JUST LIKE ME

For my family.
Who always love and accept me for being, well, just like me.

Katie, Ellie and Amelie, you inspired me to write this book!
Keep being your best selves!

- LG

A STUDIO PRESS BOOK

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FSC DUMMY

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The stories in the book follow forty individuals living with various illnesses and disabilities: neurological, physical and learning. Not everyone who lives with one of the illnesses or disabilities featured will have the same symptoms, treatments or journey as those featured in this book. Disabilities and illnesses manifest themselves differently, presenting unique challenges and experiences and having various degrees of impact on a person's life. The summaries of each of the illnesses and disabilities featured are significantly simplified so to give the reader an introduction to the conditions. Further reading on any of the illnesses and disabilities, and people, featured in this book is highly recommended.

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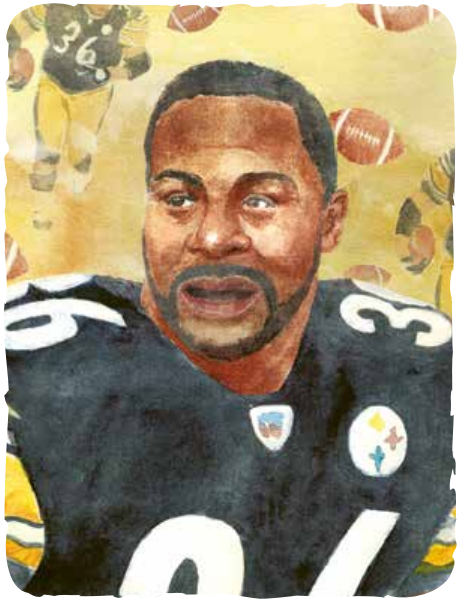
JUST LIKE ME

40 neurologically and physically diverse people who broke stereotypes

STUDIO PRESS

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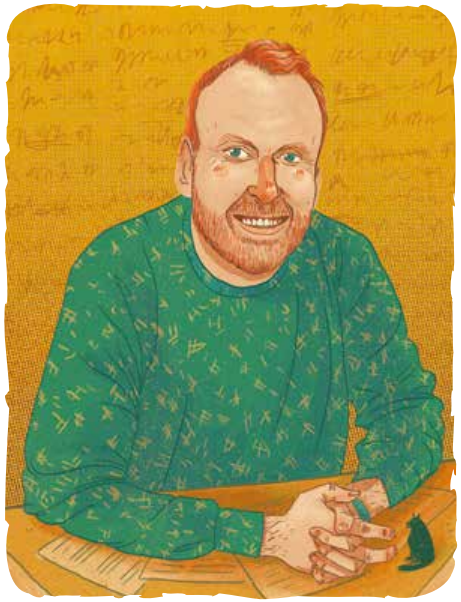








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INTRODUCTION

The world is full of people who are a little different, in one way or another.

Our uniqueness is what makes us who we are.

You may wear glasses, you may have freckles, have albinism, no hair, red hair... even blue hair!

Maybe you are the tallest or the shortest in your family, the loudest or the quietest, the slowest or the fastest. Some differences are easily seen, some may be hidden, but even when it comes down to our fingerprints, we are all unique.

In this book, we follow the stories of forty amazing individuals from all four corners of the globe who have challenged the misconceptions of living with an illness, disability or mental health issue, and shown the world what they can do.

People who have, despite being told they couldn't, shouldn't or even that it was not possible, changed other people's opinions and ideas of what was or wasn't possible for someone living with a disability or difference.

People with dreams who knew, with a bit of determination and perseverance, they could find a way to reach their goals.

Naoki Higashida wanted to be heard, even though he could not speak.

Harriet Tubman wanted freedom, in a country that had enslaved her.

Nkosi Johnson wanted to be loved, in a world in which he was feared.

Dreams come in all shapes and sizes.

Maybe your dream is to learn how to shoot an arrow as far as Matt Stutzman can, to be an artist like Frida Kahlo, to speak in public without a stutter like King George VI did, or maybe to become a world-famous astrophysicist like Stephen Hawking!

