

# Weathering Autism

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# Presentation Outline

- \* Diagnosis of Autism
- \* Early Intervention
- \* Obstacles that I encounter in Life
- \* Obsessions and special interests
- \* Visual stimuli and *Directomes*
- \* High School experiences
- \* College experiences
- \* Conclusion of program

# *My diagnosis of autism*

- ⌋ I received an official diagnosis in 1983
- ⌋ The diagnosis was made by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals at the TEACCH program in Chapel Hill, NC
- ⌋ I did not develop speech prior to my fourth birthday
- ⌋ My social patterns were different from other toddlers and it initiated action by my parents
- ⌋ This diagnosis frightened my parents

# Early Intervention

- ⚡ Started early intervention at 18 months
- ⚡ Received services at Child Development Resources in Williamsburg, VA
- ⚡ A comprehensive assessment was done before my official diagnosis
- ⚡ Services provided by CDR were very comprehensive and allowed parental involvement
- ⚡ I have some memories of the CDR sessions
- ⚡ Attended a local pre-school program

A dramatic night sky with multiple bright lightning bolts striking down over a dark landscape with a body of water. The lightning bolts are bright yellow and white, contrasting sharply with the dark blue and purple tones of the night sky. The landscape below is mostly dark, with some faint lights visible in the distance, possibly from a town or city. The overall mood is intense and powerful.

Some of the things that make  
me different from other people

# Obstacles that I encounter in Life

- ★ Had difficulty making and sustaining long friendships throughout school
- ★ I am easily distracted during lengthy classes that are of no interest to me
- ★ Very difficult to distinguish whether a girl is really flirting with me or is just being very friendly and polite!
- ★ Strong aversion to chewing sounds, especially gum
- ★ Some impairment in ability to transfer my thoughts into spoken language (speaking before I think it through)

# Obstacles that I encounter in Life

- ☾ Laughter at non-humorous comments I make is often upsetting for me, especially from family members
- ☾ I have always felt awkward making major transitions throughout school and work
- ☾ Laughter for no apparent reason (“internal echolalia”)
- ☾ Substantial delay in getting Driver’s License
- ☾ Tourette-like symptoms from time to time

# Childhood Obsessions

- ♥ Hairdryers
- ♥ Clorox bottles
- ♥ Hubodometers
- ♥ Feeling shoulder blades
- ♥ Legos and pipes
- ♥ Heart-shaped pillows
- ♥ Excessive spinning
- ♥ Truck serial numbers
- ♥ Railroad Spikes
- ♥ Electric power lines

# Recent Obsessions

- ♥ Air Vents
- ♥ Staring at my high school yearbooks
- ♥ Camping and Bicycling
- ♥ Temperature Readings
- ♥ Studying Spanish
- ♥ Having fires in the fireplace
- ♥ Dumpster Diving
- ♥ Girls

# A few notes about obsessions

- Most people within the autism spectrum have hobbies or interests that may seem unusual to their peers, teachers, and family.
- There is a great range in the possible pre-occupations that these people may have.
- It is very important for peers and caregivers to understand that these behaviors are often innocuous and steps to eliminate these interests should not be undertaken.

# Visual Stimuli and *Directomes*

- ♪ This relates to staring at the yearbook pictures
- ♪ Many individuals with autism experience intense visual stimuli that most people do not see
- ♪ I have coined the term *directome* to mean “Areas or points on particular pictures or objects that attract an excessively amount of attention via visual fixation.”
- ♪ These visual stimuli can include hair strands, eyes, and edges of clothing, especially on females
- ♪ Removing unnecessary posters in the classroom can help reduce this problem

