Anthony Wallace: Welcome to the companion podcast for the Sixth Edition of the bestselling book, How to Survive Your Freshman Year of College. We interviewed hundreds of real life college students and recent graduates to get the real answers to the endless questions you must have on living in a dorm room, dating, the dining hall, classes, extracurriculars, Greek life, and more.

Anthony Wallace: Like in the book, on the podcast you can hear the uncensored voices of these freshman year veterans as they share their candid and cautionary tales. They have been where you are now, and they want to help. This episode of the podcast is brought to you by QuadJobs, where small jobs count. In this episode, we're talking about accommodations. We'll hear from four freshman year vets who needed some extra help based on medical conditions completely outside of their control. Each had their own unique challenges that required their own unique solutions.

Anthony Wallace: Although their situations were different, they all showed ingenuity, courage, and persistence in dealing with them. First, we hear from Lillie, a graduate from Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Reading and doing math were always tough for her, but it wasn't until her freshman year of college that she discovered the culprit was dyslexia. It turns out all she needed was a little extra time on tests, and a special quiet environment for her to focus.

Lillie: Reading and math, the letters and the numbers switch for me. So, the sixes and the nines are particularly hard, and then the B's and the D's, the lowercase B's and D's. I'd be getting wrong answers, but do the processes the right way. But, it would just be because the numbers switched. Yeah. It got particularly bad when I was tired or anxious.

Anthony Wallace: Okay.

Lillie: Stress can impact it as well.

Anthony Wallace: But of course, having a limited amount of time on a test and being around other people would make that worse.

Lillie: Right? And you have those people who are coughing and sniffing and sneezing, and the lights are like buzzing.

Anthony Wallace: You got some help at some point. What was it like before that?

Lillie: I was really good at school, but it would take me longer. You sit there in the classroom, and everybody's bringing up their tests and everybody's finishing before you. And you're sitting there struggling, and you're thinking, "What's wrong with me?" I brought that to my mom, and she's like, "Well, let's get you tested. Let's see what's going on."

Lillie: It was a long process, and during that process, I knew that something was different about me. But, there wasn't anything that I could do yet, because I had to have this piece of paper that said she requires these accommodations. So all the while, I'm going through this, I'm still struggling.

Anthony Wallace: So, how long was that process then?

Lillie: You have to get tested, and you have to get an appointment. You had to put that through the school system, which can always be frustrating.

Anthony Wallace: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Lillie: They tell you to go to one department, and then that department tells you to go someone else. All in all, I would say three, four months. I got more time, it was time and a half.

Lillie: And once I got that time, my grades went up. I was less anxious. I ended up graduating with Honors, but I also got a quiet space to take a test. It was a less distracting environment. So, I would notify the teachers at the beginning of the year when I got my classes, and I would say, "I have these special accommodations. When you give out tests, I have to go to the learning center."

Lillie: They would give the test to the learning center proctor. That person would have me put all my belongings into a little locker, closed me into this room. There was me, or maybe one other person in there. It was often times just me, because a lot of people didn't know about these services or take advantage of them.

Anthony Wallace: Correct me if I'm wrong, you didn't think going in there freshman year you had a disability, right?

Lillie: I didn't. I'd say explore all the options. Even if you don't think you need it, try. You're right. I didn't think I had anything wrong with me, and there's nothing wrong with me. It's just different. Trying and also not being afraid, you know ... Walking to that learning center instead of going into class, and having my classmates ask me where was I during the test was a little bit awkward.

Anthony Wallace: How'd you explain it to them?

Lillie: Well, I said it very matter-of-fact. I have accommodations for testing. I never felt like I was judged, per se, for that.

Anthony Wallace: Waking up can be hard. For Katherine, a current student, sometimes it can be nearly impossible. That can make school a real challenge.

Katherine: I'm a rising junior at George Washington University.

Anthony Wallace: Nice.

Katherine: Six blocks from the White House. So I have narcolepsy, but I have a rare type called type 2 narcolepsy. There's no cure for either type. They're both auto-immune disorders, but mine was probably triggered by having the flu when I was in middle school. Basically, what it is is my brain doesn't make hypocretin very well, what keeps you awake.