Some of the world's most inspirational scientists, artists, engineers, actors, singers, athletes and writers have been people who have had to find a way to overcome their own challenges and differences. People who, until now, you may not have heard of, or who may not of yet had the chance to share their stories.

When I started to write this book, I wrote it with my three children in mind. One had been diagnosed as autistic, one with ADHD and the other had suffered from discitis when she was only two years old, resulting in years of chronic back pain, physiotherapy and medication. I wanted to find role models, people who my children could learn from and feel empowered by. A label and a diagnosis did not define who they were or who they would become, and so my search for stories began.

We are all special.
We are all unique.
We are all 'different; not less'.

- Louise Gooding





LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

1770 - 1827

"It seemed unthinkable for me to leave the world forever before I had produced all that I felt called upon to produce."



Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany in December 1770.

Ludwig's father had high hopes for his son's musical abilities, pushing him to become a musical prodigy. With daily practice on his piano and violin, and additional lessons on the organ, music was drummed into him. At the age of seven, Ludwig held his first public performance.

Although Ludwig didn't quite become a child star like his father had hoped, he did enjoy improvisation: making up his own music. He later started to gain attention for his musicality, composing his first piece of music at the age of twelve!

In his twenties, Ludwig set off for Vienna, Austria, the home of another world-famous composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, to study music.

Ludwig was dedicated to improving his performance skills and continuing his studies. With the opportunity to be trained by many highly skilled teachers in violin, vocal composition and musical theory, he was destined for great things. To fund his studies, Ludwig would often play the piano for the rich and famous of Vienna.

As an extremely talented musician, Ludwig had no time for people who didn't pay full attention to his performances. Ludwig was known to stop playing mid-performance and wait for people to stop chatting and focus their attention back on him, before he continued to play.

Ludwig's journey to become a great composer was not without its challenges. By his late twenties, he developed a loud ringing noise in his ears, known as tinnitus. Because of this, he found himself to be hearing-impaired.

The loss of hearing brought great sadness to Ludwig; music was his life and it was meant to be listened to and enjoyed. It was this passion for music that encouraged him to work through his hearing impairment and continue doing what he loved best for as long as he could.

When Ludwig released his first symphony, performed in a famous concert hall in Vienna, it was considered a joke. His experimental style took symphonies to a place where no symphony had been before, breaking the rules and setting a new path for classical music.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Ludwig went on to become one of the world's most famous composers. He wrote some of the most beautiful classical pieces of music ever written: piano concertos, string quartets, piano sonatas and even an opera which took him approximately ten years to perfect. His most recognised piece is *Symphony No. 5* with its strong, dramatic leading four notes.

Although his hearing loss made playing concerts difficult, Ludwig continued to compose, conduct and perform even after he completely lost his hearing. He wouldn't let a single thing, not even going completely deaf, get in the way of his success.

Ludwig's real date of birth is unknown, although records show he was baptised on December 17th. At this time it was the law for babies to be baptised within twenty-four hours of their birth, but there is no proof of his actual date of birth.

What is deafness?

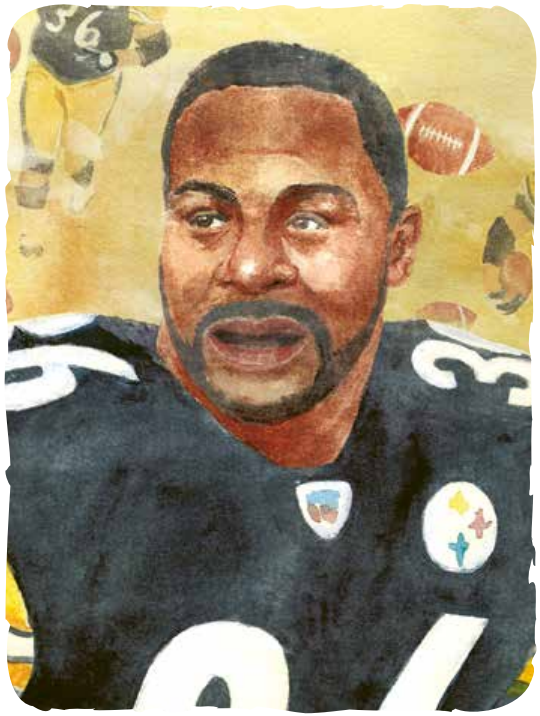
Deafness and hearing loss occur when a person's ability to hear sound is not as clear as it should be, due to inner ear problems or nerve damage.

