

**00:00:00:08 - 00:00:21:20**

**Traci Neal**

In South Carolina, in the state where I'm from, they had at the time a book festival and my mother attended. They had an open mic. I was 14 years old at the time, and I brought poems that I had written and my mother encouraged me to go up there and read one of my poems. Well, I didn't go up there and read.

**00:00:22:05 - 00:00:53:21**

**Traci Neal**

I was the only one that didn't read off of paper. I performed my first poem at 14 years old and my mother confirmed to me, You have a gift.

**00:00:54:17 - 00:01:16:20**

**Eileen Lamb**

Welcome to Adulting on the Spectrum. In this podcast, we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people, among them an autistic author and photographer. And I co-host this podcast with Andrew Komarow

**00:01:16:21 - 00:01:55:21**

**Andrew Komarow**

Hi Eileen. I'm an autistic entrepreneur, software engineer, co-host of this podcast, and I can play the mandolin better than I played today. Our guest is Tracy Neal. Tracy is a neurodivergent spoken word artist on poets and writers residing in Columbia, South Carolina. Tracy received a professional adult autism diagnosis and ADHD very recently, October 20, 23. She has won numerous awards and acclaim relating to her poetry and uses her poetry platform to help bring awareness to nonprofits in need worldwide.

**00:01:56:01 - 00:01:57:03**

**Andrew Komarow**

Thank you for joining us.

**00:01:57:21 - 00:01:58:23**

**Traci Neal**

Thank you for having me.

**00:01:59:20 - 00:02:19:09**

**Andrew Komarow**

So I don't know if you listen to our podcast before, but we'd like to start off by asking each guest how they prefer to identify. And we don't mean traditional pronouns, although you're welcome to share those as well. We mean a person with autism autistic on the spectrum. Asperger's. But no preference is an option. Actually, anything's an option.

Really. Do you have a preference? And if so, what is it?

**00:02:24:13 - 00:02:25:22**

**Traci Neal**

I don't have a preference.

**00:02:27:06 - 00:02:46:15**

**Eileen Lamb**

One more for the. It's. That's the answer. We we get the most. So, Traci, I. I know your diagnosis is very recent as of last month. Can you tell us about the process of getting diagnosed as an adult? Like, what did you feel afterwards all of this?

**00:02:47:18 - 00:03:14:18**

**Traci Neal**

Yes. Well, the process started actually, when me and my mother had a conversation. I don't even remember what it was about. But she mentioned, you know, you might be autistic. And she said that in the past, sometimes in conversation. But for some reason, I felt more compelled to do my research to learn more about autism. And so by doing my research, I said, okay, I see a lot of similarities of myself in that, but I want a professional diagnosis.

**00:03:14:18 - 00:03:29:04**

**Eileen Lamb**

So that's what kind of led me to that. After I got officially diagnosed, it was a sense of relief. And I tell you, I knew about the autism and not the ADHD. The ADHD is like hyperactive, so.

**00:03:30:03 - 00:03:46:08**

**Eileen Lamb**

And what was the process like going through the actual, like, diagnosis? Like, did you have to do like interview with a therapist? Did you fill out questionnaires? You did talk to your family. Like for people who might be wondering what the process is like as an adult, how many hours did it take?

**00:03:46:20 - 00:04:10:08**

**Traci Neal**

Yes, the I think the last one I did, it took about 4 hours. I did one prior to it that took about an hour and it was like over 300 questions. My husband and my mother had to fill out a form assessment related to, I guess, how I do things to kind of get a better understanding of me.

**00:04:10:09 - 00:04:41:12**

**Traci Neal**

So I the assessment where I did online, that was like an hour. It wasn't that bad for me, but the actual 4 hours where I was in person with the psychologist, that was a little trying for me because I am I am simple minded. So some of the testing was like kind of complex for me. So I

had to, you know, use my coping strategies to deal with, you know, frustrations and stuff with with handling it.

00:04:42:24 - 00:04:46:23

**Eileen Lamb**

Were there any accommodations given to you? I'm curious.

