



# NEURODIVERGENT

A SHORT DOCUMENTARY BROUGHT TO YOU BY ADHD



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PRESENTS "NEURODIVERGENT"  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY SCOTT JOHNSON | SOUND BY REBECCA GRASS  
EDITED BY KAITLIN PETERS & SYDNEY TAYLOR | DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY YIFAN YIN HAUNG  
PRODUCED BY RACHEL PRIEBE & REAGAN SHEA | DIRECTED BY AFTON QUAST SALER



SITE: [HTTPS://WWW.NEURODIVERGENTFILM.COM/](https://www.neurodivergentfilm.com/)

IG: [HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/NEURODIVERGENT.DOCUMENTARY/](https://www.instagram.com/neurodivergent.documentary/)

## LOGLINE

When a 35-year-old film student is diagnosed with ADHD, she turns the camera on herself and questions a lifetime of misdiagnosis, mental haze, and those damn gardeners outside. A serious topic handled with surprising charm and humor on the road to self-acceptance.

## OVERVIEW

Genre: Short Documentary

Running Time: 25:35

Language: English

Format: HD

## DIRECTOR CONTACT

Afton Quast Saler

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347-443-7526

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## DISTRIBUTION

Sandrine Cassidy

USC Festivals & Distribution

213-740-4432

## FESTIVALS / AWARDS

- Directors Guild of America Student Film Award 2021- *Jury's Choice Award*
- Awareness Film Festival 2021 - *Audience Choice Award*
- Portland Film Festival 2021 - *Best Short Documentary & Audience Choice*
- Salute Your Shorts Film Festival 2021 - *Audience Choice, Honorable Mention Student Film, & Honorable Mention Documentary*
- The Film Series at Cine Gear Expo 2021 - *Audience Choice Award*
- Thomas Edison Film Festival 2021 - *Jury's Choice Award*
- Pasadena International Film Festival 2021
- Real Abilities Pittsburgh 2021
- San Diego International Film Festival 2021
- New FilmmakersLA DocuSlate 2021
- Newport Beach Film Festival 2021
- Davinci International Film Festival 2021
- La Femme International Film Festival 2021
- Sedona International Film Festival 2022
- San Luis Obispo International Film Festival 2022
- Cleveland International Film Festival 2022
- Flordia Film Festival 2022
- Athens International Film and Video Festival 2022
- Ashland Independent Film Festival 2022
- DocEdge International Film Festival 2022

## SYNOPSIS

From Post-it notes to magnets, keys, pens, rubber bands, & receipts, the unorganized chaos of a junk drawer is the perfect representation of what Afton Quast Saler's brain feels like every day. Growing up, she knew she wasn't like the other kids but never really understood why, and doctors didn't seem to be much help. She was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, rapid cycle bipolar. bipolar

II, fibromyalgia, addiction disorders, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, insomnia, & dyslexia - but none of those diagnoses felt right. It isn't until March 2020, in the height of the Covid-19 pandemic & in her 3rd year at USC School of Cinematic Arts, that Afton receives extensive psychological tests and is diagnosed with something she never even considered: ADHD.

In a unique way of coping with this new information, she courageously decides to put herself in front of the camera and, with the help of her husband, Jesse, documents this very personal journey. Her bible soon becomes the 1995 book, *Women with Attention Deficit Disorder: Embrace Your Differences and Transform Your Life*, as she learns that she is not the only young girl to have silently suffered in school. In fact, women with ADHD are more often under-diagnosed than men, as well as commonly misdiagnosed and treated for anxiety and mood disorders as primary diagnoses. Finally feeling understood, Afton is thrilled to have the opportunity to meet the author of the book and superstar in the ADHD world, Sari Solden. With Sari's help, Afton is able to recognize that the negative thoughts and feelings she was having throughout her life weren't from the learning disability itself but rather the shame that comes from not being able to fully be her genuine self.



**"MY MIND IS LIKE  
SOMEBODY EMPTIED  
A JUNK DRAWER ONTO A  
TRAMPOLINE."**



Not understanding why she wasn't diagnosed sooner, Afton goes to the people who are blamed when someone's life totally falls apart. It's always the parents, right? On her 35th birthday, Afton and her parents reminisce on her childhood and discuss the impact of this new diagnosis. Despite not finding the answers she was looking for, Afton is reminded of the love & support her parents have given to her through the years, something that has helped her accept who she is more than any accurate diagnosis ever could. What originally started as a personal journey becomes something much bigger as Afton wishes to use this film to reduce the shame and stigma surrounding Neurodivergent brains. In learning to accept not only her brain, but her entire identity, she hopes it will inspire other Neurodivergent women to embrace their differences rather than try to fix them.