Hearing loss or partial deafness limits a person's ability to correctly hear sounds. Today, hearing aids, which are special devices worn inside the ear, can help project sounds.

Those who are profoundly deaf have a total loss of sound, relying on lip reading and sign language as a way to communicate with others. Some people can still feel sound through vibrations and many deaf people are still able to watch and enjoy movies and television with the help of subtitles and signing.

JEROME BETTIS

"I understand and appreciate the air we breathe a little more than most."



Jerome Bettis was born in Michigan, USA on February 16th, 1972.

Growing up in a rough area of Detroit, Jerome's parents were determined to keep him and his siblings off the streets and out of trouble. Most of Jerome's time was spent with his family. His mother was a bowling instructor and was keen to encourage her children to be involved with the sport.

In his spare time, Jerome enjoyed playing street football with the other kids. With his small frame and being asthmatic, Jerome wasn't picked first to join any of the teams, nor did the kids see him as much of a threat on the field. This never deterred Jerome from playing, and at the age of twelve he found himself growing taller, bigger and stronger than all the other boys. No one wanted to challenge him now!

Wanting to follow in his father's footsteps, Jerome had plans to become an electrical engineer. But, as the family didn't have much money, the only way he would get the chance to study at college would be if he found himself a sports scholarship.

Jerome was talented in both bowling and American football, but no colleges were offering a fully-funded scholarship for bowling. This made the decision easier for Jerome. He chose American football.

Jerome was built for American football. He was big and strong and was soon nicknamed 'The Bus', due to his ability to keep pushing forward, despite tacklers from the opposing team clinging onto him. He made it look like he was giving them a ride down the field.

Jerome had been diagnosed with asthma as a teenager and this was something he needed to keep in mind, considering the amount of sport he played and the fitness that was required. After suffering a serious asthma attack in a game, needing immediate medical assistance, Jerome made sure to always keep his asthma in check. By making regular appointments with his doctors and monitoring his condition, they could keep his asthma under control with medication when required. By doing this he continued to have a successful and long career within American football.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Jerome's career in American football had only just begun when he received his scholarship, playing football for Notre Dame College. He was later drafted to The Rams, a professional American football team based in Los Angeles where he played for two years before moving to the Pittsburgh Steelers, where he played for a further nine years until his retirement.

He won a number of awards in his career in American football, including a Lifetime Achievement Award for his effort and commitment to the Pittsburgh Steelers.

In 2006, Jerome was given an honorary doctoral degree from Lawrence Technological University, Michigan.

Jerome founded the 'The Bus Stops Here Foundation' to help improve the lives of underprivileged inner city kids and schools. His work with the foundation supplied both academic and sporting grants to help give more children the chance to get into further education.

What is asthma?

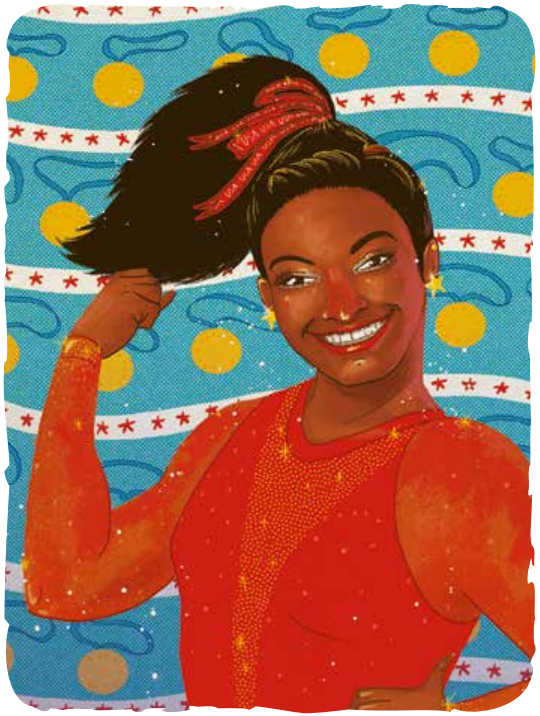
Asthma is a long-term condition that affects the lungs, causing the airways to narrow and/or swell, leaving the person feeling short of breath and unable to get enough oxygen to the brain. There are many different types and causes of asthma, with symptoms and attacks ranging from mild to severe.

