was firing thousands, he was one of 200 graduates hired nationwide at a starting salary of $42,000.

Emerson wrote: " 'What will you have?' quoth God. 'Pay for it and take it.' " These are places eager and eminently able, if you are willing to pay for it with hard work, to empower you to take it.

The Learning Disabled of Today Will Be the Gifted of Tomorrow

Recently, a mother telephoned me with a request: "Please don't use the term 'learning disabled' to Ann when we come in for our interview."

Ann didn't even want to hear the word "disabled" mentioned. And she is not alone; some of my clients have even tried to deny that they learn any differently from anyone else. While no one really knows, the estimates are that 8 to 12 percent of the population has some kind of learning problem. But those percentages don't begin to reflect maternal anxiety.

Parents and students, relax!! This chapter can't cure adolescent indifference but it will prove the truth of its glad-tidings title. Not only can the high school student with a learning problem prosper in college, but by senior year he or she may be ahead of the problem-free peers. Furthermore, the skills of these people, who tend to be visual thinkers, will continue to grow in maturity and old age, and their productivity will increase, while the skills of logical thinkers will diminish.

Neurologists explain that dyslexia and other learning problems are simply biological differences in the way the two hemispheres of the brain are connected, or "wired." In general, the left thinks in words and numbers while the right thinks visually in pictures and in three-dimensional images.

In people with such problems, the connections between the

right and left hemispheres are different, and the different wiring, even as it creates difficulties with the spoken or written word, often produces a variety of creative abilities. Although the people with learning problems tend to mature more slowly, they go farther and reveal surprising strengths. They are the late bloomers, and contrary to what some parents think, late blooming is often a bonus. In nature, the most sophisticated kinds of life take the longest to mature. Thus the dyslexics often outdo the quick studies because they continue to grow and because they've had to overcome difficulties. So, away with the foolish shame!

Furthermore, the world increasingly puts a premium on the visual, spatial, conceptual, and creative abilities so characteristic of the dyslexics, the ADDs, and others now smugly and wrongly labeled "learning disabled." Today's verbal skills will take a backseat.

The era now coming to an end has been that of a literate society that communicates mainly by the printed and spoken word. Those skills have been the prized ones, and the ones on which the educational system has been centered. Even so, some of the greatest scientists, political leaders, generals, artists, writers, and poets from Leonardo da Vinci on have been people who had great trouble with words. They were, as such people often are, visual, conceptual and spatial thinkers.

Now, say some experts, the computer is changing everything. It has already replaced bank clerks. And with the advances in artificial intelligence, the computer will soon take over from the professionals in those areas where knowledge is routine, systematized, or conventional, for example, middle managers, attorneys, and scientists. The vast corporate downsizings of the early 1990s were a precursor of larger things to come.

But the computer's artificial intelligence hits a brick wall if the task requires imagination, creativity, intuition, the "lucky hunch," serendipity, seeing the possible connections, or taking the big leap. And this is where the dyslexics are outstanding.

We are entering a new era that has been called "the post–literate society," one in which the old adage, "one picture is worth a thousand words" will be an understatement. With the computer doing the routine and the formula work, the intelligence most in demand will be the one that can creatively and effectively find and make use of information, not the one with the greatest store of it. And that, incidentally, is where these catalytic colleges outdo the famous ones; students at two very different colleges in this book who'd been in off-campus programs with Ivy Leaguers told me the Ivies "might have had more information on a problem, but we could use it better."

Most of what I've said so far is the result of reading a terrific book by the dyslexic father of a dyslexic client, a former computer systems consultant, whose life is now devoted to research, writing, and lecturing on this cause, in which he is one of the world's leading experts. He is Thomas G. West and his scholarly, encyclopedic, and endlessly fascinating book is *In the Mind's Eye*, (Prometheus Books, 1997). This volume, which will answer just about every question you can think of on learning problems, is a great public service and one long overdue. Every family concerned about a learning problem—or even the usual problems of dealing with a teenage student—should have it in the house. To begin with, Chapters 2 and 3 will set minds at rest. And on page 172, he gives parents some good advice: relax, back off and wait a while; too much presure is counterproductive. Also, if I were dictator, every teacher everywhere would have to pass a test on it.

In his preface, Mr. West says this is a topic whose time has come: "As our technology, economy, and society are transformed at ever greater rates, while our institutions hold ever more tightly to outmoded ideas, perhaps it is time for some really fresh thinking . . . The old measurement scales do not quite fit, as many have long known, in spite of what they were told. And many have suffered for no good reason as a consequence." How true!