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In a way, I began the development of this film on the first day of elementary school. Or at least, it's the first time I knew I was different and that it might be a bad thing. I remember the classroom as if I was sitting there now looking at that whiteboard: the spelling of the words mix around in my head as my brain takes the colors and shapes and makes them into an exciting story, something it wants to understand. I look out the window to calm myself and see the family of birds I've noticed the past week. They have been making a nest that has grown two times in size in only a day! As I ponder the birds' process to build this beautiful nest, I look back at the board to realize I have no clue what the teacher is writing or saying. I sense my face flushing red and feel the familiar rush of shame wash over me. Looking down at my notebook in embarrassment, I pretend to read. If I don't look up, maybe no one will notice how dumb I am. Does it show? This was my school experience before I knew I had dyslexia and ADHD.

I always assumed I was too right-brained to go to college. My sister was the smart one, and I was, well, very creative, curious, and unique. I loved learning, but the anxiety I felt every time I entered the classroom was crippling. I constantly waited for someone to discover I didn't belong there. I remember playing a spelling bee game in the 5th grade and breaking into a cold sweat before it was my turn to go up and spell a word on the board. I was asked to spell "success," the irony of which was not lost on me then or now. I mixed up the letters, and the whole room burst into laughter. I asked to go to the restroom and cried until the bell rang. In the girls' bathroom stall, I decided I never wanted to feel that way again.

So, after being home-schooled in high school and then dropping out of classes at community college, I stopped going. What was the point? Something was wrong with me, and that was that. I would focus on my acting career and do my best to hide my difficulties. But fortunately for my academic career, I'm also competitive and stubborn. It killed me to think there was something I wasn't capable of. I knew if I didn't go back to school and succeed, there would always be a part of me that let my fear stop me from my love of learning.

It took me four years of finishing transfer work, one year at USC, a year and a half on neuropsychological exam waitlists, and a loan for five thousand dollars to finally get the answers I needed to stop thinking I was broken. The day my neuropsychologist Anne gave me my test results showing I had a learning disability, I cried. Not because I was sad, but because I finally knew I wasn't dumb.

"You're very smart, Afton," she explained, "You just see the world differently than other people." It was at this life-changing moment that I started filming.

Being neurodivergent and finding out so much more than I ever thought I would about what that means during the production of this film has been frustrating, insightful, funny, sad, beautiful; the list could go on. But there is not a day that goes by that I regret sharing my experience. Girls and women need the confidence to move forward with their diagnosis and the accessibility to the tools needed to succeed. Few things in life are more important to me than creating art that drives people to look inward to make the changes we need outward. My experience is only one of the thousands.

Still, I'm hopeful the film will inspire others to stop the stigma and the shame around ADHD and allow neurodivergent people to focus on the unique qualities we have to share with the world.

There are times I still mourn the loss of a life I feel was stolen from me. If I had known sooner, would I be different? If I wasn't neurodivergent, would I be more successful? Maybe. But I also wouldn't be the filmmaker, artist, and human being I am. I wouldn't have been able to find a team of like-minded people to show what it's like firsthand to have ADHD and create a film to help women like me feel less alone, help loved ones understand a little better, and show women they aren't broken and don't need to be fixed. I hope this film will bring a new look and open discussion relating to learning disabilities and ADHD, ending a stigma that keeps ADHD a disorder and not just a difference. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for spending the last 10 minutes reading this. Or at least I think it was 10 minutes, but I'm time blind, so I'm honestly not sure. Either way, thank you for joining me on this journey.



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## THE TEAM



### **AFTON QUAST SALER** **DIRECTOR**

Afton grew up in Anaheim, California, where she started her professional acting career at the tender age of 13. She has toured the U.S. and Europe with The Young Americans, an educational outreach and performing group, as well as working in regional theaters across the country, including New York, California, Utah, and Maine to name a few. She trained acting at the T. Schreiber Studio in New York City, BGB Studios in Los Angeles, and sketch comedy at Second City Hollywood, where she would discover the purest reflection of herself in a passion for writing, directing, and creating her own work.