00:04:48:18 - 00:05:16:00

**Traci Neal**

No, I think she really wanted to see how I, you know, respond, like even with some of the test. Oh, there was one particular test where I had to, like, click the spacebar for a particular letter, but I kept just pressing it, like pressing my eyes or like, no. And I guess like for my coping mechanisms, I will revert to my happy place.

00:05:16:06 - 00:05:34:17

**Traci Neal**

And my happy place is like butterflies and meadows, things that I enjoyed as a kid. So I started singing Christmas songs like humming Christmas songs, because that part was like 15 minutes. So like, Let me get to my happy place. I can do this.

And she was like, This is the end of the evaluation and you are autistic.

**00:05:43:11 - 00:06:10:20**

**Andrew Komarow**

How did you end up finding somebody who was able to perform a diagnosis? Because one thing that we hear commonly is that adult diagnosis, it can be very hard to find somebody who is qualified, especially in women. You know, so how did you find somebody who was able to give you an assessment? How did you go about finding somebody?

00:06:10:20 - 00:06:17:20

**Andrew Komarow**

Because that's something that I think a lot of people struggle with and seems inaccessible, inaccessible, not accessible. One of those.

00:06:17:20 - 00:06:51:17

**Traci Neal**

Things. Yes. For me, I did my research on Google, but I'm all about, you know, I'm simple minded. I love professionalism, because when I started, I had people that were willing to kind of help me to understand the value of professionalism. So when I did my research, I would thoroughly look on their website. I also prescreen. So I was able to actually interact with the psychologists firsthand before making a final decision as to whether I wanted to follow through with her.

00:06:52:03 - 00:06:59:20

**Traci Neal**

So by me having that, I guess prescreening, being able to find out, will this be a good fit for me, that helped me a lot.

00:07:00:18 - 00:07:26:00

**Andrew Komarow**

That makes a lot of sense. What if there was advice you could give to others who may not know where to start with all the research? Right. Was there something you found in particular that you could help people maybe not need to do as much research? Like, you know, okay, this is maybe stay away from this type of person or this is like got these letters after their name.

00:07:26:02 - 00:07:31:07

**Andrew Komarow**

You know, they seem to be a bit more qualified or any like tips on anything people could look for.

00:07:32:18 - 00:08:00:01

**Traci Neal**

I did like six psychologist today. That was very helpful. And I also will say see about your insurance. So see about psychologists that are covered by your insurance because this particular psychologist, I was able to use my actual health insurance to go towards paying for my diagnosis screenings. So that was very helpful as well.

00:08:01:02 - 00:08:15:03

**Eileen Lamb**

No, that's really good. Yeah, you you know, diagnosis as an adult is really expensive. So it's really good to know that some health insurance plans will actually help cover some of that cost.

00:08:16:08 - 00:08:24:18

**Andrew Komarow**

You said you appreciated your late diagnosis. What what made you appreciative?

00:08:24:22 - 00:08:53:12

**Traci Neal**

It made me appreciative because I was able to navigate and learn and grow as an individual. And I feel like with with how I was raised, I was raised to be independent. I was raised to not allow any thing that may be different about me to hinder me from going forward. So it was like I was constantly told, You're different, you're different, but use your difference as your leverage.

00:08:53:20 - 00:09:21:10

**Traci Neal**

So it's like I came to terms with myself and having a security of myself. Okay, I finally want to

know what this is so that I can help more people because my mindset is different. And I feel as though back in the day, if I had got it early on, I would have made like, what's being created my poetry platform about me instead of it being about helping others and impacting others.

00:09:21:10 - 00:09:29:24

**Traci Neal**

So I think everything happens for a reason and that was the reason that I need to grow and develop as a person to have a positive impact for others.

00:09:31:09 - 00:09:55:15

**Eileen Lamb**

So that's that's the perfect transition to our next question. I'm wondering if there were any obstacles that you ran across when, you know, launching your poetry career and and platform and, you know, when you perform, were there any any obstacles? And if so, how did you overcome those those obstacles?

