

## From the Inside Out Resident writes about learning disabilities

### Resident writes about his experiences with learning disabilities

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STAFF WRITER

One of the first times that life-long Wayland resident Michael Murphy, now 27, realized that he might be a little unusual was when he was 5 and taking the first in a battery of tests designed to determine just how different he was.

"The test was on antonyms and one of the words they gave me was 'thin.' I chose 'viscous' as the right answer," he recalled recently. "The previous evening, I guess, I'd been reading something in the encyclopedia about the properties of oil, which can range from very thin and watery to quite viscous. So it was a natural, if - under the circumstances - incorrect, choice."

There had been other signs. Like the time, at age 3, he tore his sister's pillow apart to try to count the feathers inside. Or when, a year or so later, he dumped soap powder in the middle of the living

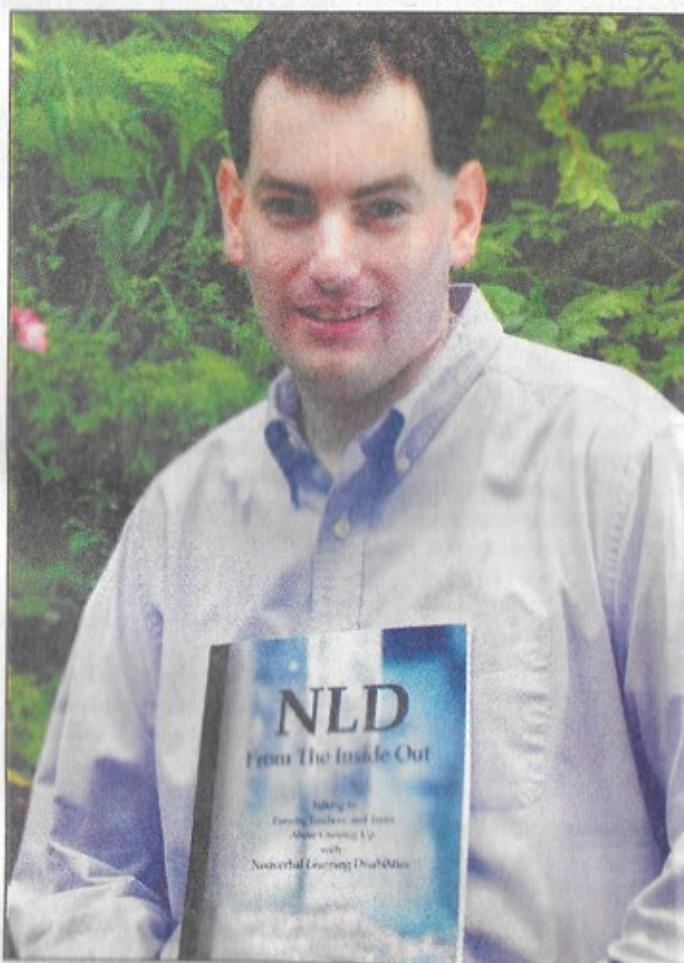
room floor and turned a hose on it.

But it took nearly two decades after the "viscous" incident - some 20 years of special education classes, deep discouragement and sheer frustration - to finally get a diagnosis of what is now called "NLD," short for "nonverbal learning disability."

NLD, which is still not officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in its "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders," has a spectrum of manifestations, including precocious reading and vocabulary abilities, delayed motor skills, discipline problems, social awkwardness and a tendency to perfectionism despite confusion and disorganization.

"One of the problems," said Murphy's mother Gail Shapiro, "is that there's no authoritative diagnosis." But, Murphy added, "one highly indicative, though

COOKBOOK, page 15



Wayland High School graduate Michael Murphy recently published a book based on his experiences growing up with learning disabilities.

MURPHY, from page 1

not definitive symptom, is a significant gap between a higher verbal IQ, that is something that can be recited back verbally, and a lower performance IQ, such as speed, gross motor skills, and spatial reasoning."

In the midst of the uncertainty that surrounds the condition, Murphy's just-published book, "NLD From the Inside Out: Talking to Parents, Teachers, and Teens About Growing Up with Nonverbal Learning Disabilities," will likely bring considerable relief to those affected - victims, families, and friends alike.

After graduating from Wayland High School in 1999, Murphy went to Framingham State College "where I flunked every class except for logic. And technically anyway, Spanish." He then transferred to Landmark College in Putney, VT, a school for high-potential students with learning disabilities, but lacked the maturity, he said, to make that work either.

Following this, he turned to Mass Bay Community College, where he finally encountered a teacher who explained to him how to get past the first sentence or two of a class paper. He thrived here and earned his Associates Degree from the school summa cum laude.

He then enrolled in Clark University and received a BA cum laude in psychology. "NLD From the Inside Out" began as a 15-page final paper for one of his classes at Clark. "The topic was entirely open-ended, and my

mother suggested that I write about NLD. I did and got an A on the paper. So then I started to think I might want to work on this for my senior thesis. And it just kind of spiraled from there."

In order to write the book, Murphy designed an online survey that contained about 80 very detailed and open-ended questions. Of the 107 people responded, about 40 did so thoroughly enough to warrant inclusion of their experiences, thoughts and suggestions, in the book.

"I wanted to find out what NLD was like for them and what they wanted to tell parents, siblings, teachers, friends and psychologists. I also wanted to measure the degree of severity of the symptoms over time. And what I found out there was that, while the younger people, those in their teens and early 20's often felt helpless and hopeless, older respondents were more optimistic. So one of the messages of the book is that, if you're an adolescent with NLD, don't give up. It does get better."

The major target readers for the book, he said, are teens who are affected by the condition, as well as parents and teachers who are interested. Murphy gives practical advice on such matters as creating more harmonious family and peer relationships; organization and planning, including study skills and writing papers; and ways to change negative, disabling attitudes.

Shapiro, who helped with the editing chores, and Murphy be-

lieve that this is the first book that talks about NLD from the perspective of someone who has lived through it. The book covers what NLD is and isn't; the short history of the disorder; the NLD brain; NLD and social interactions; talking to parents and teachers; helpful hints about dealing with the condition; answers to frequently asked questions; and, last but not least, hope.

Murphy lives and epitomizes that hope every day. He is currently a graduate student at Hebrew College in Newton and expects to earn a Ph.D. in preparation for a career as a college professor of Jewish studies.

"NLD From the Inside Out" is available both in large format paperback (\$19.95) and as an e-book (downloadable as a PDF, \$14.95) through [www.nld-fromtheinsideout.com](http://www.nld-fromtheinsideout.com) or at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

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