

Here's to  
Not Catching  
Our Hair on  
Fire

An absent-minded tale  
of life with  
Giftedness & Attention  
Deficit - Oh look! A chicken!

Bohemian  
Ave. Press

Stacey Turis

## EXCERPT for Abundant Livelihood

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## ***Introduction***

Sitting in my bed, propped up by more pillows than necessary, I have my beloved iPhone next to me, running a Brain Wave application set to *focus*. As I adjust my legs crosswise and turn on my laptop, I close my eyes and allow the white noise and binaural beats to flow through the headphones and permeate every mottled-grey fold of my unreliable brain. I sit with the laptop balanced on my thighs for a couple minutes to allow for the full effect from the software. Though I would appear peaceful to someone walking past, inside my mind I have just stepped into a more chaotic yet colorful world. There are many layers, multiple dimensions, and an almost metaphysical knowing inside this brain of mine. With a seasoned hunter's keen perception, I'm aware of the soft sigh of the tea bag settling in the cup of extra-hot water next to the bed. My eyes move upward under my lids as my mind registers the constant breath of the ceiling fan and the distracting pinging noise as the pull-cord clinks against the base with every rotation from the blades above. "I'll need to turn that off," I think.

My toes spread out for a spontaneous massage of our cat, Yin Yang, who just so happened to claim the area next to my foot when I finally got situated on the bed. (I say *just so happened to* sarcastically, as Yin Yang is *always* waiting to lie by someone, and I'm pretty sure he has learned to materialize at will.) I feel his fur moving under my feet and smile at the vibrations that suddenly start deep under my toes. My nose wrinkles as I pick up on the faint fishy smell that emanates from Yin Yang's mouth. There are times, when my coping skills aren't at their best, that I get so bothered by the smell and sound of Yin Yang smacking his kitty lips, I literally gag (imagine a toothless, old person eating a banana). With that unpleasant thought, I realize that I'm losing my focus. I shake my head to clear the visuals, take another deep breath, and try to bring my attention back to the present.

With my eyes closed, legs crossed, and pointer finger and thumb touching in *Chin Mudra*, I take some deep breaths and throw out a request to the universe. *Begging* would probably be more accurate, but you get the idea: "Please, please, please bless me with a shit-load of focus, patience, creativity, and raw strength." I say *shit-load* to eliminate any possible confusion of how much of the above I really need, and I'm pretty sure God understands my reasoning and isn't offended by my colorful language. While my Vetiver and Cedarwood essential oils burn in a jar on top of the armoire, I use my entire arsenal to establish focus and concentration. I have to. Though most of my days consist of what feels like stumbling through a dark foggy swamp with an eye patch diminishing any possible visibility, this day needs to be different. I need all the help I can get. I am opening my laptop to begin writing my first book.

As my eyes open and focus on the screen, they reflect first shock and then recognition. They slowly follow the huge crack that blazes through the middle of the screen and runs diagonally from top left to bottom right. I realize with a grimace that this may slightly affect my ability to concentrate, as I can't see a bloody word I'm typing! I stepped on my laptop more than two years ago and still haven't replaced the cracked screen. I know it might sound like I'm a little lazy, but I'm not. Well, I mean I am, but I work on it all the time; it's always part of my self-improvement plan. Anyway my point is that laziness is not the factor

in my still staring at this crack; it's because as soon as I power it down and flip the laptop closed, the crack leaves my mind, never to return until I open the laptop once again. Then I groan because of the big-ass crack that has once again surprised me with its presence.

I guess at this point I should introduce myself. Hello. My name is Stacey, and I am "twice exceptional." Sounds fabulous, doesn't it? I mean, not only am I exceptional, I'm *twice* exceptional! Don't hurt yourself congratulating me. What it really means is that I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD[H]D), and I'm also considered "gifted." It's called twice exceptional because half of my brain is capable of astonishing mental feats, while the other half can't even bother to lift its leg when it farts, which isn't very productive, if you ask me. Yeah...try using that to navigate through life. It's a mess. A person can be twice exceptional in different areas, but I was blessed with the above. And no, I don't play a musical instrument, I don't sing like a canary, nor do I ever stop midsentence and begin writing math equations on the nearest window. As a matter of fact, there is not one certain thing I can claim to be gifted in. I'm the proverbial Jack of all trades, master of none. All of the guts and none of the glory. None of the sugar and all of the shit. You catch my drift.