00:09:56:16 - 00:10:31:10

**Traci Neal**

So my biggest obstacles was the writing. One of the things that psychologists and for me was I thrived non-verbally. So anything dealing with performance or performance, performing poetry, dance, singing, those things that are kind of repetitious I can thrive in. But the writing aspect was different because I didn't have, like the intellect to come up with the poetry and that's why I tell people I connected with my spiritual faith because it's like God gives me the words.

00:10:31:11 - 00:10:48:18

**Traci Neal**

I shared the message. I could I couldn't naturally come up with these words, these amazing poetry on my own. So I say, give credit where credit is due, that that goes back to my faith with the writing aspect.

00:10:50:19 - 00:10:56:11

**Andrew Komarow**

What is slam poetry? Slam poetry now?

00:10:56:21 - 00:11:26:17

**Traci Neal**

Yes, slam poetry is just a way to express yourself and allow others to feel what you're feeling. I have had the opportunity to be able to coach youth with slam poetry style, which has been awesome. And what I like to tell the kids is how does that poem make you feel? Will However, that poem makes you feel, I need to feel it and that resonates with them.

00:11:26:17 - 00:11:41:21

**Traci Neal**

And so that's what I do in my own poetry, is I will express whatever I am feeling and I want you to feel that, if I may, if I'm angry, you're going to feel that anger. If I'm sad, you're going to feel that that emotion.

00:11:42:07 - 00:11:44:18

**Eileen Lamb**

How did you learn about slam poetry?

00:11:46:14 - 00:12:10:11

**Traci Neal**

I actually got exposed to it from my mother in South Carolina, the state where I'm from. They had at the time a book festival. And my mother attended. They had an open mic. I was 14 years old at the time, and I brought poems that I had written and my mother encouraged me to go up there and read one of my poems.

Well, I didn't go up there and read. I was the only one that didn't read off of paper. I performed my first poem at 14 years old, and my mother confirmed to me, You have a gift. And so that's where that spark came, that maybe I should be doing this.

00:12:29:13 - 00:12:31:17

**Eileen Lamb**

That's great. So you started at, like, 14?

00:12:32:09 - 00:13:00:15

**Traci Neal**

Mm hmm. But I stopped actually, after, I guess, my sophomore year of college, because I still was performing and I wanted to make a career out of it, but I know they meant well. My family were encouraging me that, you know, you might want to find a stable career. Writing is not that stable. So I tried to go into teaching, but it never happened.

00:13:00:17 - 00:13:25:04

**Traci Neal**

I tried to pass this test to get certified in South Carolina, and I failed ten times for ten years. Now, mind you, I have only been doing my poetry and having this poetry platform for three years now. I started in 2020 and it has blown up. So it's like whatever you're really meant to do, it's just going to flow.

00:13:25:04 - 00:13:44:19

**Traci Neal**

It's going to just work out about this as things that are not always meant for you don't work out. And it's not necessarily like, Oh, maybe I should be still doing this. No, you might. That might not be what you're supposed to be doing. But yeah, I've always had the heart for poetry, so.

**00:13:45:05 - 00:14:02:24**

**Eileen Lamb**

So you make a living out of it now? That's. Yes. No way to go. That's really good. Yeah. You know, I heard the same thing because I've always told people since I was a little kid, I'm going to be writing books. That's what I want to do. And I'm like, okay, but what about, you know, being a doctor or finding another job?

**00:14:02:24 - 00:14:15:06**

**Eileen Lamb**

And, you know, I ended up doing it and I definitely don't make a living out of it, but I still did it. So it's fun and it's a good reminder for people listening to, you know, follow your dreams.

**00:14:15:19 - 00:14:52:21**

**Traci Neal**

I love to read my books. I started a children's book series called Lynn Learns Lessons, and it's actually based off of my journey into writing. But the concept is a young female that transitions to realizing that she is a princess, but she can't accept it at first. So for me, I couldn't accept that poetry was what I was really supposed to be doing, not necessarily what other people thought I should be doing, which was the teaching.

