

# Discovering My Spectrum: Late Autism Diagnosis and Advocacy



By **Brittany Browne, BA, MS**

**T**he soft hum of the air conditioner was the only sound in the small, cozy office. Sunlight filtered through the blinds, casting a warm glow on the shelves lined with books. I sat on a long couch, my heart pounding as I waited for the neuropsychologist to speak. My husband was at home with our four children, managing the chaos and offering his silent support from afar.

Dr. Lisa Korey, a kind woman with gentle eyes and a calming presence, looked up from her notes. She took a deep breath and folded her hands on the desk. “Brittany,” she began, her voice steady yet compassionate, “after thoroughly reviewing your tests and evaluations, I can confirm that you are indeed autistic.”

The words hung in the air, echoing in my mind. I felt a rush of emotions—relief, confusion, fear, and, oddly, a sense of validation. Tears welled up in my eyes, blurring my vision. I wished my husband were there to give my hand a reassuring squeeze, but I knew he was with me in spirit. He had been so sure, so convinced, and now here it was, the confirmation I had both dreaded and needed.

Dr. Korey continued—her tone gentle but firm. “I know this is a lot to take in. It’s completely normal to feel overwhelmed. But I want you to know that this diagnosis doesn’t change who you are. It’s simply a new lens through which to understand yourself and your experiences.”



I nodded, unable to find the words. Memories of my childhood, the confusion, and the feeling of being different all came rushing back. The sensory overloads, the social struggles, the constant need to mask my true self—they all made sense now. It was as if a missing puzzle piece had finally fallen into place.

“I’ve always felt... different,” I finally managed to say, my voice barely above a whisper. “But I never thought it was autism. I thought I was just...”

“Unique,” Dr. Korey finished for me, smiling kindly. “And you are. Autism doesn’t define you; it’s just a part of what makes you uniquely you.”

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my racing heart. “What now?” I asked, my voice trembling. “What do I do with this information?”

Dr. Korey leaned forward, her eyes meeting mine. “Now, we focus on understanding and embracing your neurodivergent traits. There are resources, therapies, and communities that can support you. You’re not alone in this, Brittany. This diagnosis is the beginning of a new journey, one where you can learn to thrive as your authentic self.”

As I left Dr. Korey’s office, I felt a mix of apprehension and hope. The road ahead seemed uncertain, but for the first time, I felt like I had a map. I wasn’t lost; I was finally found...

I never felt fully known and understood when growing up and into adulthood. I often felt that only one or two aspects of myself were fulfilled in any friendship. I am an athlete, an academic, an artist, a lover of culture and travel, and a deeply connected follower of Christ.

As an athlete, I excelled in volleyball, basketball, and soccer, earning numerous awards and being named “Most Athletic” in my senior class. I was often the first or second girl picked for kickball teams in elementary school, and I became the youngest varsity soccer captain in my school’s history at 14 years old. I thrived on the competitive challenges and enjoyed the camaraderie with my teammates.

Academically, I was among the top five students in my graduating class, even after skipping a grade in middle school. I graduated high school at 16, had two Bachelor’s degrees by 19, and completed my master’s at 22 from Georgia Tech. I thrived on academic challenges and had intelligent, well-spoken friends who shared my love for learning.

Creatively, I have always loved writing poetry and songs, singing, painting, and dancing. The emotional processing aspects of art and the communication of my inner world to the outer world through various mediums have always been important to me. I found solace and expression in these activities, often collaborating with my creative friends on artistic projects.







Culturally, I have always been drawn to travel and languages. I remember trying to pronounce words in Spanish as a child and spending hours looking at books about other countries. This passion led to one of my Bachelor's degrees being in Spanish and my Master's in International Affairs. I was in the minority as an American in my friend circle during college, surrounded by friends from various countries. Now, understanding my autism, I realize I found comfort in these diverse friendships because they, too, experienced being different.

Spiritually, I have always had a deep bond with God and others who feel God's presence strongly. I also believe in learning from other cultures and faiths and seeing truths our Western faith often ignores. This open-mindedness has enriched my spiritual journey and deepened my understanding of God.

Despite these diverse interests and achievements, I often felt misunderstood and disconnected. When I met my husband, I found someone who identified with me on every level. He, too, is athletic, intelligent, artistic, interested in different cultures and traveling, and has a deep relationship with God. He is my person, and our connection has been a cornerstone of my life.