Since moving back to Los Angeles to attend the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts and graduating with a degree in production, Afton has continued to work in both film and theatre. Afton directed the Encore Award-winning play Cheek (and other stories) at the Hollywood Fringe Festival, directed and co-wrote the workshop performance of Not Another Theater Company's original play, We're All Mad Here, as well as directed and wrote the HSPA Center for Cinema & Television award-winning short film, Brothel Sprouts.

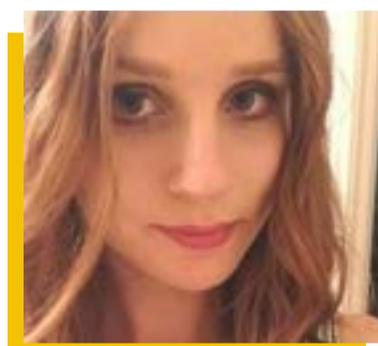
Finding a new love in documentary film during her time at USC, Afton recently finished directing her short documentary, Neurodivergent, a personal mixed-media experience inside the ADHD mind., which recently won a DGA Student Film Jury's Choice Award this past year.

She currently lives and freelances in Pasadena, CA with her husband Jesse, their dog Johanna, and the wild parrots that live in the tree outside of her house.



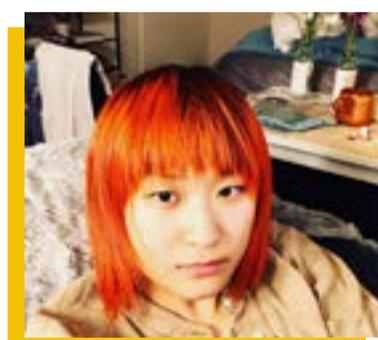
### **REAGAN SHEA** **PRODUCER**

Reagan is a junior studying Film & Television Production at the University of Southern California as well as pursuing a minor in marketing. Having grown up in Ireland, Colorado, & Singapore, Reagan finds herself specifically interested in stories that highlight individuals' differences only to portray the similarities between us humans be us near or far. During her time at USC, she has come to understand the skills needed in order for such stories to be made and thus enjoys the role of the producer as she is given the ability to help bring such narratives to life in the best way possible. Drawn to Neurodivergent given her own experience with ADHD, Reagan is proud to have worked on a documentary film that will make the next young woman not feel so alone as well as recognize the importance of self acceptance and support needed to fully be the best version of oneself.



### **RACHEL PRIEBE** **PRODUCER**

Rachel Priebe is in her senior year of undergraduate studies at the University of Southern California, where she studies Film and Television Production with a minor in French. She is particularly interested in documentary film and strives to document people living outside of mainstream society. In addition to school, she has worked for the MY HERO Project since 2018, an organization that celebrates the best of humanity through film and media. She is thankful to have been part of the Neurodivergent team and to have helped bring this story to light.



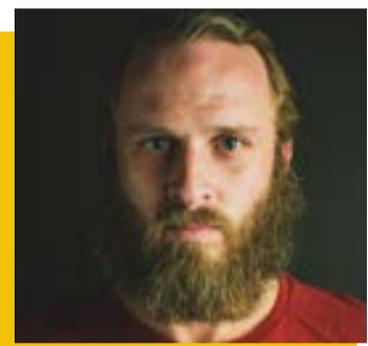
### **REBECCA GRASS** **SOUND DESIGNER & MIXER**

Rebecca Grass works as Production Sound, Supervising Dialogue editor, Sound designer and re-recording mixer. She's currently pursuing her MFA in Film & TV Production in University of Southern California. She's experienced in a variety of projects but where she found the most success was in drama and artistic narrative work.



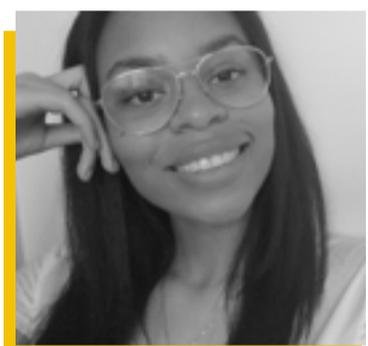
**YIFAN HUANG**  
***DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY***

Yifan Huang is about to finish his graduate program at the University of Southern California. With a Fine Art background and a strong skillset of technical knowledge, he has been focusing on how to convey a story visually, and how to draw out the subtle emotion between the lines. Yifan has been very impressed of the creativity of Afton and Neurodivergent - it has been a great pleasure to be a part of building this imaginary world.



