

# Hailey-Hall-Interview-

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## SPEAKERS

Paul Huddleston, Hailey Hall

### Paul Huddleston 00:01

I am here talking today with published author and Merrimack student, Hailey Hall. Hi, Haley, how are you?

### Hailey Hall 00:07

I'm doing well. How are you?

### Paul Huddleston 00:08

I'm doing pretty good today. So we're talking during Autism Awareness Month. And I have just met you, you are a fascinating person of you are a wonderful conversationalist. I think this is going to be a very, very fun talk. So you have a very interesting background, you mentioned that you were diagnosed late. And I've spoken to one other female who was on the autism spectrum. And they also mentioned that they were diagnosed late. So you were diagnosed at

### Hailey Hall 00:46

I was 14 years old. It's very, very, very, very common for those who are for females to be diagnosed late. We also present differently, very differently from males, sometimes.

### Paul Huddleston 00:59

Any good examples of that are something that you can cite.

### Hailey Hall 01:04

We don't have as much. So I'm not entirely certain about how different definitely we do. We make better eye contact, I think is one thing. We don't present with a lot of the the normal autistic. But I guess I can only speak from my own experience. I wanted to be social. I really desperately wanted friends. I didn't understand social skills at all. And so I would get right up in someone's face and be talking as fast as I could. And they would be leaning back. And I would be leaning forwards. Because I didn't know what personal space meant was constant problem. And to the point where I really didn't have any friends until I was in high school. I had one friend in elementary school and that ended very badly. I kind of

didn't realize I was pushing people away from her and she's fifth in the fifth grade. She sent me a letter, cussing me out. My dad read the letter, put it back in the envelope and send it to her mother. Oh, she called she had to call it apologize. But yeah, I was diagnosed after that, though. The first year of high school.

**Paul Huddleston 02:17**

Okay, and you're you're a transplant to this area.

**Hailey Hall 02:20**

I am. I am a native of Georgia. Actually metro Atlanta area. Everyone always asks, oh, are you from Atlanta? No, not really.

**Paul Huddleston 02:30**

So you you came from Georgia, St. Louis? What was it like growing up, I guess prior to being diagnosed.

**Hailey Hall 02:38**

So my dad would say I was one of those like, I was hyper social but didn't understand. So for instance, I loved people I always wanted to talk to them. Didn't matter if they didn't want to talk to me because I did not know they didn't want to talk to me. I was also very hyperactive. My dad started to my dad's a pediatrician, he started taking me to a psychiatrist when I was three years old. That was actually ended up being a very bad idea. I was put on Ritalin because they thought I had ADD, I was three. At seven. It was again, misdiagnosed with bipolar was seven. That is not diagnoseable. At seven, late teens, early 20s is when bipolar shows up about that. Yeah. And so in that vein of things, I was put on medications. I was on medications up until actually until November 2020. When I finally was I pulled myself off of them and I'm the happiest and most sane I've ever been in my life. But because they kept increasing my it's the amount of they kept increasing my dose because the amount of just wasn't working in when you start getting on the huge doses of antidepressants or an in in like Abilify and it's not working. You have to think well, why is it is maybe it's not psychological. I was not diagnosed with Ehlers Danlos until 2020. Wow. Yeah. So

**Paul Huddleston 04:12**

Now What did getting the diagnosis of Asperger's mean for you?

**Hailey Hall 04:19**

Well, it actually meant it took a quite a bit off my plate. In that regard. I went from being in almost special ed. In my I was in school for a bit ended up getting to the situation I don't wanna talk about, got pulled out of a school where I was in regular Special Ed into another school, different County that had what's called the North Metro program, which was for behavioral and learning disabilities versus the regular. I know there's a name for it. I can't remember it. It's for kids with Down syndrome full on. One's hard to take a bit you have to learn how to hear of yourself, and I went from being a moderate B student are low student because I was having so much difficulty in my just connecting with people to being a straight A, within a year. And part of that was I like to learn, but people made me nervous. So I was

went to... in the north Metro program they have they teach your social skills. That's one of the classes they actually have the social skills.

**Paul Huddleston** 05:24

Oh, that that's helpful.

**Hailey Hall** 05:25

Oh, it was it was I was seeing a therapist who is also giving it's like I didn't I am very attuned to people's emotions by couldn't really explain why I did face flashcards. Yes, they had a game, they had a she had a Go Fish Game, we play with four different things like for like instead of cards, they were the emotions. And of course, there's a number, but each of the emotions had four different faces. Okay, so four different expressions of anger, or four different expressions of sorrow, frustration.

**Paul Huddleston** 05:54

So I would imagine that would be very helpful.

