

I do not know where to start on my journey with Dyslexia everyone's is different. I have always known there was something a little different about me ever since I was little. My clearest memory was in preschool where the teacher would have everyone pick out their home phone number. I could never remember my number no matter what I tried to do, until I figured out that if I looked like I was looking for my phone number and waited for everyone to pick out their number and then grab mine then, I would be all set. Turns out this technique can be flawed because if one preschooler picked up the wrong phone number then I would be screwed, this technique also did not get by my teacher at the time. She pulled my mother and father aside to talk about my struggles at school, and mentioned I might have Dyslexia. This was not a surprise to my parents because my father also has Dyslexia.

This was the start of my journey with Dyslexia, I know you want to hear my journey through the public-school system in middle school was amazing, but sadly it was not. I had some very ignorant teachers who made me feel as though "stupid" was plastered in big red lettering on my forehead. It was not just the teachers, taking kids out of the "regular" classroom into the "special" classroom made them big targets for bullying. The bullies were ruthless this toxic environment was so bad that my confidence plummeted, I had such bad anxiety that I would wash my hands until they bled, and I became so depressed that I had thought many times about taking my own life. I am telling you this not to pity me, but to hope by sharing my story another student with dyslexia does not have to go through what I had to go through. This initialization of being told over and over again that you are not intelligent can get to you. It can cause many students with dyslexia to drop out of school and cause them to go their whole life believing they are stupid, when they are not!

Don't worry this story does not have a sad ending this is mostly because of a few factors in my life, which not every person with Dyslexia has access to. One of them was switching to a charter school called Francis Parker Essential Charter School which essentially saved my life, it provided a very healthy safe environment for learning and allowed me to be myself. The teachers also understood my needs, and the curriculum really complimented dyslexic students' strengths like having different ways of completing assignments like oral presentation, being able to present your understanding of your work visually, by writing, presenting, etc. The school played a part in the confident person I am today, and made me understand myself more. In my opinion, this also had to do with my senior project which was based on Dyslexia and the experience of other students with dyslexia. This project leads me to help out at the school academic support classes, take some classes at the mason center for teachers, and lead to me presenting a letter of my experiences to other teachers at public schools who took pictures of my letter and shared it with other teachers to get a better understanding of dyslexic student's experiences.

If possible, I would like to read the beginning of my final letter for my high school senior project, "I want you to see the world through my eyes. Fear strikes me right when the teacher says, "We will be reading each section of this paper out loud." When the paper is passed out, I count the lines until I have to read, and I read them over and over again in my head until my turn. Once I read the sentence the best I can, and it is the next person's turn to read, I remain so anxious I get nothing out of the paper. This is very relatable for dyslexics like me." This was a turning point for me not only was I sharing my experience with others, but it also taught me

being vulnerable, and ray about your experiences might help those who are presently experiencing similar struggles.

Another huge factor in my success in my life is the Masonic Learning Center which tutored me throughout my middle school years. Without your help, I would not have been able to graduate high school which would have had a dominion effect causing me not to be able to go to college, or to be able to graduate with two degrees and a minor like I did last spring. Your program has a hugely positive effect on dyslexic children's lives more than you can ever imagine, and the help that you provide will help them succeed not only in school but throughout their lifetime. It's a stepping stone you give them that, I cannot emphasize enough how much of a positive difference it makes for students with dyslexia like myself.

Another factor as I mentioned earlier is my dad who also has dyslexia, he grew up in a time when schools could turn you away for having a learning disability this is illegal now thanks to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. My dad has always talked to me about dyslexia and from a very earlier age has told me I wasn't "stupid"; that having dyslexia meant I needed to make sense of things in my own way, and I'd have to work significantly harder than most of the other children. My father's support was a turning point in my life, but my mother was always there fighting for me. This is because when I was growing up schools did not want to give me an IEP, or have me diagnosed with dyslexia because it would be more money for them, even though being diagnosed with dyslexia at an early age is one of the biggest preventions for students with dyslexia from falling behind. She fought for me to get tested for dyslexia, and even when I was too young to understand she was fighting for my rights as a student with dyslexia that without, the rights I would have failed out of school. My mother also fought for

me to get tested at Massachusetts General Hospital and brought me back and forth from Boston for a week to get evaluated for Dyslexia. Another factor was the support my whole family gave me without the support and love they gave me throughout my life I don't know where I would be.

In college, at Westfield State University I study criminal justice and later took on another major ethnic and gender studies, and took on a minor in psychology. I took on the second major ethnic and gender studies because it divulges into the history, theories, and knowledge regarding discriminated groups like those with disabilities, which I could relate to a lot not only because I have dyslexia, but also being a woman and being bisexual. My ethnic and gender studies major led me to do my yearlong senior project on disabilities studies looking into not only the history of disabilities studies, but the theories surrounding disabilities, and how as a society we can rethink our definition of disabilities, and my project also looked into the intersectionality of race, gender, those in the LGBTQ community who were also a part of the disability community and their experiences. Well doing this work I also looked into a subcategory of research pertaining to disabilities and sexuality, and people's experiences with both. Doing this work not only educated me on how my rights were fought for, elaborated on the oppression disabilities groups face and still do, but also enlighten me on how other people see the world and how they experience the world with their disability or disabilities. This also led to me helping out on a symposium for my African Literature class which had an overarching theme of education, which made me think of asking Aileen to speak about dyslexia. Especially since Westfield State's second biggest major is education. I thought it would be important for future teachers to be educated on dyslexia so students like me, do not have to struggle as much

as I did. It is also important for me to mention Westfield State University has a great program for those who have disabilities, it gives great support. This did not mean I didn't still have to fight for my rights and explain to my professors what accommodations I needed.

Even now after graduating college and now training to be a game warden, I have to advocate and fight for my rights to have extra time on the reading portions of their entry exam, and to explain to the prompter that having dyslexia does not affect my intelligence just the speed at which I read and write. I know I will always have to do this, it is part of having a disability, but I would like it to be a little bit easier for the next kid with dyslexia, next time around, this is why I am thinking of writing a book of my experience which might help those struggling to understand them self, and to educate those who are willing to learn more about dyslexia.