Katherine: So, how you would feel if you stayed up for 48 to 72 hours, that's how I feel all the time. Yeah, it's wild. If I don't take my medication, which is a stimulant, I can fall asleep in seconds and go into REM sleep in five minutes. So, it's accompanied by hypnagogic hallucinations, which is when dreams overlap with your waking state. I originally found out that I had narcolepsy my senior year of high school. I was driving to school and I was at a red light, and my car drifted into an intersection, and then a guy hit me going 30 over on the driver's side. But because I was totally relaxed, I was completely fine.

Katherine: I can always feel the tiredness, but I don't have sleep attacks anymore as long as I take my medication. So with the stimulant, it's very beneficial throughout the day. It's a extended release one, so I can keep going throughout the day. Plenty of people try to buy it off of me, and I'm like, "No. I actually need it. Please don't."

Anthony Wallace: What's it actually like to try to get up early for you?

Katherine: Mainly just a mental groan that lasts for 20 seconds. That's how I feel in the morning. Just a long ass groan. It's nice to have roommates, because they can help me if my alarm keeps going, because I'll sleep through my alarm sometimes.

Anthony Wallace: So sometimes, you really just don't wake up? It's almost out of your control, like your body-

Katherine: Oh, yeah. I work with the disability services at my school, which I highly recommend to anyone that needs any sort of help. So, I register for my classes earlier than every single other person on campus, so that way I can get classes later in the day and with professors that are more accommodating. So, one of my professors who was amazing this semester, it was at 9:35. I loved the class, but it was really hard for me to get up. He was extremely understanding, and just would fill me in on email if I slept through class.

Anthony Wallace: Sure.

Katherine: There are two main things that I realized. Is first, I wouldn't say I am disabled. That's not a part of my identity, but just because it's disability services, doesn't mean that you have to be at some level to be able to get accommodations. This has made my life so much better, just being able to register for classes at an

earlier time. It's not even about the specific classes. It's about the class time. If someone's having an issue, even if it's really bad depression or something like that-

Anthony Wallace: Right.

Katherine: ... you can talk and try to get accommodations. Furthermore, there are creative accommodations, too. Like, I can use a computer in classes that otherwise would not have that because the brightness keeps me awake. I was so worried when I went in there. It was like, "I'm not in a wheelchair. Do I deserve to be able to get accommodations?" But, it's made a world of difference in my academic career. You don't know if you can get it unless you ask.

Anthony Wallace: Leonard is a graduate of Brooklyn College in New York City. Unlike Katherine, he is in a wheelchair. His college experience made him more confident, more independent, and left him inspired to help others going through college with a disability.

Anthony Wallace: So, you've been in a wheelchair for your whole life, then?

Leonard: Yeah. When I was younger, I was in a stroller and all that, and then I transitioned from stroller to wheelchair. But, yeah. I've always needed some form of wheels to get around. I think for me, it was just the transitioning from high school to college, because it's very much different for students with disabilities. For starters, you have to find your own means of transportation. You don't have the school buses coming to pick you up in the morning like you used to.

Anthony Wallace: Right.

Leonard: In college, you have to be your own advocate. You have to be the one to let the disability services office know that you have a disability and that you have paperwork, and that you need accommodations for your classes. And, to ensure that you get them. It pushed me to develop a better level of independence for myself.

Anthony Wallace: How'd you solve the problem of the transportation, then?

Leonard: For transportation, I use what's called Access-A-Ride. It's a transportation that primarily serves people with disabilities like myself. You have to call in advance, at least 24 to 48 hours to book trip reservations.

Anthony Wallace: So, somebody's taking you in a car, like a personal vehicle? Or is it a bus?

Leonard: For me, whenever I make my reservations, I specify that I'm in a motorized wheelchair and that I require the lift. And therefore, they need to send me a bus that has the lift. I remember once I was having an issue with some of the tables

inside the classrooms at Brooklyn College. Because of my motorized wheelchair, when I would park near the table, I didn't feel like I had enough space. Whenever I would try to take notes on the desk chairs, you know, those kind of seats where they have the desk attached, for me, it didn't work because the binder I would use, it would almost consistently fall off the desk. Which made things, when it came to writing, a little bit of a challenge. I remember I asked them about that. I said, "Can anything be done?" Before I knew it, they got me a table, my own table that me personally could use and that really made a difference. It's because I asked the question.

Anthony Wallace: What would be your advice to people that have disabilities that are going into college?