**Hailey Hall** 05:57

It was it was and I think one of the biggest things I started and this is something I've noticed about a connection I have with other people who are artistic, artistic, and those on the spectrum, also notice the neurodiverse. But it's that I did not make eye contact when I was a kid. And my reasoning after it took me about until I was at least 16, I started trying, I would look, I learned how to look in between your nose in between your eyebrows, and it looked like I was looking at you because I had to. It wasn't until I started feeling more comfortable with my in my own skin, that I started looking in people's eyes. And because I could see what they saw in me, and how I felt about myself, you can almost see the disdain or the frustration or the irritation in someone's eyes, even when they're trying to cover it up. Or you're looking at someone and you don't you may be looking at them not realizing you're looking condescendingly. And so it's like, it's like, oh, yeah, that's okay. And you look at them. And you put your eyes are saying like, You're okay. You're just

**Paul Huddleston** 07:02

Yeah. Yeah, and,

**Hailey Hall** 07:05

or less than.

**Paul Huddleston** 07:06

And that is. We talked a little bit about the idea of moving from autistic or autism spectrum disorder to neuro divergence, or neurodiversity. And how has that change, altered the way people react, altered the way you think about being on the spectrum or being neurodivergent? How has that altered the way things are perceived.

**Hailey Hall** 07:36

So I've kind of felt this way for many years, but I want people to embrace their differences. I'm not, I'm very different, I think very different. I think very quickly, I think faster than most of the population. I also

speak very quickly, which can be a problem. But being able to realize that, just because you have you're diagnosed with autism, you are not less. In fact, you actually have something to contribute to society if you are given the chance to do so. I have a friend of mine. I haven't seen him in years, but he worked at savers where I work right now. moved to Canada. But when I got there, that he would say things like, "Oh, I can't help it. I have autism". And after a point, I said, No, you I was it was things like lumping everyone in the back as his trying to get this just trashcan to the back causing some difficulties. And it was frustrating me. And at one point, I finally said to him, I said like, yes, you can. "No, I can't I have autism". Yes, you can. You know why? I know you can, because I have autism. And I know you can do it. And I believe in you. And within weeks, he was working on himself. Because he had a role model.

**Paul Huddleston 08:53**

And not only that, but you provided the Yeah, I guess the reinforcement that Yeah, it's like, though you have it's not you are you can

**Hailey Hall 09:04**

Yeah, you can do it. You can do what you if you set your mind to it. And it's and that's one of the frustrations in why we're doing this Autism Awareness vs. Ai. Oh, no. Oh, no. Excuse me. Pardon me, this is autism acceptance. Yes. And I get those confused. This is autism acceptance versus autism awareness, which is very often like autism, Autism Speaks, which those of us who are who believe in the neurodiversity part of things do not like places like Autism Speaks I have heard such things because they like Amy, who is the one that acts the actress office in Stlcc at Meramec she, she heard in a radio commercial for Autism Speaks and somber music starts playing and the it's all these quotes from parents saying like, and then the doctor told me my son had Autism and it gives this depressed feeling

**Paul Huddleston 10:01**

to be fair, any child presents challenges. But autism presents different challenges. They're not necessarily more difficult or overwhelming.

**Hailey Hall 10:15**

Exactly. And one of the interesting things is, so on that note, having I have friends who they're friends of my husband, but this a few weeks ago, we went and hang out, hung out with them and their son. My husband's name is Michael, this is his godson, Michael. So Michael, Michael, I am known as God, God, father's wife, I don't even have a name yet. So he's a little over two, and she is a pediatrician. And she's, she's, they're trying to get him to use his words. He doesn't speak the only word he actually ever uses. Now, at all thus far, very quietly Owl, he loves owls. But when I said to her, she's told me and it was, she told me that this thing they like, and we're trying to get him to use his words, and, and I said, Well, have you thought about autism? And I could visibly see the like stress of that word. She's like, well, we've got him in the in the early start program. Well, just like I have autism, she's like what you do? And I'm like, yeah. And Michael, though he's never been diagnosed. He didn't talk to us for like, he is a He is not like, he is not a little he's like a computer hardware engineer. It's like, and I didn't quite want to say this to her. But your husband probably is on the spectrum. From what I've seen of him, he reminds me a lot of my husband

**Paul Huddleston 11:39**

does run in families. I think if we were to look really hard in a lot of places, I think more people would find that they are on the spectrum or closer to on the spectrum than not.

**Hailey Hall 11:53**

Yeah. And that's the thing that's so ridiculous about it being a spectrum. Truth be told. My mom said it. At one point, she said, she doesn't think there really is an increase in autism over the years. Those weird guys that used to just stay in their own, like, weird guys isn't like the old guy in his farm who had his little he had his tricks. He was never diagnosed. My father in law, classic, classic autism, according to them, I mean, it's like, but they were not now, because we're also connected. In a anti social social media. Sorry.