Normally when I'm meeting someone new, I immediately become self-deprecating to make them like me. "Nice to meet you...great party. Yes, my belly is hanging over my pants to my knees from eating so much. I hope my breath doesn't kill you from the garlic dip. Is this crowd freaking you out at all? I'm sorry, what was your name again?" I know it sounds like I need therapy (and I do), but I kind of like that about myself. It makes people instantly comfortable, like they can scratch their armpits or pick the underwear out of their butts in front of me, and contrary to popular logic, that's a good thing! Anyway, I'm pretty sure all of the above was enough to disarm you.

I'm thirty-seven years old. I have a husband, two kids, a dog, three cats, and about seventy-eight fish that hatched from our original two. I never meant to have a fish farm, but then again, I never mean for any of the stuff that happens to me to, well...happen to me. I started my own holistic pet health site, founded a holistic charity for sheltered animals (I've received three donations: the entire start-up cost from my father-in-law, one from my mom, and a five-hundred-dollar check that I lost), I have a holistic health blog for families, and I recently put together a program to educate families about the benefits of clean and natural living. I am my daughter's homeroom mom, and last year I was on the PTA board, where I was in charge of the yearbook. (I'm actually still too traumatized to talk about *that* experience.) I keep all chemicals out of our house and feed my family only all-natural and organic foods. I buy only natural body products and detergents, and make my cleaning supplies with vinegar, baking soda and essential oils...you get the idea. As I read over what I just wrote, it makes me chuckle. It's all true, but I still feel like a fraud, because if any of that makes me sound like I have my shit together, don't let me fool you—I'm a fucking mess.

We live in a middle-class neighborhood. My husband, Dave, drives a ten-year-old bucket, which allows me to cart the kids and animals around in a big SUV, like every other mom in the carpool lane at my kids' school. Oh, except for Trinity Jackson...she drives a big, white

Hummer with a vanity plate that screams, "TRINSH2." Don't get me wrong. I like Trinity. I pretty much like most people I meet, and I try not to hold their vanity plates against them. All in all, we have a nice, ~~normal~~ little family, and we enjoy living in the 'burbs, except for one tiny problem. As you can see by my double strikethrough above, when it comes to my life, *normal* is rarely in the equation.

Though I was coined *gifted* as a kid, I wasn't diagnosed with AD(H)D until I was thirty-three (after first being misdiagnosed with, and medicated for, bipolar disorder. Fun times). As giftedness can also easily be misdiagnosed as AD(H)D, I ran into the gifted concept a lot after researching my diagnosis. I hadn't thought about my gifted side since I was a kid. You can imagine how shocked I was to learn that both gifts have a tendency to create chaos in adulthood. It doesn't stop when you hit puberty, buddy. These are the gifts that keep on giving. I couldn't believe it. There I was, in black and white. My entire being of weirdness, easily explained with bullet points listed under both "Signs of Adult AD(H)D" and "Signs of Adult Giftedness." Double trouble. Twice fucked, as I like to say. Getting diagnosed was definitely a mixed blessing for me. On one hand there was a nicely packaged reason for all of the things I felt were wrong with me. On the other hand, it was comparable to a mental-health death sentence. I used to say to my mom, "It shouldn't be this hard...it isn't this hard for other people...this isn't normal." I used to think I could just fix myself away with my little self-improvement plans. I still do, actually—a different one every week, but getting that diagnosis meant I could do all of the self-improvement plans available in the universe, and I would still come out as messed up as I went in. No improvements for me. Sorry, Charlie. Shit out of luck, my friend.