ADD, with its conflicting maze of traits, is a special problem

to identify. Anxious parents, thinking a non-achieving teen-ager must have a learning problem, take him or her to a psychologist who may diagnose it as ADD, when all the teen is really suffering from is adolescence. It is often impossible to tell the difference!

To give some comfort to parents, Mr. West is at great pains to point out that the only pattern in learning problems, whatever names are given them, is that there is no pattern. The symptoms may overlap, get all mixed up, occur in crazy combinations, or defy diagnosis.

In the text of the book and in appendices, are lists of traits a person may have that are as long as your arm, but some of the more common ones—which are often contradictory and show up in many teens—include difficulty with handwriting; a general lack of organization; indifference to schedules; excessive daydreaming; difficulty with arithmetic (but not geometry, statistics, or higher mathematics); difficulty with speech (delayed speech development, hesitation, or occasionally, stuttering); ineptness or lack of tact socially, but in some cases showing exceptional powers of social perceptiveness. But parents should be of good cheer, says Mr. West, for many of them who've led fulfilling lives of outstanding achievements will recognize among these traits and in their children their own adolescent problems. And many of them will realize it has been a family pattern for generations.

To deal with students who have such a maze of traits, Mr. West observes that teachers have to use multisensory learning approaches. And that is exactly what tends to occur naturally in the colleges in this book. It occurs because learning is collaborative, and in small classes teachers tend to feel like surrogate parents in their concern for their students' welfare. A professor may give a student extra time on tests, let him tape a paper, and so on. The active ingredient is not a formal program; it is tender loving care, and it can work wonders.

However, a dyslexic student who has great trouble reading obviously would have trouble at St. John's where reading the Great Books is central, or perhaps at Marlboro, where there is also a great deal of reading. A professor there said, "People may think that because this is such a friendly, informal, family-like place (just over 200 students) that it will be just right, but it's too intense." But that professor might be wrong. If a student with a reading problem really wants that experience badly enough, he or she should talk it over with a Marlboro admissions officer.

It is very important that anyone with a learning problem should make that known when applying to any college. Trying to hide it can only create problems. Call the admissions office and discuss the matter; ask what help the college offers and how students with learning problems fare at that school. Not only will they welcome your call, but you are likely to get some very reassuring information. I have been recommending clients with all kinds of learning problems to most of these colleges for well over thirty years, and they've all prospered because they've had one thing in common: desire to learn.

These colleges want to help you. Remember, as the president of Wabash emphasized to me, these colleges are inclusive, not exclusive; they want you. They also know that many of the world's geniuses come from this group: Winston Churchill, General George S. Patton, Jr., William Butler Yeats, Lewis Carroll, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, and Michael Faraday, not forgetting Leonardo da Vinci.

The morals (plural) of the story

The morals should be obvious. If you have a learning problem in today's literate society, you are likely to have the aptitude and talents needed to prosper in tomorrow's post–literate society. And that is the one in which you will make your own career, or more likely, two or three careers.

Also, you should take inspiration from the story of a client who as a high school senior told me, "When I was in the seventh grade I could read a whole page and not understand a

word of it." To make a point he applied to sixteen colleges and was accepted by fourteen. He graduated in four years with a 2.5 average. And, he ran his own outside business all four years. All he had, but what he did have, was desire.

You, in the meantime, can do what others are doing; you can lick it, you can circumvent it, or you can compensate for it.

WHICH COLLEGE IS MOST CHALLENGING?
GUESS AGAIN

This question pops up all the time, usually from parents. "Challenging" really is a code word for "Which is the most selective, has the brightest students?"

Higher education being a status industry, the assumption is that selectivity equals rigor. Wrong, wrong, wrong. This is one of the worst myths jinxing college choices. Eighty years of official records testify that many colleges in this book dramatically outperform their very selective peers in producing the nation's scientists, scholars, and achievers. That's what this book is all about.

Neither of the two most intellectual colleges in the country—Reed and St. John's—is selective. But they are self-selective; few are willing to rise to their challenges.

Among the many life-changers in this book, Antioch, which has been selective only two or three years of its pioneering life, ranks number five among the 2,000 colleges and universities in Ph.D. production; Wooster number eleven; Earlham number thirteen; and Kalamazoo number fifteen.

