



A Senior Citizen Reflects on Her Lifelong Struggle With Dyslexia

A woman identified with dyslexia at age 76 reflects on her lifelong struggles and ultimate triumph.

By Janet Bell

Last Sunday morning the congregation began to sing the opening song. I had done it again. The congregation was singing the hymn on page 130. I was on page 310. I'm dyslexic; I'll always be dyslexic. But I didn't always know that.

In June of 1928, my mother walked me to school and enrolled me in first grade. I was so excited. I was going to learn wonderful things and have lots of fun. Wrong! In the years that followed, I found school wasn't the fun place I had dreamed about. It was filled with fear and frustration. I quickly was labeled as the "dumb kid."

My mother and aunt spent many hours reading aloud to me as a child. I remember those times as the only positive part of my [struggle](#) with learning to read.

Every day in school, I hid behind the child in front of me so the teacher wouldn't call on me. Writing the alphabet was easy, but reading it was a problem. I couldn't seem to pronounce words right. This played havoc with my spelling, and I worked hard to memorize words for weekly tests. School was a living nightmare.

I studied every night, but my father would get frustrated with me. He'd bang his fist on the table and say something like, "Use your head!" or ask, "Where's your brain, girl?"

In spite of all this, I managed to keep my grades up and receive a high school diploma, but my belief that I was dumb overshadowed my entire adult life. I made no attempt to attend college. I chose to work in the fields of general office work, accounting, and technical writing and survived by inventing my own peculiar way to get things done and still appear confident and knowledgeable.

When I worked as a technical writer, a co-worker told me she thought I had dyslexia. At the time, I didn't believe her and ignored her comment. But her words stayed with me.

Three years ago my curiosity prompted me to purchase a book about dyslexia. As I read the first few pages, I was in shock and tears. I thought the author had been peering into my life. **My immediate and joyful reaction was, "Dear Blessed God, I am not dumb. I have dyslexia."** I was ecstatic. I didn't care that my brain worked differently from others. At last I knew there was a reason for my being different - yes, different, not dumb.

I struggle every day with dyslexia in one way or another, but I no longer hide my disability. I am now focusing on dreams I once thought were impossible, such as writing a book for children about dyslexia. While children may not be able to read every word I write, it's my hope that teachers, parents, or other family members will read aloud to them.

Today a teacher or counselor can say to parents, "Your daughter has dyslexia, and we can help her." How I wish my parents could have heard these words!

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