I've always felt misunderstood. Though I was never at a loss for friends, I was always told I was weird, which I was totally OK with. *Weird* is a compliment, I think. I just didn't really understand what people thought was weird about me. It could have something to do with the following, but I'll let you be the judge of that. Thanks to my two gifts, I have a tendency to be anxious and depressed. I'm completely overtaken by the moods of others. I procrastinate. I can't pay bills or keep track of finances, and I have no emotional ties to money. I don't put effort into relationships, except for those with people who have grown to accept me and don't try to change me. I don't bond easily with most people. I constantly stress myself out trying to help everyone except myself. I feel a connection with nature in my bones, but almost to the point of pain. I get in a funk where I feel dead inside. I'm easily overwhelmed. I don't like to be touched. The sound of a telephone makes me want to put my fist through a wall. I have a horrendous temper and can snap but then forget about it five seconds later. I have horrible word recall. I often forget what I'm talking about midsentence and have to ask the dreaded, "Uh...what were we talking about?" I don't pay attention to getting to my destination when I drive and have ended up in the wrong state more than once. I love animals so much it can be painful, and I have the chips in my teeth from grinding them to prove it. I'm emotionally and physically affected by the sadness and heartbreak of others. I can barely sit still to watch TV, except for *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* or my favorite paranormal show, *Destination Truth*. (Call me, Josh Gates. Your show is my new dream job!) Unfortunately, I never remember what day or time they're on, so, thank you, DVR! Overhead lights bother me. A ceiling fan on my skin makes me crazy. Strong odors can make me throw up. I can't make casual conversation on the phone; there

has to be a purpose, such as scheduling. "What time do ya want to meet? Two o'clock? OK, bye." I sometimes don't understand people if they speak too fast, and then I have to read their lips, which can be awkward for everyone involved. I can't maintain eye contact during a conversation, and if I try to, I feel like my eyes are going to pop out of my head. According to my hubby, I "have no regard for safety." There's more...a lot more, actually, but I think I'll let you discover some for yourself. A girl has to stay somewhat mysterious, you know!

(cont.)

## Chapter 1

**I'd much rather go through a lifetime of my own torturous angst than to put those that I love through the pain of my self-inflicted "going out with a fart" instead of a bang to the head.**

It's funny (as in *weird*, not *ha ha*) that most people's impression of AD(H)D is a spazzy kid at school that won't shut his mouth, wiggles in his seat, tips his chair back on two legs, falls on the floor, and then gets sent to the office for being disruptive. That's not a true depiction of AD(H)D! Well, actually, it is. We can definitely do all of that, but there is so much more to us than that. Some of us AD(H)Ders are not hyper at all—just a little (or a lot) inattentive. Though currently the condition is all dumped under a generic AD(H)D label, I still consider myself ADD since I'm not hyper. There are so many more layers to us than most would ever imagine. We are privy to a billion gifts and a gazillion heartaches. AD(H)D has the ability to ruin not only the lives of those who have it, but those around them as well. Families, marriages, jobs, relationships...they all display the scars from the battle that is AD(H)D. Nothing comes out unscathed—absolutely nothing. The remnants of unnecessary guilt and shame are littered about like debris on a beach after a storm. If we want to walk down the beach, we just have to step around it.

Some have called me *scattered* or *unorganized*, to the same tune they would call someone an *absentee mother* or *trash eater*. Those stupid assholes have no idea how destructive and ignorant they are with their words. I make myself sick constantly trying to be organized, trying to be "with it," trying to be a less-intense version of myself, and basically putting so much energy into trying to be a person that I cannot be—no way, no how—that it slowly kills me. I'll admit, though, that I can be a dumbass. It actually took me three years to figure out which garage was mine. In our city, garages are considered unsightly, so they build them off the back of the house with access from an alley. Three years! I do forget a lot, but it's not really the forgetting that gets me down. My personal struggle has always been the anxiety, depression, and all-around fogginess that seem to go hand in hand with this wacky brain of mine. Second by second, I'm trying to push through a barrier that stands between me and what I need to accomplish that day. Do you know the internal struggle I go through just trying to make myself go to the grocery store? Or to answer e-mails? Or to make the kids' lunches for school? Those little things that most would find slightly annoying, I find unbearable, which makes my life hell on most days. If that isn't enough, there are intense and painful feelings of self-shame, of being such a loser that I can't understand how anyone could possibly stand to be around me. Most of the time, I don't even want to be around myself! Can someone please teach me how to have an out-of-body experience? Anyone? My self-talk is embarrassing; I would never speak to anyone the way I speak to myself.

