

MARK MORTAN VERSUS MIDLAND MIDDLE
SCHOOL AND THE WORLD
(A Story About ADHD)
by
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Prologue

I have written these stories to help children, adolescents and parents understand various mental health issues (in this case ADHD). They are also designed to let children and adolescents know these are common conditions and help children and parents understand the condition. This story is dedicated to Dr. Ray Seal, a great teacher and friend of mine.

I. MONDAY

Mark almost made it to the classroom door for first hour when the bell rang. As he slid into his seat, Mr. Kobos looked at him and said, "Nice of you to join us this morning, Mr. Morton." Mark started to respond with a comment about how thrilled he was to be here, but caught himself in time and clamped his mouth shut. This saved him from the pink slip he would have gotten for being tardy if he had opened his mouth. He knew if he could make through this math class, the rest of the day would be downhill. He could hear Rachel and Stephanie behind him having an argument about some boy; and his friend Ray was telling a joke about two parrots off to his right. As a precaution he shot a glance over his right shoulder to make sure Brian S. wasn't making any spitballs but he lucked out because he looked half asleep and his buddy

Duffy had his usual glazed “I’m a moron” look on his face so he didn’t have to worry about him either. He was just starting to turn in his seat to check on the class bully, Road-Kill Reynolds, when he saw out of the corner of his eye, a grey pair of slacks appeared next to his desk that he knows can only belong to Mr. Kobos. He quickly faced straight ahead, and went into his “serious student mode” which meant sitting perfectly still, not looking around, and not opening his mouth. He also tried to minimize what he was hearing because this could get him in trouble too. Usually he heard many, many things at the same time. He could even come in on noises from other classrooms. When he tried to listen to all these things in class, he got in trouble because he wouldn’t be paying attention to what was going on in class, but he could only force these things out of his mind for a few minutes at a time. He usually tried to save this effort for the end of class so he could get his assignments copied correctly, but he was only able to do this a small part of the time. He managed to look straight ahead until the teacher moved past his desk. His record was about eleven minutes, and that was usually long enough for a teacher to move to a different place in the classroom. It seemed to Mark he was always camped out there, ready to fill out a “pinkie” with his name on it if need be for the slightest infraction. Today was a good day, however, and he made to the end of the class with no “pinkies”. He was not so lucky in the next class where Ms. Bonner picked up on the fact that his book report was missing. He could have sworn that was due the following week!

His next class was art class; a class that often ended up with him in trouble for “using his time poorly.” Was it his fault if sitting still was a boring way to spend 45 minutes? He had a sense that this class could be a problem when he saw large lumps of clay on each table. They would make excellent projectiles! As he thought about it, he realized that really small balls of clay would be a lot harder for the teacher to track and there would be no “missing lump” in front of him. He sat down and selected several likely targets. He made half a dozen very small balls of clay, and then selected the most symmetrical one. This he flicked off his upraised thumb with his pointer finger, but got the range wrong and it landed on the floor. He reloaded and adjusted his elevation for a longer shot. His aim was true, but he had been so fixated on the target that he failed to notice the art teacher moving behind the target and the clay ball landed on the back of her jacket. Fortunately for him, she did not

notice the small object hitting her clothing because of its diminutive size. Mark decided that he had been very fortunate in this regard, and smashed the remaining clay into the large lump in the middle of the table. By the end of the period he had made what he considered a fairly good clay robin, which surprised him and the teacher.

At the end of the last period, Mark walked over to the classroom reserved for students serving detentions after school. He sat in his usual seat at the back of the room. The monitor, Mr. Bowers, came in and sat at his desk for a few minutes then got up and came back to where Mark was sitting. He said hello since he was on good terms with Mr. Bowers, and Mr. Bowers said, "How many pinkies have you got left to do?"

"Only two," Mark replied.

"Glad to hear you've got the number down," Mr. Bowers replied.

"Me too," said Mark, "by the way, Mr. Bowers, I was wondering something. I get almost all my detentions for late work, yet we aren't allowed to do homework in detention hall . . . does that make sense?"

Mr. Bowers asked if Mark had schoolwork with him, and Mark said that he did. Then he told Mark that most students were there because of problems with behavior, and that was why there was a "no homework" rule. Mark's case was different so he was going to allow Mark to do homework, and if he had questions, he could ask him about them. Mark was impressed with the man's fairness and willingness to hear his side of the story. He wished his dad would do the same. Maybe Mr. Bowers would speak with him.