### A journey of understanding

The journey to understanding my potential autism diagnosis began with my husband's suggestion. Initially, I was offended and resistant. However, as we navigated the neurodivergent journeys of our children, the reality of my own autism became

clearer. My second daughter exhibited sensory processing issues, and my oldest daughter showed social signs of autism alongside her ADHD diagnosis. Observing their struggles and recognizing similar patterns in myself led me to reconsider my neurodivergence.

My husband's journey with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), where he embraced and actively sought ways to manage his condition, inspired me. He suggested I get re-evaluated for autism, this time with love and care. I realized that many of the stereotypes about autism did not align with the spectrum of what it means to be autistic. Watching and reading about the experiences of other late-diagnosed autistic females, I saw myself in their stories.

In December 2023, I was formally diagnosed with autism by a neuropsychologist specializing in ADHD and autism. The diagnosis brought initial grief but also clarity. Situations that were confusing or overwhelming now made sense. I started to understand my sensory overwhelm, gave myself the grace to rest more, and communicated my needs better.

Since my diagnosis, I have started to see my life through a new lens. Daily situations that once confused or overwhelmed me now make sense. Understanding my sensory overwhelm has allowed me to give myself the grace to rest more and to communicate my needs better. Sharing my diagnosis has been empowering, helping others to understand my experiences and offering me the grace and understanding I long needed.



My goal now is to shift mainstream perceptions of autism, particularly through my pageantry platform focused on neurodiversity awareness, with an emphasis on female autism. My journey in competing for Mrs. Georgia America has been a significant part of my story (to be shared at another time, dearest reader) as a late-diagnosed autistic female. Now, it allows me to showcase my advocacy publicly. I want people to realize that autism encompasses a broad spectrum. The adage from Dr. Stephen Shore, “If you’ve met one autistic person, you’ve met one autistic person,” is crucial. Everyone’s experience is unique, and inclusivity and understanding are paramount.

A key realization for me was that traits associated with autism and ADHD are amplified human traits. Everyone has socially awkward moments or feels overwhelmed at times, but for someone with autism, these experiences are more frequent and intense. Our brains are wired differently, and that’s not just okay—it’s part of the rich tapestry of human diversity. We can contribute immensely to the world when our environments are accommodating and understanding.

My husband and I are now dedicated to supporting neurodivergent individuals. We are developing therapy manuals, meditation audio files, psychedelic-assisted therapy programs, K-12 micro-schooling initiatives, and awareness campaigns for neurodivergent populations. Our work aims to help people see themselves as valuable and capable, not despite their differences but because of them.

The late diagnosis of autism in my generation highlights the critical need for more proactive identification and resources for the next generation of autistic adults. By recognizing and embracing our neurodivergent traits, we can achieve better mental health, self-care, and support for families and caretakers. It is essential to provide the next generation with the tools, understanding, and acceptance they need to thrive.

Everything we do now aims to support and uplift neurodivergent individuals. We are passionate about freeing people from the idea that they are less valuable due to their neurodivergent traits. We believe everyone can grow into the best, most authentic versions of themselves with the proper support and understanding. While we are still on this journey ourselves, we are eager to share our experiences and offer support to those who identify with our story. By doing so, we hope to foster a world where neurodiversity is accepted and celebrated.



*Brittany Browne, BA, MS, is a dedicated wife, mother, and advocate for neurodiversity. She has a rich background as an athlete, academic, artist, and world traveler. Brittany's journey with autism and ADHD, both personally and within her family, has fueled her passion for raising awareness and support for neurodivergent individuals. Professionally, she co-founded Mind & Body Christian Health Group, where she integrates her extensive knowledge in mental health, physical wellness, and neurodiversity. With degrees in Spanish and International Affairs from Georgia Tech, Brittany combines her love for different cultures with her professional endeavors, offering a holistic approach to healthcare. As an active participant in the Mrs. Georgia America Pageant, Brittany uses her platform to promote Neurodiversity Awareness, with a specific focus on female autism. She is deeply involved in her community, volunteering for organizations like Rise Against Hunger and SERV International and leading medical missions to Honduras with Excel Global Outreach. Brittany and her husband, Brandon, are parents to neurodivergent children, which has inspired their work in developing therapy manuals, meditation audio files, and educational programs for neurodivergent populations. Outside of her professional and advocacy work, Brittany enjoys spending time with her family, being in nature, archery, volleyball, creating digital art, and learning to play the violin.*

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