Leonard: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Make sure you're informed of the differences between high school and college, because not everybody necessarily knows what those differences are, and they don't find out until it's almost time for college. And then they're like, "Wait. What? This is not already taken care of?" You know what I mean?

Anthony Wallace: Yeah.

Leonard: It's a matter of just being prepared and knowing what you need to do before.

Anthony Wallace: Don't assume that anything's really going to be taken care of.

Leonard: Yeah.

Anthony Wallace: Don't take it for granted.

Leonard: Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. But, I would say once you're in college, don't just think that, "You know what? Let me just go to classes, do what I need to do, and then go home." I got involved through volunteering. I was volunteering for the student orientations. I volunteered for open houses. I volunteered for commencements. I got involved because I made the decision that I wanted to put myself out there. I wanted to have the full college experience, you know, both in and outside the class. I would just encourage anyone, students with a disability or not, to just put themselves out there.

Anthony Wallace: Right.

Leonard: Because you never know what can happen or what you'll get out of it what you do.

Anthony Wallace: What'd you say you're studying right now, then?

Leonard: Oh. Yes. I'm studying at the CUNY School of Professional Studies. I'm a grad student pursuing my Master of Science in Disability Services and Higher Education.

Anthony Wallace: Oh, wow. Okay. So, you're just an expert in this area then. Perfect.

Leonard: I'm becoming an expert.

Anthony Wallace: Right, right.

Leonard: I'm on my way. For me, I chose this program because I got help really in the best way. I kind of just want to give back, if that makes sense.

Anthony Wallace: Right.

Leonard: To other folks, and help them in the same way that I was, and ensuring that they have the accommodations they need while they're pursuing their desired degree.

Anthony Wallace: Nick just finished his freshman year at SUNY Purchase College in New York City. He has cerebral palsy, and needs the help of a scooter, walker, and aids to get around. It would've been simpler to live at home and commute to college, but for him, the traditional dorm room experience was important. The school wouldn't allow Nick's aid to have their own room on campus. Without that extra room, the aid he found was not willing to do the job. Nick and his family worked hard to get his story out to the public, and it went viral. Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, even heard about it and spoke out on Nick's behalf.

Anthony Wallace: Thanks to all the public pressure, finally with just weeks left until classes started, the school gave them the room. Nick says that living on campus changed his life, and he wants others with disabilities to have the same experience.

Nick: I think that not in terms of just my education but in terms of in general, there's not really a pro-active approach to try and make a campus accessible for you. There's this kind of sense of personal accountability, where it's like you deal with your own problems and the best we can do is get out of your way. You know what I mean? When you're doing something as daunting and as scary to some people as moving away from home, and trying to build a life away from home, someone not helping you can really fuck you over.

Nick: But they more than not help. They didn't even want to give us the room, which would've made it impossible for me to live there in the first place. Nobody holds your hand. It's just kind of like you want to do this, you figure this out. Some people figure it out and some people get crushed by the not knowing what to do.

Anthony Wallace: Yeah.

Nick: Some people don't even try, which is sucky because living at college is I would say the best experience of my life so far.

Anthony Wallace: It seems like you and your dad had to go to extraordinary lengths to get this figured out.

Nick: We had to get the governor of New York State to do it. We were lucky to get that kind of attention that we got his ear, but not everybody's going to get that. Not everybody even should go that far to get it. You know what I mean? There should be an easier way to do it.

Anthony Wallace: How did the year go? You just mentioned it was the best thing that's happened to you.

Nick: It's hard to describe, but I'm going to really do my best. It's really different than my life has been so far, because as a disabled child like being a minor, a lot of people make choices for you. When your parents make choices for you or your school aid is older than you, so even though they're supposed to be working for you, sometimes they make choices for you. Right?

Anthony Wallace: Yeah.

Nick: In college, it's all you. You can decide that you have a final tomorrow but you want to go out party instead. You have a lot of freedom to do what you want to do. There's something that's really fascinating that I think has happened, and it's not just kind of like because I'm living at campus. I think it's because I have student aids in particular, so my friends who aren't my aids are more willing to help me. We go places together without aids. You know what I mean? People are more willing to ask questions and help me in a way that never happened before, which I think is great. I think it opens a dialogue about accessibility in general.