Little Cornell College and mighty Ivy Cornell University provide a David-and-Goliath illustration. The university takes a few of its thousands of "A" applicants; the college accepts over 80% of all who apply. But a brand-new Ph.D. who left the University after two frustrating years, told me, "I was in classes of 2,000, sitting in the balcony; I could have gotten my degree without ever getting out of bed except to take an exam. I could have hired note-takers to do the rest." Also, she'd had only one conversation with a professor in two years.

At Cornell College, there is no such thing as a passive ear; every student is actively involved. Teachers and students work together in small classes, and mentoring is a vital part of their relationships. Students examine and discuss their values; there is much discourse and much writing. And the relationships continue outside of class.

A good college does indeed have to have some bright students. A mix of academic abilities is needed for good discussion; the middle group asks the questions the bright ones are afraid or ashamed to ask and the slower ones may not think of. However, the dean at intellectual St. John's said, "Some of the most useful questions are asked by the weaker students."

Unbelievable as it may seem today, no college was selective until the postwar college-going boom swamped the higher education establishment. That produced selectivity but did nothing about rigor; it only inflated status. Had selectivity affected rigor, a lot of these colleges' seniors wouldn't be making higher scores on such things as the Medical College Admissions Test than most of the Ivies, as they do.

Later, Sputnik turned the universities into money-grubbing research institutes and has left the chore of teaching to teaching assistants and part-timers, some of whom barely speak English. The scholars do little, if any, teaching. By January 2000, reported a U.S. Department of Education study, the fast-growing proportion of part-timers had reached 42.5%. If left unchecked, it said, this "threatens the university as a place of learning."

A mother told me she wanted her daughter to go to Stanford because, "That's where the high tech is." Her daughter, if she goes, is not likely to get anywhere near it until she becomes a graduate student. But in one of these colleges, she would be heavily involved in research as soon as she wanted.

Finally, in 35 years I've never had a client report that his very selective school had changed his or her life, or that they had to work especially hard. But I have had many testimonials that these colleges are Upward Bound experiences that have given those young people the confidence and power to do things they couldn't have imagined doing.

Homeschoolers are welcome here

Homeschooled students are a growing cohort that before long may outnumber those with learning problems. Their anxieties are different but every bit as great. Their questions are: How will the colleges view us? Are we at a disadvantage if we lack transcripts, laboratory sciences, languages?

The answer is, the colleges that change lives are eager to have homeschoolers apply. All these colleges will view them sympathetically and very carefully; in other words, as favorably as those with high school transcripts, and in some cases more favorably. Every applicant will be judged on his or her own merits, just like all the others.

Every admissions officer I talked to was enthusiastic about his or her experience with homeschoolers. More than one was predisposed in favor of them because they said these kids have had the initiative and the persistence to learn on their own, some for religious reasons, but more often because the local schools were bad.

However, homeschooled candidates do have to demonstrate three things: that they are socially ready for college life, that they have the motivation for college work, and the capability to handle the course load. Thus, they may be examined more closely than their peers with high school transcripts. The student's personal statement and essay are very important. These give the admissions people a glimpse of the individual that the objective data do not. Also, an interview is usually required, of parents as well as the student. Among other things, it can help tell whether this youth is socially ready for college. Also, if a parent has compiled a transcript, it can discover what his qualifications are.

Several admissions directors told me they've been impressed with the quality of their homeschool applicants. One said, "Ninety percent of the applicants we've had have been good. They tend to have high test scores and to be curious kids. In evaluating them we may rely much more on such standardized tests as the SAT IIs than we normally do." That's because the SAT IIs are explicitly tests of achievement rather than aptitude.

Another said, "They tend to be people with the initiative to be self-learners, and they work well in these colleges. We like to have a portfolio of their work if there is no transcript. We don't want the GED." Some admissions officers think the GED is not a very trustworthy measure for their purposes. Still another said, "I find they are strong readers with literate minds. The lack of laboratory science is no barrier if they have math and the science concepts." Most admissions officers, he added, would probably agree.

Colleges want all the documentation possible to support the application, such as academic work done outside the family, with appropriate evaluations, or courses at a community college.

Because values are central, as they should be, at these schools, there is much discussion of them. And if you are a homeschooler for religious reasons and have any concerns about a school's position or values, call the admissions office and discuss it with them to see if it is the right fit for you. They will be happy to oblige because they also want it to be a good fit.