

Triumph Over Cerebral Palsy

“It Completely Changed Who I Am”

“Recess, kids! Head on out to the playground. Today we’re doing triple jumps.”

“You mean ‘*cripple* jumps,’” snickered Leanne Casiano’s schoolmate in a stage whisper loud enough to evoke mocking laughter and repetition of the insult among several other nearby children.

Sadly, humiliation was a daily occurrence for Leanne. Pervasive meanness in her environment had destroyed any hope of developing a healthy self-esteem: if only she hadn’t been forced by an accident of birth to navigate the world from the storm-tossed ship called cerebral palsy; if only she had not been different.

Lifelong physical challenges and emotional abuse from peers and parents alike caused conditions like extreme anxiety, panic attacks and self-consciousness to pile on top of each other in Leanne’s psyche like a multi-car accident on the highway.

As an adult she sought remedies for her myriad conditions, shunning medication and seeking relief from a natural perspective. Experiencing minimal relief from her efforts, Leanne, 54, discovered neurofeedback at age 50, and she says it altered her life profoundly.

“What neurofeedback did for my life was amazing,” Leanne said. “It completely changed who I am.”

Not much is known about how Leanne, who was put up for adoption at birth, ended up with cerebral palsy. She was told that it possibly occurred because the umbilical cord had been wrapped around her neck. Signs that something was wrong showed up when she was around 18 months old and continued missing developmental milestones.

Fortunately, her condition was mild enough that she never needed a wheelchair or walker, and she was intellectually normal. However, she had balance problems. She walked on her tiptoes with an awkward gait. She was uncoordinated and would easily fall. She had a speech impediment that made her sound like she was drunk when she spoke. She had muscle spasms. The left side of her body was weaker than her right side, and the left side of her mouth drooped, giving her a crooked smile.

Adopted into a world where she didn’t fit

Being half Native American compounded her difficulties when she was adopted by Native American parents living on Moose Factory Island in Ontario, Canada, populated almost exclusively by Native Americans. The problem was that she took after her French father. With her blonde hair and blue eyes Leanne looked nothing like the people surrounding her, making her an even more tempting target for bullies.

“White man go home. You don’t belong here,” was a frequent taunt, accompanied by horrendous harassment, like the time some children threw her down a flight of stairs, breaking her clavicle.

Doctor dread

Leanne had to be seen regularly by doctors for her various physical conditions and developed a dread of anything medical. To get her to go, her parents tricked her by telling her they were leaving the island to take a vacation or visit a mall. Instead, they'd pull up to the hospital and hand her over to strangers who poked and prodded her, with no parent by her side.

Becoming a teen helped

Around the time she reached puberty Leanne had blossomed into a beauty and had learned to adjust her gait slightly in order to walk more normally. The bullying subsided, and the children treated her better, but her physical and emotional scars were deeply ingrained.

In her late teens Leanne married briefly, then married again a few years later, becoming the mother of seven children along the way. She eventually settled with her husband in D'Iberville, Mississippi.

She first hears about neurofeedback

Leanne first heard about neurofeedback from her chiropractor, who was also a neurofeedback practitioner. Leanne's son was suffering from ADHD, OCD, bedwetting, anxiety and tics, and the chiropractor told her neurofeedback could probably help with those issues. She thought it might help Leanne as well.

Eventually Leanne, her husband, and son all did neurofeedback at the chiropractor's office until the COVID-19 pandemic caused the practice to shut down. Her son's tics improved, as did his bedwetting and school performance. Her sometimes-tense husband seemed more relaxed, but the results were negligible for Leanne, who didn't notice any significant changes in muscle spasms, anxiety or self-esteem.

Determined to keep trying

Leanne didn't give up, however. She had read enough to believe that administered by the right person, neurofeedback could, indeed, be very effective.

After doing significant internet research, she happened upon Frederick Starr, MD, a psychiatrist and computational neuroscientist active in brain-computer interface and neurofeedback and a pioneer in the use of remote neurofeedback.

"He said he was confident that his work with us would yield better results than what we had experienced with the local practitioner," Leanne said.

His confidence was merited. After a brain map and some remote sessions, her son's anxiety and OCD got better. He stopped recoiling if someone tapped him on the shoulder, and he even ate a cracker he dropped on the floor instead of making a scene about the germs that might be on it. "That was amazing, Leanne said, "because until then he would never, ever have done something like that."

Big changes, happier marriage

After undergoing her first 20 remote neurofeedback sessions of an hour a day five days a week, Leanne reported that she felt much calmer. (She and her family also did—and still do—occasional remote brain maps to help guide the training protocols and have continued doing subsequent groups of neurofeedback sessions over a two-year period).

Her husband travels extensively for work. She had a habit of getting impatient with him and hanging up on him when on the phone. “I think neurofeedback saved our marriage,” she said. “I used to throw the ‘D’ word (divorce) around a lot and slam the phone down on my husband when I got annoyed. Now I’m less reactive. He told me the other day that I hadn’t slammed the phone down on him in six months.

“Another huge improvement was that my anxiety evolved from being that of a teenager having panic attacks to having no panic attacks at all, not getting anxious about much of anything,” she said. “My anxiety is gone.

“Also, I have the best self-esteem I’ve ever had in my life. And my muscle spasms are significantly reduced.

“I feel like a 100% different person,” Leanne continued. “I have more confidence, more clarity in my thinking and more patience. Doing neurofeedback has completely changed me for the better.

“Dr. Starr is a wonderful man. He’s intelligent, compassionate, understanding and has his clients’ best interest at heart,” she continued. “He’s been a blessing in my life.”

The more you do neurofeedback...

Leanne has this word of advice: “Keep in mind that the more you do neurofeedback, the more changes you’re going to see. It’s amazing what it can do to your life.”

And one more thing. Before Leanne started doing neurofeedback with Dr. Starr, she took a picture of herself in the mirror to document her drooping mouth. “I knew my problem was neurological and that neurofeedback works on the neurological parts of the brain,” she recalled. “I wondered if it would affect my ability to smile.

“Well, it did. One day I got out of the shower and looked in the mirror and did a double take. My mouth wasn’t crooked and for the first time in my life I could smile normally!

“I’m so excited about neurofeedback that I want to shout it from the rooftop.”

Note: Leanne granted permission for the use of her real name and the two photos she submitted of her before/after smile.