**00:14:53:07 - 00:15:23:17**

**Andrew Komarow**

That's interesting. And do you and do you think that if you had been diagnosed, you know, earlier on that you ever would have been exposed to, you know, poetry in the way that you were, you know, for example? Yeah. I feel like a lot of times like like, do you think that you would have not tried so many things or not as exposed to as many things?

**00:15:23:17 - 00:15:40:16**

**Andrew Komarow**

Or do you think, you know, your parents would have continued doing the same thing they would have anyway? Like in hindsight, are you grateful for the later diagnosis and not knowing in a way like it challenged you a bit more? I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. I'm just trying to.

**00:15:41:05 - 00:16:04:23**

**Traci Neal**

No, you're. You're not. Actually, definitely. It did challenge me more and it made me more resilient. And I think that's way more effective when you're out there in the media, which I am. To have those positive impacts. Because if I'm talking to someone and telling them you can get through your struggle, you can get through your challenge and you can overcome.

**00:16:05:02 - 00:16:16:16**

**Traci Neal**

Well, how do you know that? What have you been through? And when they when they hear my

story, they're like, oh, okay. I think I think I can get through this.

00:16:18:17 - 00:16:27:10

**Andrew Komarow**

So you mentioned that your autism is tied to your spirituality. Can you tell us a little bit about your spirituality? And then also how it's tied with your autism?

00:16:28:14 - 00:16:56:07

**Traci Neal**

Yes. So I grew up going to church with my mother as much. My dad would go sometimes, but my mother, she took us. So it was like a small, intimate church. And it's very interesting. There were songs that were like repetitive, like they did a lot of hymnals that were repetitive, and I still remember them to this day.

00:16:56:07 - 00:17:22:13

**Traci Neal**

And before I got my diagnosis, when I was with my mom, my sister, they're like, How do you remember these songs? Because my because I was like a whiner when I was a kid and somebody had to take me out and, you know, discipline me or, you know, causing ruffraff in church. And so they were very intrigued that I could still remember the songs.

00:17:22:15 - 00:17:45:14

**Traci Neal**

So when I got the official diagnosis that I had, autism is like, wow, now it all makes sense that this is how I learned, this is how I thrive. So with my spirituality, it's that foundation that I started off with, you know, of how I learn. And it just flourished to the point where I go back to it.

So as I said in the beginning, I have a simple, basic mindset. It doesn't take a lot to make me happy. And because of that, oftentimes as I got older, I just I felt so out of place, especially when I was around women of color, if I could be honest, because there tends to be a stereotype of being strong and and being intelligent.

00:18:15:06 - 00:18:45:21

**Traci Neal**

And I wasn't that. So it was like trying to mask who I really am. And so with my faith, I could always, you know, rely on my faith to get me through those challenges and give me the wisdom that I needed to get through whatever. Like, I have two degrees. But I tell people it's like a certificate because I don't even remember the things that I learned in college.

00:18:45:21 - 00:18:58:12

**Traci Neal**

Like I have a masters and a bachelor's, and I don't even remember what I learned, but I can honestly tell you songs and things that I learned as a child because of the repetition.



00:18:59:16 - 00:19:22:02

**Eileen Lamb**

It's funny, I think a lot of people can relate to, you know, a degree and just remembering anything from it. I like how, like self aware are how you say these things about yourself and you can like laugh about it. You know, it seems like you definitely know your your strengths and I guess you're your weaknesses. And that's it's very, very nice to see.

00:19:23:04 - 00:19:37:11

**Eileen Lamb**

You mentioned it's your poetry. You use that to help bring awareness with some non-profits all over the world. Can you tell us more about that? How do you use that to help nonprofit organizations?