The blue arrows in this figure are pointing to directomes



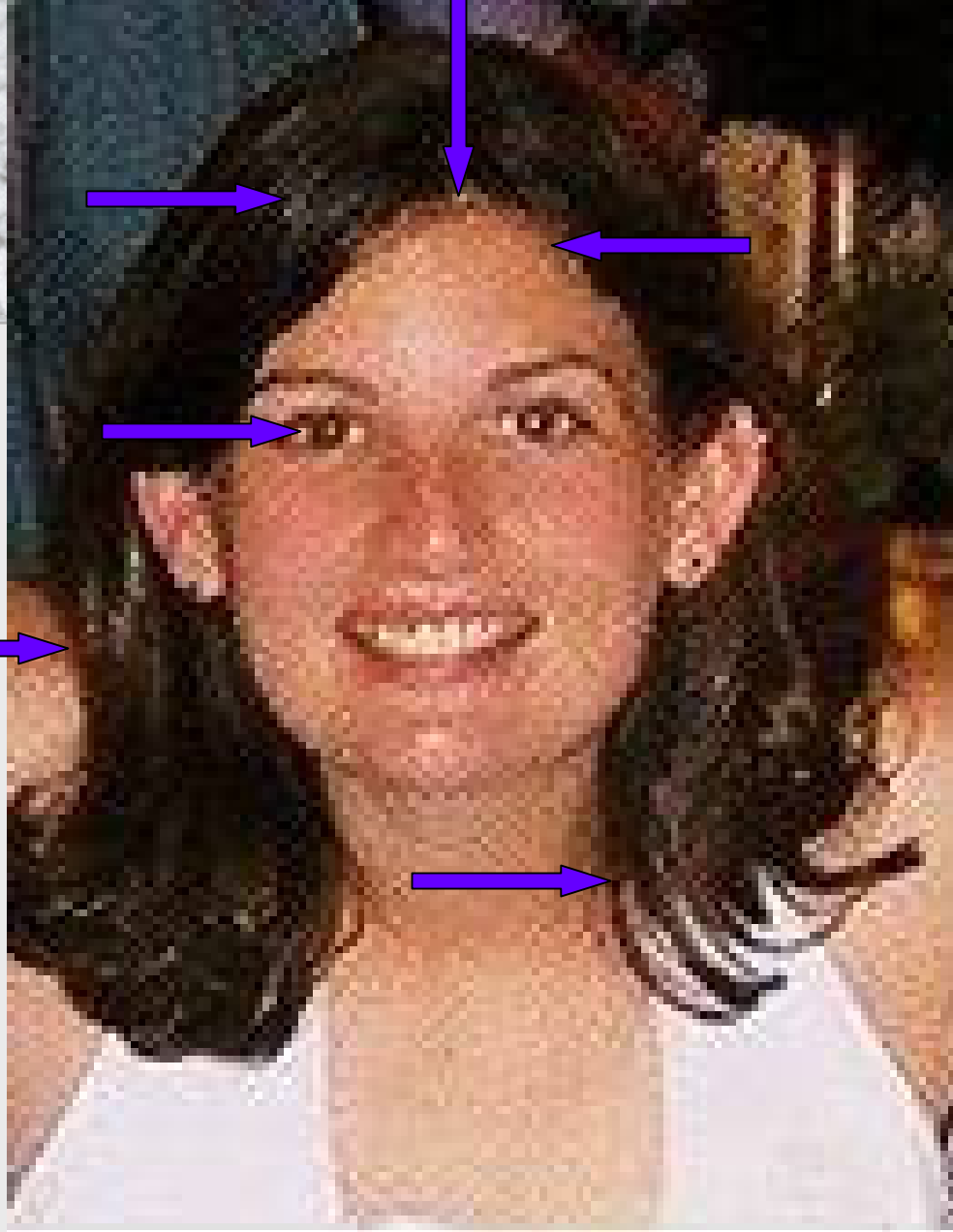
The advertisement features a photograph of a smiling family of four. A man on the left is holding a camera up to take a picture. A woman and two children are smiling next to him. Three blue arrows point to the woman's hair, the man's hair, and the child's hair, which are the 'directomes' mentioned in the text. Below the photo is the Howard Johnson logo, the slogan 'Go anywhere. Stay here.', and a red circular button with the text 'BOOK NOW'.

More examples of directomes



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Dave Hamrick

# Schooling Issues

- ✱ I attended a special program for children with autism (PACES) until fourth grade
- ✱ This was an excellent program for the time period (1980s). It was exclusively for people with autism spectrum disorders
- ✱ Great diversity in the amount of positive reinforcers offered by the staff
- ✱ Included in the regular math class by first grade and spelling class by second grade
- ✱ Transitioned to a regular school after PACES and was taking regular classes with support

# Schooling Issues

- \* Both elementary and middle school had a special education room as a haven for me
- \* Almost completely free of special education support by high school
- \* Did receive some accommodations
- \* Teachers under-estimated my abilities!
  - was not admitted to AP History
  - was not admitted to Honors Chemistry
  - kept out of National Honor Society because of English grades
  - not allowed to take the marriage class offered because of my social situation