**Paul Huddleston 12:32**

I know you're not wrong, you're not wrong. You're not

**Hailey Hall 12:35**

really friends with a million people. You might have to if you have to, you're lucky sometimes. But this like socialists, like you're so connected, you start to see someone else's eccentricities. And then it becomes as Oh, that person has a problem.

**Paul Huddleston 12:51**

And now we have a name for it. Yeah, we can say this. Is that. Yeah. And I tend to agree with you. I think that a lot of the oh, they're just a little odd. Yeah, probably were are somewhere on the spectrum,

**Hailey Hall 13:08**

Albert Einstein,

**Paul Huddleston 13:09**

that you you'd mentioned earlier, when we were talking before this about something that you like to think about as far as nonverbal autistic people. That is, that's something that a lot of people mistake when someone is nonverbal. They associate that with, they can't speak so they can't think or they don't understand. And that is far from the case.

**Hailey Hall 13:35**

It is and actually that's one of the major things I want people to be aware of, is the the people around, you know, it doesn't matter if they're they are banging their head against the wall, screaming, whatever. They're not stupid. In fact, there are now books written by nonverbal Autistics. People like Carly Fleischman, I can't read the names of the other ones. She's an amazing individual. What she has is aphasia. She can't speak. She does all these things. She was asked this question. What and she does it by typing took it take takes a long time because she sits there and hunts impact to there is no as facilitate communication. Nobody's touching her. So it takes those who sit there and hover. But the question was asked, Carly, why do people with autism stim? Why do they bang their heads? rock flap their hands? Her answer was, and I'm paraphrasing. "I take a million pictures of a person's face every

minute. It's overwhelming. We start creating output to mask the input". If you think about it from my own, my own experience, I am aware of every sound in this room at this moment individually. I cannot actually filter them out. When I'm in a in a crowded place with a bunch of conversations. I can hear everybody's conversation. And sometimes I'm inputting on all of them by accident in my head or out loud which gets me in trouble. because I've been told to stop talking,

**Paul Huddleston 15:02**

understood, I've heard that once or twice.

**Hailey Hall 15:04**

It's just like I imagined all of that. And, and for me, I mean, I already have a lot. You imagine the ones that have so much that they can't handle, there is no filter. And that's what's happening. I've had it happen a few times, I have this innate ability to connect with those with severe autism, for example, like little Michael. Because, first off, I am engaging with him as a person, not just with him as a child playing with a child. I look him in the eyes, and it's like, amazing at how quickly he starts to smile at me, because I am looking at him with understanding and love and you are worthy. And I don't think you're stupid. I'm gonna talk down. Yes, you're two years old. I'm not going to talk to your 20 year old. Is that stupid? It's not a good idea. But you are your own person. You're not stupid. You're there's nothing wrong with how who you are. And this has happened with adults as well. People I've never met before. I was at point at Baldwin Commons at one point in a pool there. And there was an autistic man walking around in the pool doing not focusing and looking down, obviously very much on the far end of the nonverbal autistic didn't talk. His dad was there too, older gentleman. At one point, I was watching him just like looking around. I'd say hello to him. You kind of look my way a little bit, but not look me in the eye. finally ended up in the little area where we ended up talking. I was talking to him and looking him in the eye like looking at his face. And of course, in the beginning, he's not looking at my eyes. And eventually you start doing this kind of side glance. Then he actively making eye contact. Wow. And I'm talking to his dad, about what like how much I've loved St. Louis or whatnot, but looking at him engaging with him. By the time he left, they had to go and his dad gets up. He reaches over to shake when I think you shake my hand. He shakes my hand starts trying to pull me with him. It was the cutest thing. He's like, come here. Come with me Come with me. And his dad was like, flabbergasted. He's like, no, no, wait, she can't come with us. He's going mmm look and look and kind of sideline looking at me. And I was laughing but no, no, it's okay. I have to stay here. Look at him in the eye. I was like, waves and leaves. And I was laughing about it later. But oh my gosh, I got an autistic dude is the a little crush on me. It's funny. It was cute. But it was that connection. It was the connection that he doesn't know, probably doesn't get that often at all.

**Paul Huddleston 17:39**

No. And that's, it's it's really difficult to try to explain to neurotypical folks Yeah, that that connection means so much.

**Hailey Hall 17:52**

Oh, yes, it does. It does. And even for myself, it's like being seen. It's like, most people when they've learned or I tell them, yeah, no, I have Asperger's. Oh, you're so high functioning. I would not have

known. I'm like, because there's nothing wrong with me. Exactly. Kind of want to say that. And it's just like, frustrates me.