Unfortunately and fortunately, giftedness booked the same brain in the same life, and I'm stuck with both. Sometimes I have a problem differentiating which side I need to pull a coping skill from, but now, for the most part, I can sort it out. Whereas AD(H)D is contained mostly in the mental arena (I say *mostly* because sensory issues are also common), my giftedness has both mental and physical aspects to it. OK, get ready...here comes a freak flag! I'm an empath—at least that's what I've been told. I "feel" things mentally to

understand them. It is kind of like a grocery scanner. I mentally hold a thought, idea, or person in front of my stomach and scan it. You can't imagine the amount of information I receive by doing that. It's not like it pours slowly in, though. It's more of an immediate knowing of many things all at once...*bam!* Information stored for later review. Scanning is just one way I get information and the only one I have total control over. But for the most part, I pick up information I don't want when I don't want it. Don't assume that I know a person's dirty secrets or what they had for breakfast. It's mostly feelings. Someone's negative mood or emotion can hit me in the stomach and just dig and dig and dig until it's raw and achy, and I have to leave their presence. Even then, the feelings don't go away completely. They always linger until I stop what I'm doing and focus on getting rid of them. Most of the time, I can't be bothered to try to stop what I'm doing, so I just deal with the underlying anxiety it causes me that day.

When I'm not at 100 percent mentally or emotionally and unable to block things out, I also pick up on feelings that aren't directed toward me, but to another person, thought, or idea, which sucks because I can't distinguish between any of them. I'm like a radar gun picking up every wave in my range. Beep. Beep. Beep. As you can imagine, I basically walk in a world of constantly thinking, "What's wrong with so-and-so? Did I do something to blah, blah, blah?"

On top of all that, because of the physiology of my brain, I get blasted from every direction. That's what it feels like, too—a continuous attack, not only mentally but physically. Smells, sounds, every sense is on fire every second of every waking day. It makes me feel like I'm in a never-ending state of trying to find balance on the edge of a slippery cliff. "Please, God, just let me make it through today. I'll worry about tomorrow if I get there." Toss in the constant juggling of everyday life, and I have to be pretty steady and on top of my game to keep my balance, which is obviously sometimes more than I can handle. Quite often, I panic, drop the balls, and fall. Anything seemingly minor can knock me right off the edge, but I struggle mightily to keep my balance because if I fall, I'll land in the *dead* place, and that place is no bueno. This is how I once described a visit to the dead place, otherwise known as depression.

The dead place is dark, lonely, and suffocating. The voice from the dead place talks to me and tells me that I'll never leave, that I'll be there forever or until I can't take it anymore and decide to "check out." I begin to believe it, because it's the only voice I hear, other than the faint cry from the other voices. The other voices are so far away. They are standing at the edge of the cliff, looking down at me and calling out for me. I can't hear what they're saying. I know they're trying to tell me something, but the voice from the dead place speaks louder. I get frustrated and confused from the noise, straining painfully to hear the words of the other voices, hoping for a way out.

After some time, the other voices give up, turning away in frustration. I have no idea they were offering their hands and even brought a rope to help me climb out. Since I'm not holding my hand out in return, they think I'm simply ignoring them. They don't know that I can't hear them and that their voices are mixed and jumbled.



They have decided that I must like it in that deep, dark, dead place, or else I would have reached for their hands.

