



**My Life as An  
Autistic Person  
by Ben Ellis**



Here I am with my friend Allyson from Macon County Schools.



Hello everybody! My name is Ben Ellis, and today I would like to tell you all about my life as a sophomore student (Class of 2023) in the Next Steps program at Vanderbilt University.

I was diagnosed with autism when I was 2 years old. Before Next Steps, I was a student at Macon County Schools from kindergarten up through my senior year of high school. I met lots of very kind and reliable people there. From kindergarten to fifth grade, I had an aide named Mr. Scott Gann, who was very kind and helped me with my work at school as well as staying calm.

My friends and I had a great time in school together through Interact Club, which was like a rotary club, and by having fun in pep rallies in high school.



This is my favorite character from *Star Wars*. His name is Luke Skywalker.



I am really good at acting out characters from movies, TV shows, sitcoms, and cartoons. Ever since I was a little boy, my favorite character to act out has been Luke Skywalker from the movie *Star Wars*. I am also good at playing video games. My favorite game to play is Super Mario Odyssey on the Nintendo Switch.

Some things are challenging for me, and some things are easy. One thing that was hard for me was studying for spelling tests back in second grade to fifth grade, because I would spend a lot of time (all night) studying for it, and back then, spelling was hard for me. I've gotten better spelling, but I still use Grammarly and spell check to help me when I write.

One thing that I'm really good at is communicating with my friends and family. For example, I talk about whatever happened at school (whether it's good or bad) with my mom, dad, and sister.

This is a picture of my dad and I playing in the snow.





This is a picture of me at the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation



I wanted to become a Vandy student in the Next Steps program because I wanted to learn more about how to live on my own and prepare for the workforce. My current internship is at the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation. It is the greatest internship! So far, I've learned about service dogs for autistic people and neurodiversity in the media. I have a student job coach named Yuna Jeon who works with me on all of my projects. My coworkers are really nice and kind, and my supervisor, Claire Barnett, is also really nice and she has autism just like me.

I've made lots of new friends at Vanderbilt University. One boy who I'm good friends with is named Rodrigo, who is a year ahead of me. We both love Spider-Man, and we both love playing Marvel's Spider-Man for PS4 by the company Insomniac Games. It's the best Spider-Man game ever. I also made friends with two boys named Connor and Tanav. Through Next Steps, I got to meet an Ambassadore named Eve Moll, who is very nice and kind to everybody. I have a very nice advisor named Lindsay Krech. She is the best.



Here I am with my Next Steps Ambassadore and friend, Eve Moll.



From the first day of freshman year to the last day of sophomore year, it has been very fun to be a college student in Next Steps.



This is a picture of me on my first day of Zoom classes as a sophomore.



After college, I want to become an actor and director for movies, TV shows, sitcoms, and cartoons. I would like to write my own comics by working for franchises like Spongebob, DC Comics, Marvel Comics, Star Wars, Transformers, Mario, and Sonic the Hedgehog. I am also interested in having my own YouTube channel someday. And for now, I love my current job, working in a kitchen in a nursing home.

Thank you for reading my story! I have a wonderful life, and I am so glad that I got to share it with you.