II. Wednesday

Wednesday started poorly. He had stayed up late Tuesday night playing video games after his parents went to bed so he had a very hard time getting up the following morning. He had a hard time figuring out how these two events were related, but he was frequently tired in the morning because of it. He had to give up breakfast to make it to the bus on time, but he was able to get some junk food from a vending machine on the way to his first hour class. The down side of this was the sugar hit

his bloodstream all at once, and he ended up squirming and wiggling in his desk the whole first hour class. Somebody in the back of the room remarked he must have ants in his pants, and he was embarrassed by the amount of laughing that followed. This also alerted the teacher to his problem but he toughed it out and stayed in his seat. He realized at the end of class that he could not remember a single thing that was said there. This usually occurred on tests but not in class so he was concerned about it.

Things went downhill in second hour. He got a pinkie for not having his homework with him even though he truthfully told the teacher it was completed; there were just too many times in the past when it hadn't been completed. There were also several times when he had completed what he thought was the homework, but he had written down the assignment incorrectly. The more things he was asked to copy down the more likely it would be that he messed something up. He tried to make up for forgetting his homework by answering more questions in class, but this backfired because he got in trouble for blurting out answers. He just couldn't seem to win. He was feeling frustrated so he decided to treat his third hour class to his famous King Kong imitation. This went over fine with class (everyone laughed), but he knocked a microscope off a desk and bent it (mashed might be a better word) and the teacher was very unhappy with him. He was given a five page report due the next day on the history of yellow fever. He had never heard of yellow fever!

Finally lunchtime arrived, and it started out well because they were having his favorite lunch, Pizza, so he ordered two of them. The downside of lunch was he ended up sitting next to Willy (The Hog) Murphy who was a notorious food thief. Sure enough, when he got up to get some more mustard for his pizza, his second pizza was missing. He looked at The Hog and said, "Give it back."

The Hog looked very offended and replied, "Give what back?"

Mark could feel his face getting red and said, "My pizza, you idiot."

The Hog was getting angry himself and said, "I didn't take your stupid pizza!"

Mark took the long way around to his seat scoping out the kids next to The Hog to see if he had handed it off, but everyone's lap looked empty. It was starting to get quiet in the lunchroom now and he realized his reputation was at stake so he couldn't back down from the Hog. He emptied all six packs of mustard on his remaining half of his pizza, and before he actually thought about it, he sensed his right hand swinging into The Hog's face with the pizza in front of it. Since The Hog's honor was at stake too, he responded by throwing Peggy Smith's spaghetti in Mark's face, and before he knew it, he and The Hogg were sitting outside the Principal's office wiping food off their faces with the paper towel the secretary had given them. Mark wasn't too worried since he and Mr. Albright were pretty good friends in light of their frequent get-togethers over rule infractions on Mark's part. He ultimately ended up with no more "pinkies," but he got worried when Mr. Albright called his mother. He told her that he thought Mark had ADHD, and advised her to have it looked into by a professional. She agreed with the Principal, and made an appointment with a child psychiatrist her sister recommended.

II. FRIDAY

On the day of the appointment Mark complained bitterly to his parents, "I don't want to see some stupid shrink. Butch Mitchell sees one of those and he's messed up."

"We are at least going to hear what he has to say," his mother replied.

"I'm not getting any more shots," Mark complained.

As it happened, there were no shots, but the doctor did ask Mark about his ability to concentrate in school and on homework. He asked Mark if he was able to do any quiet tasks such as reading or drawing (video games did not count because they were not "quiet.") He asked Mark if he had trouble sitting still or blurting things out in class. He wanted to know if Mark had problems tracking assignments or organizing his schoolwork. He asked Mark about his activity level, and how he got along with peers and adults. How did he respond to directions from authority figures such as teachers? He asked about Mark's health and

whether he used street drugs or alcohol. He asked about Mark's development and how the family got along. He wanted to know about mark's long-term goals such as whether or not he planned to attend college, and if he had any ideas about jobs he would like to do.

The doctor wanted input from Marks parents and whether they had a written accommodation plan with the school. They worked together to come up with a plan for Mark which included recommendations for home and school. The plan included such things as Mark having a set homework time each day and he had to track all his assignments at school. This was backed up by weekly emails from his teachers to verify work and completion dates. He had to attend a social skills group with five other kids his age for the next few weeks. One of them was Hog! Mark and Will actually became friends. Mark quit referring to him as The Hog. They discouraged others from using this moniker as well. Mark's grades improved, but he continued to have problems socially and with impulsivity. Ultimately he needed medication. This together with social skills training allowed him to relate better to his classmates. It also caused his grades improve more, and his improved concentration allowed him to have more free time.