



That's Like Me!



Stories About Amazing People With Learning Differences

Jill Lauren, M.A.



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Foreword by Jerry Pinkney

Star Bright Books
New York

Bridging My Two Worlds

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I grew up as one of six children in a small house in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. My most prevalent and vivid recollections of my early years are that of a young boy struggling to balance the two seemingly different worlds I resided in during that impressionable time: home and school. I received full support and encouragement from my family, most especially my mother, and I was not laughed at or teased by the people around me. My mother was a quiet woman who spoke mostly with her eyes, and when there were apparent reasons to be concerned about my apprehension at school, she made me feel better about myself. Because of my mother, I was able to enter that second world, school, the place that made me so very anxious and a little off balance with no understanding as to why.

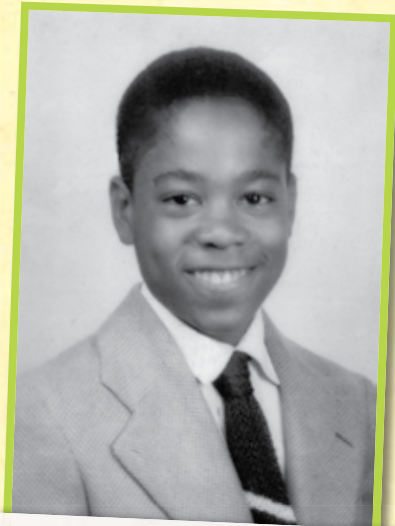
There was little knowledge of dyslexia in the 1940s and certainly not in the schools I attended. In school, I found myself in the favor of my teachers, yet I was often sent to special classes. I don't think anyone knew what those classes were supposed to accomplish. I have loved to draw as long as I can remember, and I was encouraged by teachers who appreciated and recognized my gift. They were able to see beyond the slow reader I was to someone who wanted to learn and grow.

I was far too young to realize that my two worlds could be bridged. There were two Jerrys: one gifted, smart, and likeable, and the other, a slow reader who was unable to spell. And, oh how much work there was for me just to hold onto ideas as they were presented. I have lived those two lives for most of my life.

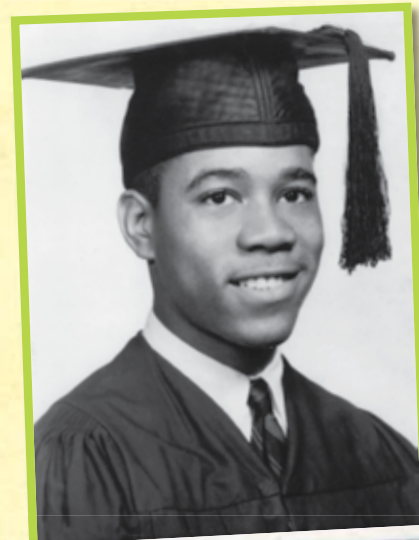
Over the years, I have grown to accept that these two seemingly opposing personality traits are really one Jerry. Each supports the other; both come together in a way that I now understand makes me stronger and unique. With uneven grades, but a thirst to learn, I became a model student. Mostly, I tried to show my teachers that this child with so many hurdles in front of him was trying.

My learning disability was not recognized or considered, thereby making it invisible, which caused me to find ways of keeping it unseen. I learned to excel in areas where I was strong and hide those places where there was a challenge. I became very good at hiding it, and I had no way to express just what I was feeling. I supported many assignments with drawing, allowing my gift to shine. I graduated from Hill Elementary School with honors. Making images, making art would become my speaking voice—I drew to learn. I learned to tell my story through pictures, the story of the child I wanted to be.

I hope the profiles in this book will serve as a bridge to inspire every child to be all that he or she can be.



Jerry in elementary school



Jerry graduating from high school



Characters from Jerry's books that overcame obstacles; Jerry working in his studio

Ann Bancroft

Explorer / Teacher

In my second-grade class, there was a big picture of the yellow brick road from *The Wizard of Oz*. Every time we got a math problem right, we moved along the road. My friends were marching their way to Oz, but not me. I never made it past the witch's house. Math was difficult for me, and so was the rest of school.