My stomach flips as the dark, heavy fabric of their frustration shrouds my head, making it almost impossible to breathe, see, or hear. The fabric starts to move and slowly begins snaking in and out of my eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, before settling heavily in my brain. Immediately my senses begin to fade, and my vision is replaced with the mottled grey-brown color of the fabric. My stomach jerks as I gag from the sickly sweet smell of it. Pain makes me recoil from the accusing heat of it burning my skin. I gag again as my mouth fills with the sharp, metallic taste of it. Confused, angry, embarrassed, and hurt, I begin to mentally disconnect and disengage from the other voices and their judgments. Doing so will prevent this pain in the future. Afraid of suffocating as the feeling of shame becomes unbearable, I slowly turn away from those in the light staring down at me to once again face the dead place.

Sadly I realize I'm quite honestly more comfortable down here than balancing up on the cliff, constantly surrounded by those other voices. Nobody expects things from me here. My shame is only my own down here. I sigh, accepting the familiar sense of defeat and begin to listen to the unthinkable words of the voice from the dead place. I begin to forget about my other life of balancing on the edge of the cliff and look for somewhere to rest my eyes. My energy is depleted, and it's too hard to stay awake. As the dead place senses its victory, it begins to whisper wickedly about hopelessness, loneliness, shame, guilt, and defeat. An old movie projector noisily jumps to life. I watch with dread as images of every failed job, business, friendship, and relationship begin to flicker by on the wall. On the opposite wall, I cringe as I see a parade of faces of the people I've let down in my lifetime. I feel ashamed and cry out from the sharp stab of hate I have for myself. Like a broken record, I begin to attack myself. If I love them, why do I let them down? Why am I like this? Why can't I be normal? Why is this so hard for me? I realize with panic that I don't have the answers. I'll never have the answers, and my life will always be this mind-numbingly hard. My throat tightens, and I can't breathe. My heart responds by beating frantically as my stomachs pinches with tension and my hands start to shake. Gasping for breath, every movement becomes a struggle.

Remembering the words of the voice from the dead place, I slowly realize that I'm not strong enough (I must have been tricking myself into thinking I ever was strong) to endure this mental and physical torture for another second, let alone a lifetime. I can't fathom living through it. A person just cannot live that way. It's not even fair to ask them. I begin to relax, letting the dead place settle in my heart, a mere whisper away from my soul.

The ending always makes me giggle because it sounds so dramatic. You'd think that would be the end, huh? I mean, "a mere whisper away from my soul" surely sounds like death! Well, let me tell you, I have been in the dead place more times than I care to remember, and it hasn't killed me yet...and *I* haven't killed me yet. I have finally learned that when I'm there, my perspective is all wonky. I don't trust anything my brain tells me, because I know

that the ol' translator isn't working so well...it's basically *opposite day* upstairs. I usually stay down for anywhere from two weeks to several months. My longest visit in the dead place was eight months, and it was ugly, but again, I made it out. The only way out is to climb, bloody fingernail by bloody fingernail, back to the top of the cliff to the designated post, teetering on the edge, knowing full well that I'll fall to the dead place again fairly soon and go through the entire nightmare again. It sounds bad and definitely like a shitty way to exist, but it's either that or I just kill myself. Think about it. If I killed myself, I would never have to wobble on the edge of the cliff or endure the eternal suffering of the dead place again. It's really a toss-up because all of my options sound so groovy! Gee whiz...how to choose, how to choose? My only problem with that whole *killing myself* malarkey is that I just can't imagine that my purpose in this world is to live a constant, daily struggle for thirty-odd years just to end it by gagging down some pain pills and crapping my pants while gasses escape from my butt with loud popping noises. That's not really what I had in mind by "going out with a bang." I want to see what this is all for. I want to see it through till the end. It's the only way I'll ever know how strong I truly am, what my gifts are, and how they'll contribute to humanity. Besides that, when it comes down to it, I'd much rather go through a lifetime of my own torturous angst than to put those that I love through the pain of my self-inflicted "going out with a fart" instead of a bang to the head.

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