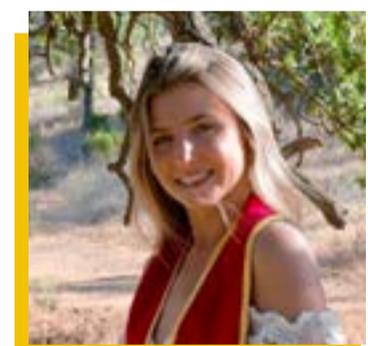
**JESSE SALER**  
***ADDITIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHY***

Jesse Saler is the husband and artistic collaborator of Afton Quast Saler. He is a professional photographer ([salerphotography.com](http://salerphotography.com)), cinematographer, and actor. Jesse couldn't be more proud of being a part of this documentary and helping shed light on a topic that affects so many lives, including those diagnosed with ADHD, those undiagnosed, and the partners and loved ones also effected by it.



**SYDNEY TAYLOR**  
***EDITOR***

Sydney Taylor is a filmmaker originally from North Carolina where she earned her Bachelor's in Dramatic Arts and Communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There she developed a love for films, taking on various positions in front of and behind the camera. Sydney enjoys storytelling in all genres, and is drawn to stories that center around those who don't always feel seen or heard. She is currently in pursuit of her Master's in Film and Television Production at the University of Southern California. She feels so incredibly lucky and thankful to have worked with the Neurodivergent team to help tell this story.



**KAITLIN PETERS**  
***EDITOR***

Kaitlin is an undergraduate receiving a B.A. Degree in Cinematic Arts, Film and Television Production in May of 2021 from the University of Southern California. As she moves forward from her time spent with SCA, she reflects on the academia that has helped her maximize her skills as an Editor. Her Editor's position on "Neurodivergent" has not only secured her confidence in her own abilities with Avid Media Composer, but has also advanced her knowledge of media workflows. Truly, this has been an enriching season for her post production skills. Kaitlin is grateful to have been a contributing member on this film, for it has been a pleasure to work with and be surrounded by the talented team behind Neurodivergent.



# CREDITS

Directed by:  
Afton Quast Saler

Produced by:  
Rachel Priebe and Reagan Shea

Director of Photography:  
Yifan Yin Haung

Edited by:  
Kaitlin Peters and Sydney Taylor

Sound by:  
Rebecca Grass

Original Music  
by: Scott Johnson

Featuring (in order of appearance):  
Afton Quast Saler, Jesse Saler, Lynn Quast, Gerry Quast, Sari Solden, Mimi Gramatky

Additional Cinematography:  
Jesse Saler and Afton Quast Saler

Animation by:  
Alice On and Yifan Yin Haung

Colorist:  
Yifan Yin Huang

Titles by:  
Kelsey Kent"

SCA Business Affairs:  
Veronica Villanueva, Brenda Williamson

Transcriptions:  
Kristin Muller Transcription Services

Documentary Faculty Directing:  
Mark Jonathan Harris

Producing:  
Lisa Leeman

Cinematography:  
James O'Keefe

Editing:  
Jason Rosenfield, ACE

Sound:  
Richard Burton

Avid Instruction:  
Jeremy Deneau

Story Development:  
Mary Posatko

Graduate Assistants: Cameron Babcock Melanie Grams Jiashu Li  
Jimmy Pierce"

Special thanks to:  
Hanna Adams  
Kate Amend  
Marcus Anderson  
Nels Bangerter  
Doug Blush  
Ted Braun  
Donna Brown Guillaume  
Lisa Cortes  
Brian Davis  
Jen DeGregorio  
JoAnna Dias  
Dianne Farrington  
Wendy, Albert, and Colin Garcia  
Mary Hakimeh  
Kirsten Johnson  
KLAME  
Linda Goldstein Knowlton  
Mark Landsman  
Aaron McNally  
Anne Nolty  
Amanda Pope  
Mary Posatko  
Lynn and Gerry Quast  
Jay Rosenblatt  
Jesse Saler  
Jean Tsien  
Hao Wu  
Charles Zablan

The USC Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic  
Jef Pearlman, Director Katherine McClellan  
Timothy Trost"

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Archival Footage Courtesy of: Lynn and Gerry Quast

Additional Archival Material:  
Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation  
Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology PRINTANDSHARE Etsy Store  
Take Your Pills (2018)



Student Produced at the School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern  
California.  
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