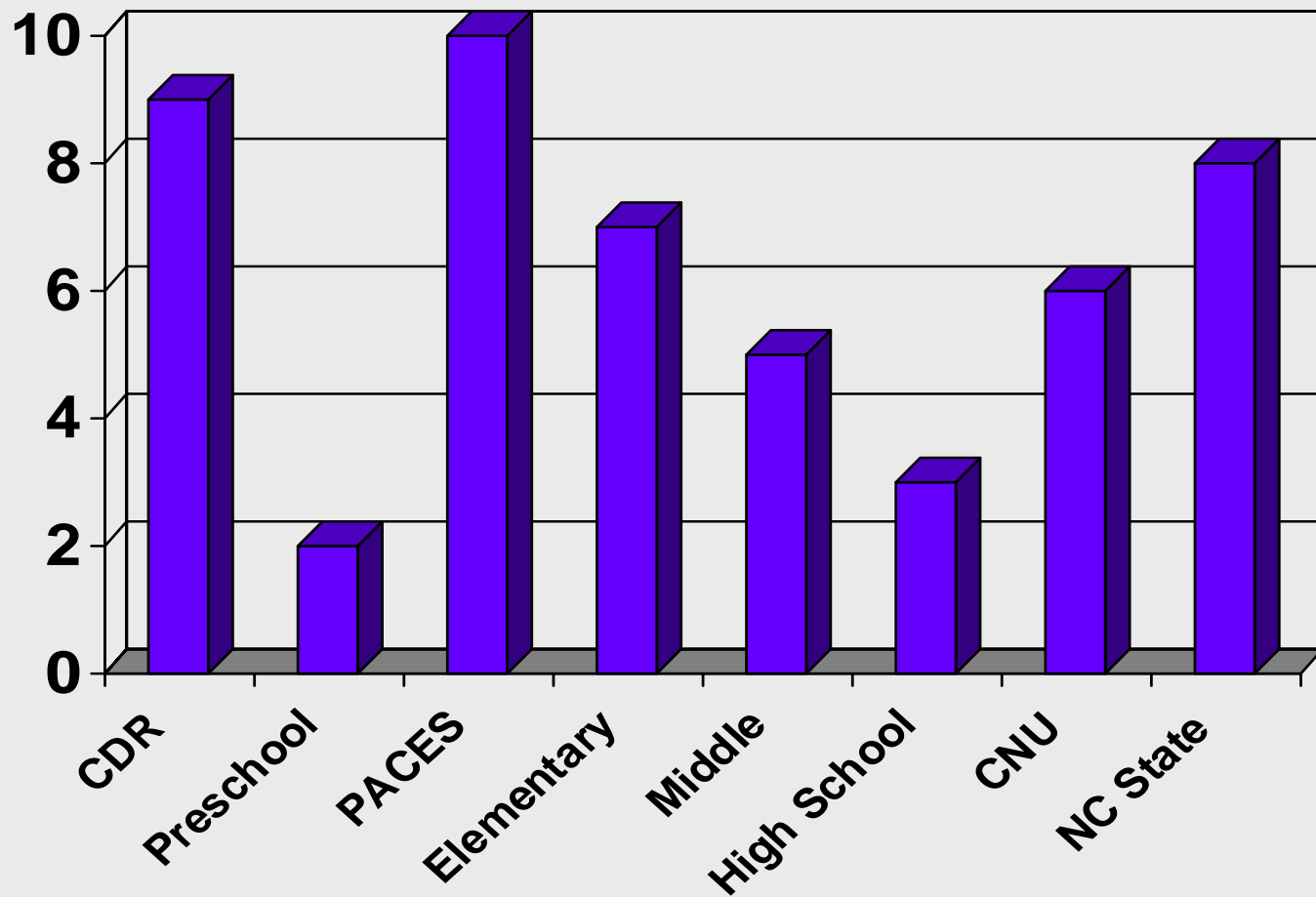
# College Life

- ★ I was admitted to Christopher Newport University after completing high school
- ★ Eligible to receive some accommodations through the Disabilities Coordinator
- ★ Some professors were fussy about my accommodations and how they should be administered
- ★ Live at home my Freshman year
- ★ Lived on campus for the next two years