By the time I was twelve, I knew I was LD. I realized I learned best when I could use my eyes, ears, and hands. My science teacher helped me by bringing science to life through experiments. And I helped her by showing her how to ski. I was so happy that I could teach a teacher! It showed me that I had something to offer.

I was great at sports and loved outdoor adventures. I remember looking at pictures in *National Geographic* magazine and thinking, "I want to go on an adventure to the North Pole." So, I started camping outside in my backyard in the winter. My dog was the only one willing to go with me. I told him my feelings about being frustrated in school. He never told my secrets to anyone.

As I got older I spent more time outdoors, going on canoe trips in the Arctic and climbing mountains. In college, I focused on my strengths and decided to be a physical education teacher. It took me six years to graduate because of my LD. I had a hard time memorizing for tests. I took them over and over until I passed.

After I was teaching for a few years, an explorer named Will Steger invited me to travel to the North Pole. I loved this adventure, but it was really challenging. At times I felt like crying, but I thought to myself, "If I could get through school, I can get to the North Pole." Eventually we did make it, and I became the first woman in history to cross the ice to the North Pole. This was big new—so big that my picture was in *National Geographic* magazine!

Now with the help of the internet, I take students with me on my adventures. On my last trip, three million kids watched as my partner, Liv, and I traveled across Antarctica.

Even though we struggled, we never gave up. By watching us the students learned that, like me, they could follow their own dreams.



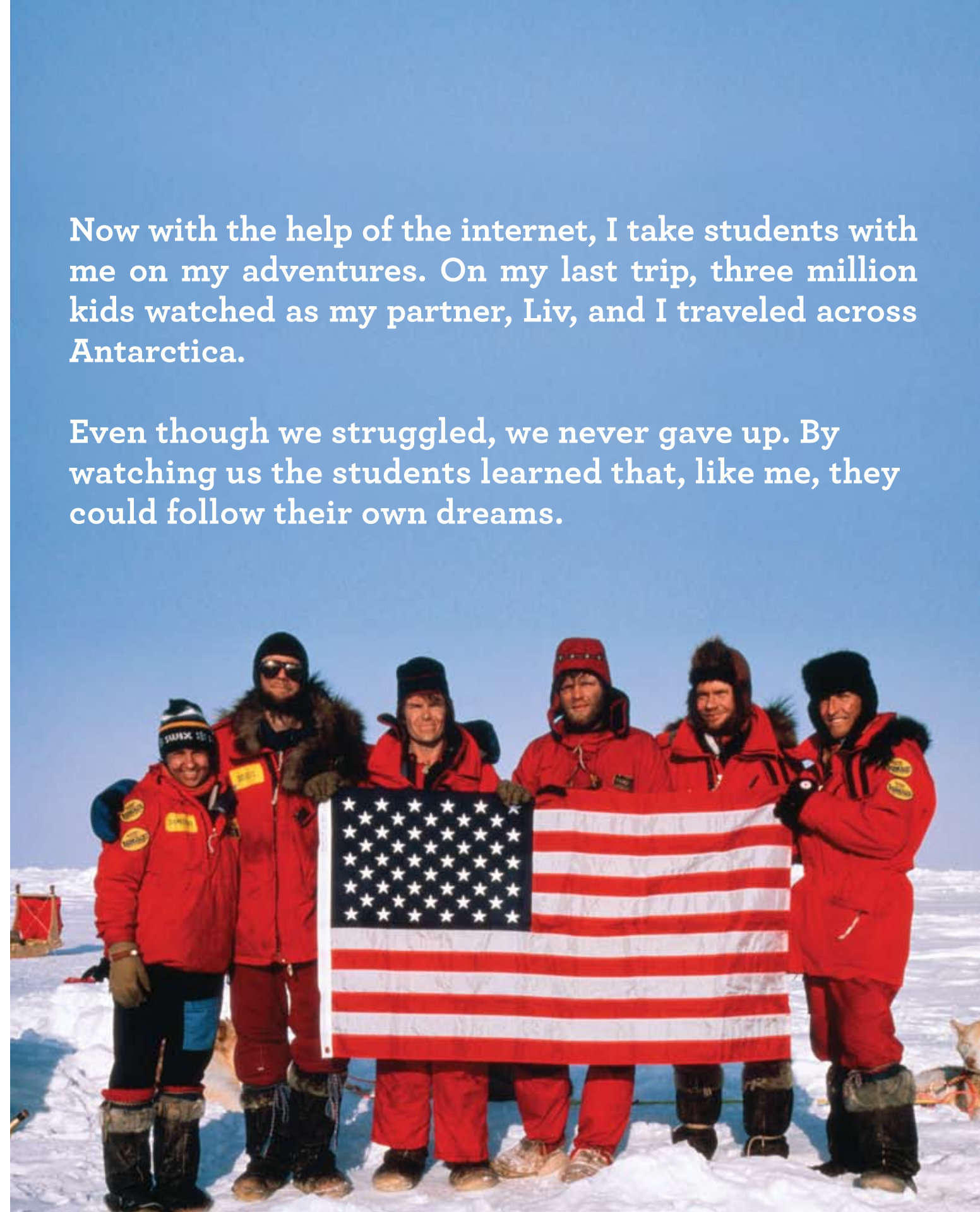
Ann on a canoe trip after graduating from high school