Someone having an asthma attack may feel tightness in the chest, feel unable to breathe, and may cough and wheeze.

People with asthma can control their symptoms by using inhalers and medicines to help keep their airways open. It is important to be aware of what may trigger asthma; things such as exercise, pollen, pet hair, dust, cold air and perfumes can cause asthma attacks.

SIMONE BILES

"I take things one step at a time."



Simone Biles was born in Ohio, USA on March 14th, 1997.

Simone was raised by her grandfather from the age of three. Simone's mother was unfortunately unable to provide a safe and stable home life for Simone and her siblings. Luckily for Simone, her grandfather and his wife adopted her and her sister.

At the age of six, Simone went on a field trip to watch some local gymnasts in training. Simone was blown away. Standing on the sidelines with her group, Simone found herself mimicking their movements and poses. Some of the coaches had noticed her and made sure to give Simone an enrolment form, encouraging her to join the club. Simone did just that.

Whilst Simone was smaller than the rest of the girls, it didn't mean she was weaker. Instead, Simone pushed herself harder. If someone told her she couldn't do a trick, she worked her hardest until she had mastered it. She was so determined to succeed as a gymnast that her grandparents started to home school her, allowing Simone to dedicate more of her free time to gymnastics. She put thirty-two hours a week into training! Simone had a lot of energy and was diagnosed with having ADHD as a young girl. She had been regularly taking medicine to help manage her symptoms, but because her ADHD did not define who she was, Simone and her family chose not to publicly discuss it.

An opportunity came up for Simone to try out for a place on Team USA for the 2016 Rio

Olympics. All those years of hard work paid off. She was given a place on the team and was going to Rio!

Simone was busy preparing for the games when some unpleasant people appeared online, determined to sabotage her place on the team. They had stolen her private medical records and claimed that as she was on medication, she should be disqualified. The medication was called Ritalin, the medication she had been using to help manage her ADHD. Simone came forward and told the world about her ADHD. She was not ashamed, or embarrassed to say she had ADHD, it was part of who she was. She would not be made to feel bad for taking medication she knew helped control her symptoms. The accusations were dismissed, her place on the team was safe.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Simone has so far won over 30 World Championship and Olympic medals. She has also won many awards around the world for her sporting achievements and was named one of the most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2017.

Having won so many awards and medals in her early gymnastics career, it was of no surprise that Simone won four gold medals at the Rio Olympics. She has been acknowledged as the best and most decorated female gymnast in history, and in the media, as the world's greatest female gymnast.

Simone is an advocate for foster kids. After discovering that only about three percent of foster kids went on to gain a bachelor's degree, compared to thirty percent of the general population, she launched a scholarship fund to help assist foster children with costs towards gaining a degree. Simone believes that everybody, no matter their background, deserves the chance and opportunity to learn.

What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and is something that is usually diagnosed in childhood. ADHD can last into adulthood.

It is not clear what causes ADHD, but it seems to be hereditary, meaning it tends to run in families. ADHD affects 'executive functions' in the brain, the part that controls concentration, self-control and organisational skills. There are many different options for treatment including medication, behavioural therapy, parental coaching and support through school.

There are three types of ADHD: attentive, inattentive and combined. ADHD is likely be diagnosed alongside other disorders, such as anxiety, autism spectrum, ODD, bipolar, sleep disorder and learning disabilities.