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LA 100

Autobiography

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## My life with Dyslexia

Dyslexia is defined as a learning disability that impairs a person's ability to read.

Although I am dyslexic, I have not let dyslexia define who I am. My mother always told me I was just as smart as everyone else only my brain worked differently. However, that was hard for me to believe for many years. Over time, dyslexia has helped me become the hardworking, determined person I am today, but I have learned not to let it classify me as disabled.

My mother suspected I had a reading disability in first grade and I began getting services through special education soon thereafter. I can remember crying everyday in second grade. My teacher thought I was not focusing in class, but I just couldn't read like everyone else. The words would dance around on the page so I kept looking away from the words to make them stop. I thought this happened to everyone when they were reading. At my teacher's urging, I had my eyes checked, but the ophthalmologist said there was nothing wrong. She even suggested to my parents that I repeat second grade but they knew I was smart and that holding me back was not going to make me a better reader. It was not until several years later that I was diagnosed with dyslexia.

My mother used to spend hours upon hours helping me with homework. What most people do not understand is that it takes me much longer to complete the same work as a non-reading disabled person. Not only is reading a nightmare for me, but spelling is too. There were many tears in the early years. I wanted to do the same work as everyone else. I didn't want different spelling lists or fewer words, but this meant much more work and effort on my part compared to most students. I hated being pulled out of class to go with the "reading group" because I felt different but I never complained. Early acceptance of my disability lead me to the decision that it wouldn't define me. This made it easy for my friends to accept as well. No one

ever made fun of me because I was not ashamed of it. Dyslexia was just a part of who I was, not all that I was. I was not embarrassed to be the only one reading with my teacher in eighth grade because the novel was too hard for me to read on my own. I had to know the material in the book, and that was the only way I was going to know it.

It was not until recently that I realized how lucky I was to have a great support system at home. My parents, brother and sister provided a loving environment for me and were always willing to help and support me in any way that they could. Sometimes I wonder where I would be today if I did not have such a great support system. Early in my high school years, I realized there were many kids who had issues in their lives, but they were not lucky enough to have a support system at home like I did. It made me want to help those kids. I knew what it felt like to be different, but I also knew what it felt like to get loving support at home that I needed to get me through tough times. It is because of this that I have decided to major in social work in college. I hope someday I can be the support system for those kids who do not have one at home.

Although I have been able to compensate for my reading disability up to this point I am unsure how dyslexia will affect me as a social worker. For example, sometimes I worry if I'll be able to complete the paperwork and forms that will be required of me as a social worker. I worry if there will come a point when the skills I have used to compensate for my disability will no longer be enough. This is the scary part about my dyslexia. I do not know if there will be limitations to my success in the future because of it. I have always worked hard and hope that will be enough to get me through. People always say you can do whatever you want in life; but I wonder if I will be able to. I try not to let these worries linger in my thoughts for very long. I do not want to become overwhelmed with doubt. I keep reminding myself that dyslexia has provided me with a strong work ethic and it is hard work that has brought me this far.

A lack of self confidence is a common problem for dyslexic students. Often the more difficult thing to deal with is not the reading disability itself but overcoming the feeling of being unintelligent. I was lucky that my parents understood this and worked hard to develop myself confidence. They constantly told me how smart I was. They explained to me that my brain just worked differently. However, when you are dyslexic there are times in your life when self confidence is hard to muster. For example, taking the SAT exams was a very difficult time for me. Again, I was made to feel “different”. I was granted extra time because of my disability so on the day of the test I had to register in a separate line. I had to take the test in a separate room from everyone else and then had to explain to my friends where I had disappeared to during the test. The reading portion of the test was very difficult for me. Sometimes self confidence only goes so far. It is times like this that I am grateful for my support system, quickly stop feeling sorry for myself and dig in and get back to work using the coping skills I have learned. There is a quote from Nelson Rockefeller that I particularly like. He said “I was one of the ‘puzzle children’ myself — a dyslexic . . . And I still have a hard time reading today. Accept the fact that you have a problem. Refuse to feel sorry for yourself. You have a challenge; never quit!” (Nelson Rockefeller).

College is important to me because it proves I can take this next step in my life and be successful. I have worked hard to get to this point and it was the next challenge to take just like many other high school graduates. I have always worked hard to maintain the same work load as other students and I needed to prove to myself that I could be successful in college as well. I learned how important a support system is to my success and have been able to find a new support system in college. Student Disability Services has been a great resource providing me with support ranging from necessary software to expert advice. Although my family continues to

be supportive of me I am finding I have to advocate for myself. I have to make my appointments with Charlie in Student Disability Services; I have to speak to my professors if there is a problem. In other words, I am responsible for myself. This is another reason college is important to me. It is a time when I can prove to myself that I can handle life's situations on my own regardless of my disability. I have found a new group of friends on campus that are both accepting and supportive of me regardless of my reading disability. My roommate never loses patience when I ask him how to spell certain words. He does not laugh at me. He just helps me as if it were an everyday normal occurrence.

My disability has helped me to become a compassionate person. I believe this is an important trait for a social worker to have. People working in a helping profession need to understand the struggles their clients live through. Although my disability has never been a devastating struggle, I have often felt "different" than other students. I feel having these experiences will make me a better social worker. I also feel I am an accepting person. I do not judge people and always accept people for who they are. This is also an important trait for a social worker to have. A social worker can not judge their clients. They need to be open minded about each and every client and do the best they can to help them. I have been lucky to have a great support system throughout my life and I realize others have not been as lucky. Most of my life's experiences have been positive and rewarding however I know that is not true for everyone.

As of right now, in the future I see myself as a counselor for teens struggling with depression or drug/alcohol problems. I think my desire to help teens with depression comes from the fact that my brother was a teen who struggled with depression. It was a difficult time for him as well as our entire family. He received counseling during this time and it helped him to

overcome his depression. He worked very hard to conquer his despair. I witnessed how hard it was for him. Working with a good counselor was an important part of his recovery. My brother went on to college, graduated Magna Cum Laude, and is currently a first year teacher. I would like to help other teens with this difficult problem succeed as my brother has. However, I know as I progress throughout my college years I may change my focus. I am currently involved in an internship at the Gray House and find I like working with the younger clients very much. I am looking forward to new experiences that will expand my horizons in the field of social work. The one thing I am certain of is that I want to work in the helping profession. I feel this is the most rewarding field of study and believe my learning disability and experiences related to it have led me to this field.

Dyslexia is something that I will live with for the rest of my life, but I believe I have gained more from my disability than I have lost. While reading will always be a difficult task for me, I have dyslexia to thank for my work ethic. I am not afraid to work hard for what I want, setting high goals and challenges for myself. I am a caring and compassionate person because I know what it is like to be different. I have learned not to be judgmental because everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. My weakness is reading but my strengths far outweigh that weakness. I will be successful in the future not in spite of my dyslexia, but in large part, because of my dyslexia.

## Works Cited

“Famous Dyslexic Quotes.” *www.dyslexikikeme.org*. WordPress, n.d. Web. 2012.  
<<http://www.dyslexikikeme.org/about-dyslexia/r/>>.