Ann on the way to the North Pole



Students say goodbye to Ann and Liv before an adventure



Right: Ann, far left, at the North Pole with her team

Tremaine Peterson

Artist, 10th Grade

In first grade, I used to draw scribble scrabble. I practiced, and then I got better at drawing. Drawing was the only thing I was good at. My friends would ask me to draw things for them because they couldn't draw. They'd ask, "Can you make me a body? Can you draw me a head?" And I'd do it.

In first grade, I had a reading problem. I tried to do the work, but it was hard. I also didn't like to read out loud. My aunt and my teachers tried to help, but I still didn't get it. My friend, Cameron, tried to help, too. He likes to read. He's read hundreds of books.

Because schoolwork was so tough, I really got into my art. I started drawing cartoons. I like black and white drawings. I would get my ideas from TV shows or websites. I like to copy, but I usually change it around.

**Drawing is never boring for me.
It's easy, and it makes me feel free.**

As I got older, school became harder, including math. In middle school, it felt like I had ten things to do every night for each subject. That's too much homework and too much stress. My aunt asked if I wanted to go to a school called the Academy in Manayunk [in Philadelphia]. The teachers at that school knew how to teach kids who had learning problems like me. I said, "OK."

At first I didn't like my new school, but now I do. It is easier to learn there. My reading is better because I am learning how to sound out words. We've got this Wilson method that helps teach us all the vowels of the English language. I like reading at school now, especially about animals.

Math got better, too. We use blocks, which makes math easier. I am studying long division, and I understand it. I also aced my first science test on the food chain. I read the study guide until I knew it all.

In the summers, my aunt sends me to art camp. I learned to paint, pencil, sketch, and draw there. Last summer I helped create an award-winning mural that is on display in Philadelphia. We also went to a zoo to learn to draw animals. I'm not really good at drawing animals. I'm better at cartoons. That's what I want to focus on.

In school we're learning about the Renaissance. That's a time when there were not a lot of books, so artists told stories through pictures. Maybe I'll tell the story of my life through cartoons. I think I'll probably be famous one day. I want to be. One of my cartoons is already in an art gallery!



Tremaine in elementary school



Teacher, Jackie Ford, helps make math easier



Below: Mural in Philadelphia that Tremaine helped create
Right: Tremaine's art; with best friend, Cameron



Jessica Lee

Wrestler, 8th Grade

When I was in kindergarten, I had hearing problems. Since I had a hard time hearing the words correctly, I also had trouble saying them. My speech teacher helped me learn to speak better. She also helped me with my spelling.

In first grade, I went to special ed classes for help with reading, writing, and math. My teacher, Ms. Conroy, taught me how to read. I also learned about sounds and syllables. Once we made a rap to help me learn the spelling of a hard word.

When I was in fourth grade, the other kids started to notice that I was leaving class for extra help. Some of them teased me. One boy called me a name. It made me very angry. When other kids said stuff, I ignored them. I wouldn't let them bother me. Soon they stopped teasing me.

