

## Falling Through the Ceiling

*“Our internal house was a mismatched hodge-podge of impoverished parts, even as the external dwelling looked good to outsiders.” – Audrey*

Larry was completely afraid of heights and allowed most things around the house to go unfixed. Jay became the fixit man in the family. We moved into an historical house the year Rob graduated from high school. There were many things that needed to be repaired, including a missing pipe in the attic that was needed to divert dripping water from the HVAC unit to a drain. When we saw droplets on the third-floor ceiling, we knew the drain pan needed to be emptied again. Normally Jay would climb up and drain the pan; however, he was no longer living with us and had to be summoned for such repairs. Wanting to be helpful, Rob impulsively took on the task unasked. It did not go well.

*“Hanging by my midsection, looking down at my mother from the attic to the third floor of our house, I felt like that out-of-control kid who used to write on walls or throw firecrackers into bonfires. How could I have possibly fallen halfway through the ceiling, knocking down plaster and wood onto Mom’s head? Jay wasn’t even there to dare me to climb up the ceiling ladder from the third floor. He didn’t hassle me about being too big to even fit through the ceiling access panel. It was much easier for him, at 5’10” and 150 pounds, to get into the attic. Because I was 6’3” and about 200 pounds, I had no business being up there. Jay’s job was always to deftly crawl across the attic beams when necessary. So*

*how did I make the decision that resulted in me hanging in that extremely painful position with my sneakers waving above Mom's head? I have no clue. It just seemed like the right thing to do when I made the decision to fix it in the absence of my brother and my father, who was afraid of heights. I was in college; living rent free and was perfectly comfortable with putting off things until later. I guess I thought it would be fun.” – Rob*

Fortunately, Jay showed up in the nick of time and got Rob down from the hole before he crashed through the ceiling. I felt blessed that once again my child was safe, and at the same time, it was one more atypical day with the Jones Boys. I didn't even bother to ask him why he did it. These types of incidents had been going on for years, and there's never a good explanation. After asking why so many times and it never making sense, you just stop asking and become a fixer—an enabler—to get to the next point. Fixing things is what we learned to do, and it teaches nothing. We had become inoculated against the errors, the mishaps, the poor choices and the bad decisions. Parents will enable until they run out of money, run out of patience or simply give up.

“Rob fell through the ceiling, not because he did not know that beam walking was dangerous, but because he was impulsive. Solving the problem would have taken more effort than trying one more daredevil move.” – Audrey

## FINAL THOUGHTS

*“From the Winds of Frustration to Stabilization and Resilience”*

*Audrey and Larry*

Our family memoir was written to highlight for parents and professionals the journey that our family has taken to get to stability in our marriage and our sons' lives. These are just some of the stories of our parenting experience raising three African American males. As you have read, it has been a wild roller coaster ride of child rearing. We want your path to be more direct by avoiding our mistakes and finding the right tools to guide your child(ren) successfully through the maze of distractions that accompany ADHD. Hopefully you will share what we have learned about how crucial stabilizing inattention and impulsive behaviors are, in order to unlock each person's gifts. This is an ongoing challenge. We want our perspective in *Falling Through the Ceiling* to be a catalyst for discussion and sharing your story with other families and friends.

As a parent reading our stories, you understand the value of early diagnosis and treatment. Early interventions are extremely effective in focusing on the most appropriate educational and behavioral goals. You have the benefit of regular meetings with the school to keep education and behavior on track. You as the parent are the primary decision-maker and advocate. However, as the child approaches adolescence, he should be included in the decision making process.

We were diligent and resilient in getting our sons through high school

and transitioning them to college. Based on our college experiences, we thought that college would offer them their best opportunities to thrive, but it was there that they each hit the proverbial brick wall. These years were our greatest tests as parents. We had been a significant stabilizing force for them, and too often, enablers. Even though they had been taught to focus in order to be successful in school. As the stories reveal, our maturing young men each continued to struggle with inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity in college. Only Rob completed his bachelor's degree on his first try.

To stabilize our sons and begin to unlock their adult gifts required many resources, a different set for each one. In others words, preparing for a positive lifestyle after the storms and day-to-day challenges of ADHD required resource kits including:

- Family
- Educational professionals (teachers, counselors, coaches)
- Psychological therapists and counselors
- Physicians
- Medication

When our sons began living independently, they disavowed the need for most of the types of resources we had provided. But as they have matured, they have cobbled together their own teams and villages to keep their positive behavior on track. Fortunately, they have found supportive, loving mates that encourage them and establish ground rules for their relationships.

After 40 years of practicing parenting we see that our most critical responsibilities continue to be:

- Keeping realistic expectations for each child, accounting for how ADHD affects him
- Maintaining a stable, safe home
- Providing positive supervision and learning experiences at every age
- Promoting shared problem solving, not enabling, as they mature

Our measure of success is their ability to have meaningful careers, find loving mates and to use the principles we have outlined in this

memoir and other principles to raise their children. Each one has told us their stories of how they use their gifts to overcome disappointments and difficulties on their own. Their measurements of success are based on their individual, focused expectations. They have harnessed tools that complement their capabilities for adult focus and self-discipline. We are proud that Drew, Jay, and Rob continue to solve their problems and resolve lingering issues that allow their gifts to emerge and their lives to thrive.