes. A sound, a conversation, a plan or something I have not understood can stay active until I know what it is and where it belongs. If too many boxes stay open at once, everything starts to feel crowded and harder to process. Once I can name something or make sense of it, it takes up less space.

Processing in the background

I have realised that this is also why I often process things best when I do not stare directly at them. If I have something familiar to hold my attention, the rest can keep working in the background. Music is the clearest example. I can focus on the music while thoughts and feelings keep moving behind it. Things can fall into place without me forcing them. It is:

anchor in front, processing behind.

That has helped me understand that some activities are not distractions from difficult things. Sometimes they are what lets me process them.

Socialising and energy

I have become more selective socially, not because I dislike people, but because unfamiliar situations can take a lot of energy. When groups keep changing or there is nothing clear to connect around, I may be reading the room, working out the tone and thinking about what to say while trying to stay present.

Familiar people, shared interests and knowing I can be quiet or step away make it easier. Once I understand the rhythm, conversation becomes more natural. If I run out of energy, I become quiet and slow and may lose access to words even when I still want to be there.

The same effort can happen inside a conversation. With people I do not know well, I may be working out what they mean, whether they are joking and what kind of response fits. Humour and conversation are easier with familiar people because I already know their timing and intentions.

In larger settings, noise, changing conversations and the effort of staying social add up. Alcohol can make the load less noticeable, but it is still there. I also need quieter time where being together actually feels like time together.

My social capacity depends on more than whether I like someone. It also depends on how much I have to process, how familiar the situation is and how much can happen naturally instead of being worked out in the moment.

When I look back at the last few years

When I look back at the last few years, I can see how many of these threads have been running through them at the same time. I received an ADHD diagnosis and

also began looking at parts of my experience through autism, which has helped many things make more sense. I have been dealing with things happening now while older experiences from childhood have also come closer to the surface. I have felt anxiety, old defences and how hard vulnerability can be. I have been through burnout and depression and spent a lot of time trying to understand parts of myself I did not have words for before.

All of that was happening while life itself kept changing. In a fairly short period I lost people I loved, renovated an apartment, ended an important friendship and met Dina. There was grief and loss, but also love, new experiences and a better understanding of myself. Ordinary life kept moving through all of it, and I kept going to work, making food, showering and getting through the days even when it took much more out of me than it probably looked like from the outside. I did not always know where I was going or how to get there.

The part of me that kept looking

When I look back, I see that I never completely gave up. I did not always feel hopeful or know where I was going, but I kept doing the next thing and trying to understand one more piece.

When I could not find a road, I built one. I watched people, noticed patterns and made my own maps. I can see how ADHD and possible autism may both have been part of this. One part kept me moving and searching for another route, while another needed to understand where I was and what I could orient myself by. This helped me adapt, but it also allowed me to continue long after my energy was gone. When my body eventually stopped, I had not given up. My old way of keeping myself going had given out.

I recognise myself in the story of a man alone at sea. The sun disappears, dark clouds gather and the voices around him are gone, but he keeps looking toward the horizon. There he sees a lighthouse where the harbour should be.

The lighthouse does not calm the sea or sail the ship for him. It gives him enough direction to find his own way. I have also needed those points: my grandmother and her room, familiar people, music, football, work, the structures I created and, later, Dina.

Now I understand that not giving up does not always mean pushing forward. Sometimes it means stopping, listening to my body and letting someone stand

beside me. I still search, adapt and find solutions, but I am learning that this part of me also deserves a harbour.

The light was not always visible, but I never stopped looking for it.

Holding several truths at once

I try to hold the whole story at once: what happened around me and my own part in it. I have made mistakes and reacted in ways I would handle differently today. I can take responsibility for that without taking responsibility for everything around me. Other people can have had their own struggles without making my experience less real.

Someone can have been good for me in one period and difficult in another. I can love my parents while still looking honestly at what shaped me. For me, this is not about blame. It is about understanding what was passed on, what belongs to me and what I want to carry forward differently.

When I look at the whole story

I no longer only ask what was wrong with me. I can also ask:

What was happening around me, what did I need, and what was actually mine to carry? What belonged to other people? And who do I become when I feel safe enough to lower some of the defence?

When I put the whole story together, I see a child who made mistakes and failed, but also tried and learned. I was a child who struggled and was trying to understand. I could settle when someone met me calmly. Later, I had different experiences and found more belonging, equality and connection. I learned more about my own signals and what helped me handle things. I was lucky to find good people, good environments and a safe place with my grandmother. Later, through work, I learned that I could do a lot when I was allowed to learn and when people understood that everyday things could sometimes take more effort than they looked like from the outside.

As an adult, many of those anchors changed or disappeared. My grandmother passed away, I built a home, kept working and kept life going. I had people who truly showed up, but I also had to let go of something familiar that had become unhealthy, and I stood between the old and the new for a long time. Slowly, I

started building something different through better experiences, clearer boundaries and through Dina showing me that safety could feel different. Eventually, I had to stop asking how I could push myself back into who I used to be and start asking what I actually needed now.

When I look at it that way, I was not only a child who had to learn how to behave. I was also a child who needed help understanding what was happening inside me, and people who could stay beside me while I found my way back. Later, I needed much of the same again. That is also what I want for my sister: people who stand beside her, a life that feels like her own, and the chance to learn that the world can also be safe, warm and full of good people. When I have had that myself, I have functioned differently. Maybe that is also where I am finding my way back to myself.