

DJ “Deej” Saverese



David James Savarese, also known as D.J. or Deej, is a poet, advocate and author who has a type of autism where he types instead of speaking. He produced and stars in the film “Deej” about his personal experience as the first non-speaking student at Oberlin College. Deej graduated in May 2017 with degrees in Creative Writing and Anthropology. While at Oberlin, he was one of the best students and won many awards.

D.J. is a passionate autism advocate who believes in the principle “Nothing about us without us.” This means that people with a disability must always be included in conversations and projects related to that disability. While at Oberlin, D.J. was awarded an Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) Autistic Scholars Fellowship to help pay for some of his college tuition.



D.J. made the film “Deej” as a way for him to help free nonspeaking people with autism from prejudice and suffering. D.J. is trying to educate the world to presume competence and learn that just because someone doesn’t talk doesn’t mean they aren’t intelligent with important things to say!

David James Savarese’s website, djsavarese.com, says this about the film, “Deej”:

“Abandoned by his birth parents and presumed incompetent, DJ Savarese (“Deej”) found not only a **loving family** but also a **life in words**, which he **types** on a **text-to-voice synthesizer**. As he makes his way through high school and dreams of college, he confronts the terrors of his past, society's obstacles to inclusion, and the sometimes paralyzing beauty of his own senses. In his advocacy **on behalf of other nonspeaking**

autistics, he embraces filmmaking and poetry, and discovers what having a voice can truly mean.”



“I won the lottery when my parents adopted me from foster care; I won it again when they included me in regular education. Now, I seek to help kids much less fortunate than I by showing people what a nonspeaking student with autism can do.

In *Deej*, the camera intrudes on every aspect of my life. If seeing truly is believing, then perhaps eyes can be opened to the full potential of kids with significant disabilities. Shot over a six-year period, *Deej* reveals not only what the ideal of full inclusion requires but also what it can accomplish.”

– D.J. Savarese



D.J. spends most of his time traveling around the country educating people and introducing them to his film. He's starting an organization called '**Listen 2 Us**' that will "share tools to promote **self-determined, inclusive lives for nonspeaking autistics** and **community workshops designed to shift public misconceptions about nonspeaking people.**"

When he is not traveling around teaching people about the intelligence of nonspeaking people, **D.J. is a regular guy who has autism. He cares deeply** about his family and friends and wants to be in **love** with a romantic partner. He is **proud** of his film and proud of the work he does to **help the world better understand and include people who express themselves best by typing instead of speaking out loud.**

**Unless otherwise noted, all of the images, quotes and background information in this document come from djsavarese.com

“I have always thought that poetry is autistic: it revels in patterned sound. For me, poetry is more natural than spoken language, maybe because I spent so many years hearing it without comprehension. I would simply attend to its intonations and rhythms. Even now, when I can decode spoken language easily, I notice things such as alliteration, assonance and consonance.



A poem is like a person wearing earrings: it shimmers in the light. I of course use poetry to talk about my life, but a poem is only satisfying if it proceeds from an awareness of sensuous patterns.”

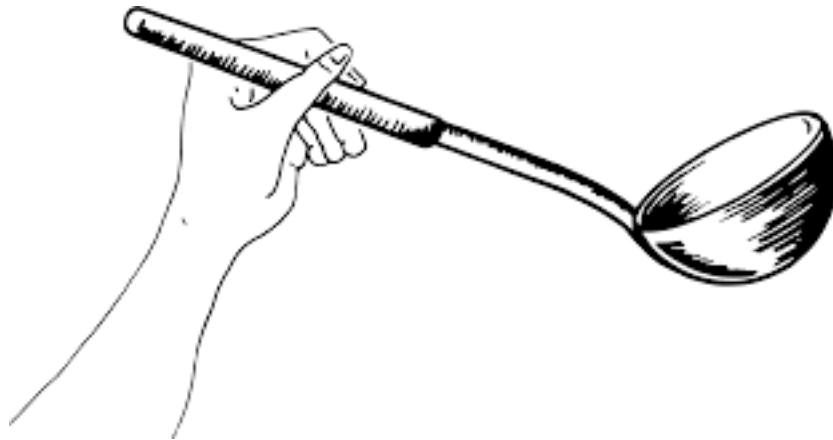
–D.J. Savarese



“Stand in the park and you can’t miss it. The only red amid a splash of green, the vine curls itself delicately around the broad trunk, tendrils cradling the bark. Considered inactive, the vine does the least it can to reach the golden light, using rocks, trees, and plants for support. With roots in the soil and most of its leaves in the bright sunshine, it’s said to enjoy the best of both worlds. When I was little, red curls falling around my face, I rarely stood in the silver cart my adoptive mother pushed me in, but one day I got down and crept my way up and around her—first her legs, then her hips, and finally her neck. Up there, the sun danced on her earrings, and little old ladies stopped to coo at me. They say a vine is passive; I say it opens itself to others.

To express myself, I use a method called facilitated communication. With this method, a person physically supports the typing or writing of someone with autism who cannot speak. That support—in the form of resistance or a countermovement—can be provided at the hand, wrist, elbow, or shoulder, depending on the autist’s motor challenges and their familiarity with the support person. The hand of the autist is not being led to the keyboard; to the contrary, it is being gently thwarted. The resistance allows the autist to feel his arm in space and to focus his motoric will.





The autistic painter Larry Bissonnette adopts the metaphor of clumsy cooking to explain the need for support: “Ladle of doing language meaningfully is lost in soup of disabled map of autism, so I need a potholder of touch to grab it.” My metaphor is the tree/vine relationship, where the tree resists the vine in the way that a dancer resists their partner and thereby allows them to twirl. Facilitated communication, to say the least, is controversial. “How can we be sure that the autist, and not the facilitator, is authoring his words?” critics ask. “How can someone who looks so retarded type such eloquent things?” they persist. Much anxiety attends to the issue of the competent, self-actualizing individual.”

-“Passive Plants” by D.J. Savarese



https://www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk/London_Documentary.aspx

BLANCH-INK-JET-MANEUVER*

For Stephen Wiltshire

He has two days to bring
all of London to life,
two days and thirty pens.
"The human camera,"
or so he's been dubbed,
draws from memory:

one jaunt in a helicopter
over New York, Berlin or Rome,
and the metropolis,
in all of its perspectival glory,
passes into art.
"Savant," says the neurologist;
"automaton," claims the art historian.
Skill without animating vision,
the hyper-real
without discernible feeling...



To elude predators
the inking cephalopod releases
a diffuse cloud
of dark pigment, which it then disperses
with a jet of water.
Stephen's pen works like this—
call it hippocampal subterfuge.
The crowd in the museum
has come to gawk
at the effete spectacle:
a working-class black man
turned robotic scrivener.
What the audience
doesn't understand is that Stephen

has already swum away;
in his place a more substantial
cloud of blackened mucus,
a spectral Houdini.

-D.J. Savarese



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D.J. "Deej" Savarese

S D P D E U L C J E K E D C T
T A R G X G R I C E M W O G E
Y G V Z N E E N S U E M G N O
P N X A A I E L S T M D V I P
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G V L P A P S I E V C N Y R T
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K O T M P Z P O U I Y T E V F

ADVOCATE
AUTHOR
COMMUNICATION
CREATIVE
DEEJ
FILM
JAMES
NONSPEAKING
POET
SAVARESE
WRITING

ANTHROPOLOGY
COLLEGE
COMPETENCE
DAVID
FACILITATED
INCLUSION
LISTEN
OBERLIN
PRESUME
TYPING