Around that time, my teacher handed out forms to the boys for the wrestling team. One boy told me that girls couldn't wrestle, which I wasn't happy about. I wanted to try wrestling. The next day I went to the principal's office and got a permission slip to join the team.

The coach was excited to have me on the team, but none of the boys wanted to be my partner. During my third match, the boy I wrestled was scared of me. I took him down by shooting, which means I grabbed both of his legs. That was the first match I won. I liked wrestling right away.

Now I'm in middle school. I still get extra help, but I don't leave my class anymore. Instead, my special ed teachers come into the classroom. If I don't understand what the regular teacher is saying, I just raise my hand and the special ed teacher comes over. I like getting help right away.

Star wrestler!



Jessica & her sister



History teacher, Mr. Deodino



Jessica loves animals!

My teachers have helped me understand that I learn differently. It's best for me when the teacher doesn't teach too fast and goes step by step.

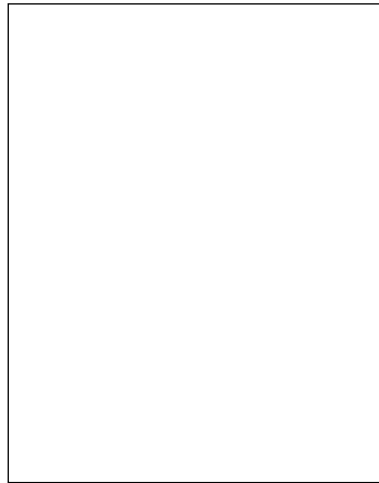
Sometimes I still have trouble saying words, like names of people I learn about in history. When my teacher, Mr. Deodino, writes a name on the board, I'll say, "What's that word?" He says it, and I repeat it. We both laugh when I say it wrong because it sounds so funny.

I am still going to wrestle in high school. I might even be able to get a scholarship for college because of wrestling. I will also work hard to get good grades because I want to go to college. Maybe I'll be a veterinarian. I love animals, and I'm good at taking care of them. I'll just keep on trying in school. I won't give up.



All About You!

Write Your Own Success Story



A Picture of You

Your Name

Your Grade

My favorite activity is ...

My favorite subject is ...



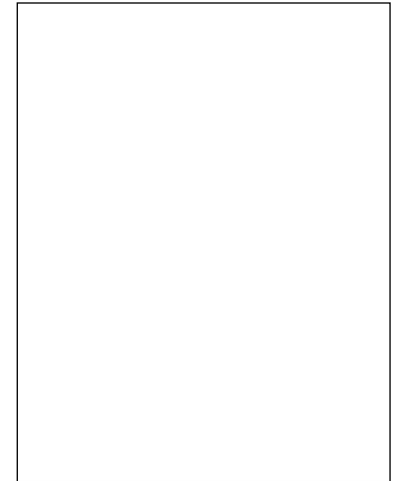
A Picture of Your
Favorite Hobby

School is hard when ...

I learn best when ...

I feel successful when ...

In the future, I hope that ...



A Picture of You When
You Feel Successful

That's Like Me! Includes:

- ☆ Fifteen success stories from role models who learn differently
- ☆ Advice for pursuing goals while facing school challenges
- ☆ Space for kids to write their own success stories
- ☆ An invaluable list of resources for adults and students

Praise for *That's Like Me!*

"*That's Like Me!* is fantastic—it gives a perspective on learning differences that isn't out there. I love that it approaches the issue from the angle of success!"

—Dana Buchman, Fashion Designer & Author, *A Special Education: One Family's Journey Through the Maze of Learning Disabilities*

"The journey through childhood is a difficult one for students who—through no fault or choice of their own—must struggle with their learning disorders. *That's Like Me!* introduces us to fifteen 'guides' who will assist us on this journey. Their stories will inspire struggling students . . . and the adults who care for them. This wonder-filled book is a source of invaluable information and inspiration for all those 'kids in the back of the room.' Read it . . . re-read it . . . and read it again."

—Richard D. Lavoie, Author, *The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child*; Creator, *How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop*

Also by Jill Lauren

Succeeding With LD: True Stories About Real People With LD

—Parent Council® Selection

Star Bright Books
New York