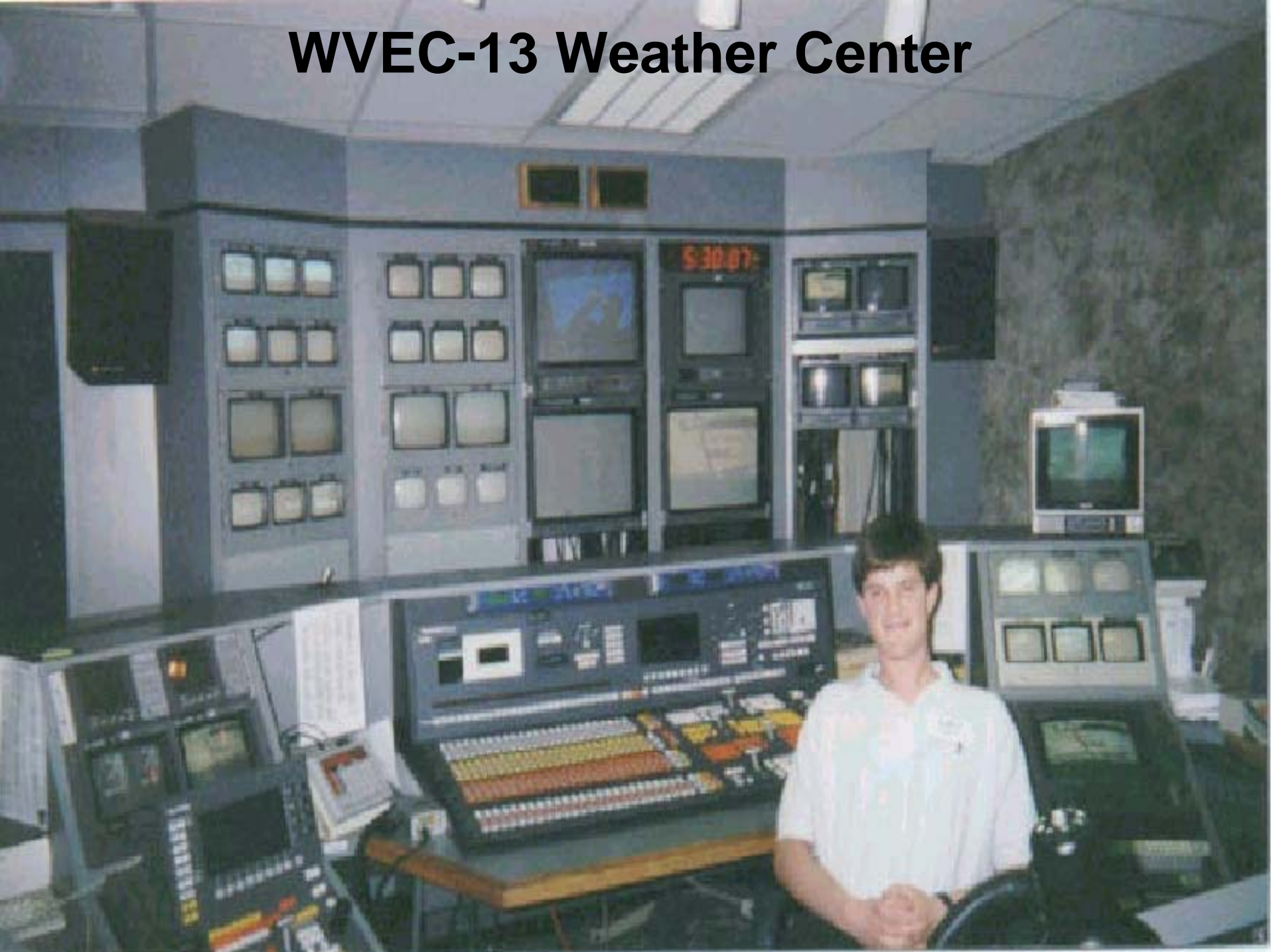
# College Life

- ✦ Transferred from CNU to NC State to pursue degree in meteorology
- ✦ Apartment living in Raleigh
- ✦ Received Bachelor's Degree in May 2003
- ✦ Admitted to the Graduate School at NCSU
- ✦ I also plan to be active with autism activities.
- ✦ Want to become fluent in Spanish
- ✦ Want to be a forecaster with the National Weather Service

# Comparing the Schools



# WVEC-13 Weather Center



# A few final thoughts

**Every individual with autism is different!**

**Many people with autism grow up to lead successful lives!**

**Teach tolerance for those who are different from us!**





Thank you for coming!

Photo by Larry Adams '01