

LIVING WITH TOURETTE

RU Alumn speaks about son's affliction

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It started with a 5-year-old boy's uncontrollable urge to shake his head. It would soon be discovered that this head shaking was an involuntary tic caused by Tourette syndrome, which led to a 15-year battle for Cory Friedman and his family.

"I used to come home and say welcome to the house of pain," said Hal Friedman, father of Cory Friedman, and author of "Against Medical Advice."

Hal Friedman, a Rutgers-New Brunswick alumn, visited a Rutgers-Newark journalism class on Feb. 5, where he spoke about his book, which he co-authored with his friend and best-selling novelist, James Patterson.



The book gives a detailed look into the ups and downs the Friedman family endured during their search for a correct diagnosis and treatment for Cory Friedman.

Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder that affects about 200,000 people in the United States, roughly 1 in 200 children, according to the Tourette Syndrome Association.

Symptoms usually appear in youth between five and 18 years of age and include motor and vocal tics, which range from mild to severe.

According to Faith Rice, executive director of the New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome and Associated Disorders - a facility which provides support, education and awareness to families, schools, and others - Tourette is often accompanied by other problems.

"Tourette is almost always accompanied by other disorders which may include, A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder), O.C.D. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), learning disabilities, and

sometimes depression," said Rice.

Rice said that Tourette is an inherited disorder and is three to four times more common in boys than girls.

"Against Medical Advice" is a revealing account of Cory Friedman's experiences dealing with the emotional trials associated with dealing with severe tics as well as O.C.D., teachers, schoolmates, friends, family, and the constant rotation of doctors and medications, throughout his life.

"We went to about 15 doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, allergists. Cory was on 50 to 60 meds over the course of his life, sometimes three to four at a time," said Hal Friedman.

There is no cure for Tourette Syndrome. Children with the disorder often take medications used for other medical problems.

The medications Cory Friedman took ranged from Ritalin, which is used for patients with A.D.D., to Haldol, often used on patients with schizophrenia.

"It's an ongoing process," said Rice. "What works for me today may not work for me six months from now. There is no one medication. Patients are often on a cocktail of meds and there is constant experimentation with the dosage."

Hal Friedman said that he and his wife, Sophia Friedman, believe that most of the meds were responsible for some of Cory Friedman's worse tics.

One of his tics included a jolting twist of his body which is known to have caused him to rip cartilage. Watching Cory Friedman in such pain in turmoil prompted Hal Friedman and his wife to have to make some harsh decisions.

"You try to keep the kids spirits up," said Hal Friedman.

"We bought him things to try to distract him. We let him have friends that were unthinkable. Things got so bad that we decided to let him drink. We even started pouring drinks for him sometimes.



Jessie Friedman, Hal Friedman's daughter said that growing up with a brother with Tourette was hard, to say the least.

"My parents tried to treat us equally," said Jessie Friedman. "Cory just required a lot of attention. That left me to kind of fend for myself. It affected my friendships, and there were times when I was embarrassed."

Jessie Friedman, who describes her brother as a courageous and kind human being, said that

while it was rough growing up, her parents are amazing, and it is because of them that she and Cory Friedman made it through.

"Half the reason my brother was able to survive is because of them," said Jessie Friedman. "They are so strong. I know families who have been torn apart by Tourette, but it actually brought us closer together."

Hal Friedman said that in writing the book, he was able to see how much of a journey it was for her brother.

"He is undefeatable. He didn't quit or let it get him down," said Hal Friedman.

Currently, Cory Friedman is 25-years-old. He is a self taught drummer, sings in a band, and has five different websites up. He is no longer on medications and his tics have gotten 60% better.

According to Hal Friedman, Cory Friedman said that if the book was able to help just one person, he was fine with the book being written.