Nick: My friends talked to me about, "Oh, I've never really noticed that pothole until I started walking there with you." And then suddenly, accessibility becomes a more tangible thing for people who aren't disabled. Which means that if we're going to have a broad discussion about accessibility on campuses, and you could argue accessibility as a whole, I think it's important that we all become aware of it.

Anthony Wallace: When it comes to accessibility on campus, what do you think the situation should be, and how is that different from what it is now?

Nick: My biggest problem, and I think this is a problem is that not all the dorms are accessible. You miss out on certain social interactions. And then, you kind of have to wrangle people to hang out in specific places. Which can be difficult for

a bunch of lazy teenagers, but it's doable. It's already hard for disabled people to socialize, and making social places inaccessible if you can't get to certain floors or certain building. For example, a lot of the freshmen dorms, I couldn't get past the basement or the first floor, which sucked because some my friends lived on the third floor.

Nick: But, I was lucky enough that sometimes my friends were willing to carry me up the stairs, which was nice of them but I don't think we should expect that of people. You know what I mean?

Anthony Wallace: Yeah. Why earlier did you say that it was the best experience of your life, of your 20 years?

Nick: As a disabled person, as a physically disabled person, I don't mean to speak for all disabilities here. It's really hard to go out in social settings. Because college is such a kind of niche bubble in a weird way, where everybody's really close together, is easier to socialize with people. I've been able to make friends, and I've been able to make good friends that are willing to do things. Like I said before, they're willing to help me in ways that my friends prior didn't really help me. It's changed my social environment. It's changed the way I think about the world. If I'm like, "Hey, let's go to the beach today." That's a feasible thing now.

Nick: I have friends that have cars. I have friends that are willing to do this. So, it's really changed the landscape, at least for me, and how I view friendships and how I view my future. It makes me hopeful for the future, that I could build friends where we could go out places and kind of explore the world a little more. Because as a disabled person, you're lucky to leave your neighborhood. Going on planes is a hassle. Traveling through New York City is kind of a hassle with the subway system. You know what I mean? Your world terrain gets a little limited.

Anthony Wallace: Right.

Nick: College has taught me that it doesn't have to be that way. I think that's an important lesson, and it's made me happier about my future prospects.

Anthony Wallace: To hear about how you kind of got a sense that your world expanded a little bit, and the possibilities for your future were greater than you'd ever imagined from going to college is pretty awesome.

Nick: Yeah. I think that by making college more accessible, you're basically allowing someone who has a disability to broaden their future prospects into thinking that they could become productive members of society, which is something that you don't really hear a lot in kind of the conversation of disability in general. I think that's ultimately what's important.

Nick: If you're a disabled person, I think that's really the best thing you could get out of your college experience. I'm not talking about in terms of only employment. I'm talking about in terms of do you see yourself doing things that make you happy? Hopefully someone listens to this podcast and is kind of like, "You know, I can go out to college and I can hope for things that seem, at the moment, unobtainable." Is it scary to kind of take that leap? Yeah. I've talked to a lot of children and a lot of parents who are horrified.

Nick: But, I think that at the end of the day, if you were to ask me would you go through the whole Purchase college thing knowing that you would go through that horrible couple of months of just gruesome rejection, I would 100% do it all over again. If you really think that it's worth going to whatever school you're trying to go to, I would say 100% try your damn best to get in there. For me, it was a life-changing experience. I think for a lot of people it is a life-changing experience.

Anthony Wallace: College is an important time for self-discovery and growth for everyone. Some students need a little extra help to navigate campus or to do school work. And as we've heard, that help can make all the difference in the world. If you need any kind of accommodation for any reason, don't be afraid to ask for it. Be proactive. Your school will give you the help you need. Even if it takes a ton of persistence to get it, it's worth it.

Anthony Wallace: For more enlightening and entertaining stories and advice from past students, read the Sixth Edition of the bestselling book How to Survive Your Freshman Year of College, published by Hundreds of Heads. Available at your local bookstore, on Amazon, or at our website, howisurvive.com. Once again, this episode of the podcast is brought to you by QuadJobs, where small jobs count. College students need flexible jobs that can work around classes and holidays. Whether it's babysitting, piano lessons, tutoring or more, there are tens of thousands of job openings for college students. Go to quadjobs.com to find that perfect one for you. My name is Anthony Wallace. Our theme music is by Bob Rabbit. Check him out on all social media and music streaming platforms.

Anthony Wallace: As always, thank you for listening, and good luck out there.