00:19:38:24 - 00:20:12:24

**Traci Neal**

Because I have built the platform where I've been in the media and built those relationships I'm able to find, which I usually do find nonprofits. They're trying to do positive things. Sometimes it's related to youth. I am very big on helping the youth, the young people, because I feel like when I'm gone in transition, they're coming up. So I always want to leave that opportunity, that door for them to thrive and to succeed further than me.

00:20:13:01 - 00:20:35:23

**Traci Neal**

So I just try to find organizations that may just need that extra exposure so that they can flourish. And and it has been doing well. People that connect to me, they've been doing very well. So it's a it's an honor to be able to do that because so many people help me along the way. So now it's like paying forward by helping someone else.

00:20:37:03 - 00:20:41:19

**Andrew Komarow**

Can you give us a few specific examples?

00:20:42:02 - 00:21:26:21

**Traci Neal**

My favorite one was actually this year I helped this startup, a nonprofit that was trying to put on a production for Pulp Spoken Word, and it was to showcase young people throughout my state and highlight them in a positive way. So I was they needed funding. So I was like, they go to the reached out, use my name to help get them funding so that they could put it on and they actually put it on at the Koger Center at one of their smaller venues in the center.

00:21:27:05 - 00:21:59:14

**Traci Neal**

So that was really nice and it turned out really well. So that's one of the things. I guess another one would be at the Columbia Metropolitan Center. I did dream cards for kids of various ages. They would literally tell me their dream and I would create a short poem for them. So I didn't think it was going to be as popular as it was, but it was about 65 kids that I did, and one group, it was an older girl.

00:21:59:19 - 00:22:24:11

**Traci Neal**

She might have been like 11 or 12. I did one for her and then the whole her whole family, siblings, I ended up doing cards with them. So just things like that that's tangible, that resonate with people. I love doing that because I think that matters. How you make people feel is what matters. At the end of the day.

00:22:25:04 - 00:22:29:16

**Andrew Komarow**

That was great. Thank you. No, super, super Appreciate that.

00:22:31:09 - 00:22:40:19

**Eileen Lamb**

So, Traci, can you tell people where they can find you on on social media where they can, you know, see you perform poetry, all of that?

00:22:41:16 - 00:23:11:10

**Traci Neal**

Yes, I will be honest. I am not on social media anymore. I haven't been on since 2021. I am an open book. I was getting cyberbullying heavily, so I ended up getting out. But my go to is my website, which is Tracey new speaker, poet dot com. There is like a one stop shop. I have my books, I have performances, everything.

00:23:11:10 - 00:23:14:11

**Traci Neal**

And what I've done to help others, it's all on there.

00:23:16:09 - 00:23:27:01

**Eileen Lamb**

So I'm going to ask you some quickfire questions now, which means that I'm going to ask you some quick questions and you give me a quick answer. The first thing that comes to your mind. Okay.

00:23:27:17 - 00:23:27:23

**Traci Neal**

Okay.

00:23:29:15 - 00:23:31:01

**Eileen Lamb**

Who's your favorite poets?

00:23:32:04 - 00:23:33:00

**Traci Neal**

Phillis Wheatley.

00:23:34:23 - 00:23:41:01

**Eileen Lamb**

Favorite rhyming words.

00:23:41:01 - 00:23:44:19

**Traci Neal**

Act, Sex.

00:23:44:19 - 00:23:45:14

**Eileen Lamb**

Favorite food.

00:23:47:03 - 00:23:49:09

**Traci Neal**

Bread.

00:23:49:15 - 00:23:52:15

**Eileen Lamb**

Favorite music.

00:23:52:15 - 00:23:53:04

**Traci Neal**

Gospel.

00:23:54:15 - 00:24:09:05

**Eileen Lamb**

Nice. Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Traci. We love hearing about your story and slam poetry. So thank you for, you know, raising awareness and sharing about something that I think a lot of people don't know about.

00:24:10:01 - 00:24:13:00

**Andrew Komarow**

Yes. Thank you. Really, really appreciate you coming out.

00:24:13:20 - 00:24:22:23

**Traci Neal**

Thank you so much for having me.