**Paul Huddleston 18:16**

I do like the way that you described it. Because I think for people who are neurotypical, I don't even notice the sound of the highway. Yeah, outside the window, I don't notice the sound of the lights buzzing overhead or the ventilation system wooshing, I notice it, I just can you can filter it out, filter it. And, you know, it's almost like if you were to put a microphone in the middle of a room and collect every sound unfiltered, that would drive you nuts. Yes. But when we talk about neurodivergency which I love that term, because it basically means that you sense things differently than a lot of other people. One gentleman that I spoke to our STEM Dean on this campus, his son is on the spectrum. And he said, Yeah, it's it's almost like where, either where you can see 16 million colors. Someone with autism can either see eight colors, or billions. And it's either overwhelming or it gets so overwhelming that they say okay, we're going to cut it down to eight because we can handle eight. Yes. And I like the idea of the sound thing because obviously I'm kind of in sound, but I think that's a great way to put it so that people who are neurotypical can understand that and grasp that.

**Hailey Hall 19:44**

Yeah, and one of the nice things and I actually yes, I can't filter stuff out very easily. I do a lot better than most people. I can ignore it. I can still hear it. I can isolate which sounds are coming from which direction as well. It's a little strange. I echolocate sometimes to find things. That's worse. Yeah. It's kind of Well, like not literally echolocating I can figure out where a bird is which which tree or where that bird actually is. It's driving me nuts. And I want to figure out what type of bird it is. So I see everything all the time. And I, I never even thought about but other people might not see as many colors different. They're on so many different shades of green in a single inch pair inch space of grass than anybody would ever realize. Try looking at a leaf. Oh my god, the veins are amazing. Snowflakes. Every single snowflake from the beginning of time till the end is unique. The massiveness of that amount. It's like, that's my favorite, favorite little thing that is just amazing. But what I was gonna say, though, is one day a few months ago, I think it was It wasn't from December, November. I was heading to from here, from actually from Meramec to Illinois, to see my my in laws. And I'm driving down this highway. It's storming outside, and I am the only person I think in the entirety of St. Louis that saw that there was a rainbow. Yes, it was at like 4pm. The sun was setting there. It was so cloudy. I'm single, I'm talking to my wife. I'm like, Oh my gosh, that's a rainbow. And it was a perfect arch. And it was the new colors were so muted, because there was not a lot of light. But it was a rainbow. And I'm like I looked everywhere. Did anybody get a picture of it? Has anybody else seen it? I'm not crazy. It was real. But everyone was so focused, they couldn't see it. And I could see it and stay focused. That's the cool part.

**Paul Huddleston 21:45**

Haley, was there anything else you wanted to talk about today? I wanted to bring up

**Hailey Hall 21:49**

Yeah, so I'm going to put a plug in for my favorite movie on autism, which is Temple Grandin. It's an HBO film starring Claire Danes. She is does an incredible job, what the best part about it is that it shows her it shows what her like how her family and everybody else saw my gosh, like the stuff she

was doing and how crazy it was. And then it also has what's like over like, printed over on this on the video, what she is seeing. So when she's opening this thing up and down, up and down, up and down, they're like, Oh, she won't stop. And you see in her head, she's looking at the angle of how it's doing and calculating it and using that for later. It's really well done. It's one of my favorite scenes in that movie.

**Paul Huddleston 22:33**

Temple Grandin is amazing. She's She's fantastic.

**Hailey Hall 22:36**

And temple herself said that clair Danes did such a good job. She said it was like she couldn't even see that it was accurate, which is first like unnerving for her. She's like, it was like me as a kid.

**Paul Huddleston 22:48**

unnerving. But but a great compliment to get Claire Danes.

**Hailey Hall 22:51**

Oh, yes. No, it was insane. It was amazing. I love that movie. And then a small other little thing. You mentioned that I'm an author, a published author. I will note, I am not a self published author. I had a book of poetry and art that I wrote, In my years here. I briefly I was a nun for five years. It's been an amazing ride and went from being someone who did not who my father had said my father was so when I was five years old, I should be institutionalized. I would never drive a car, I would never have a job. I would never, never do anything with my life to being a self being a published author at age 35. But three more books on the way. But that book is available through my website, if anybody's interested in looking at it.

**Paul Huddleston 23:38**

And the website if somebody wants to find out more about you or the things that you do would be

**Hailey Hall 23:44**

Hailey Hall dot art That's H A I L E Y H A L L dot ART.

**Paul Huddleston 23:52**

Haley, thank you so much. It's been wonderful talking to you today. Absolutely.