

Before I found out I was dyslexic, school was an intimidating place. I didn't want to go because it was hard to learn. On Fridays, there would be spelling tests and I would always dread them; I would work rigorously all week to memorize the spelling of the words, and it never worked no matter how many different ways I tried. In addition, reading groups were a huge embarrassment. Even though the teachers never explained how reading groups were organized, you always knew which groups were the smart ones and which needed help. Out of all the leveled reading groups, mine was the lowest and the smallest, which was kind of sad to know how much I was struggling in one of the main areas of learning.

Another annoyance about school was the Rocket Math timed multiplication tests. It was extremely difficult to memorize the times tables, and I would always find a way of cheating so I could move on to the next level. When I was still on basic math facts, all of my friends were way beyond me; I wanted to get better to be where they were. I felt like all of my friends were smarter than me. Another way the teachers torment me was the game, "Me vs. Calculator." This terrible game involved two people picked at random and herded to the front of the class. The teacher would give us a math fact and told both of us to solve it, one with a calculator and one with our mind. This sickening game was supposed to show us that our brains could work faster than a calculator. For everybody else, it worked, but I consistently lost. It was such an embarrassment as the entire class watched the calculator beat me.

My mom reached her boiling point when my 5th grade teacher gave me a geography test and counted me wrong for spelling, even though I had gotten the answer correct. Although I had butchered the spelling of the countries, I still knew

what they were and where they belonged. Being an educator herself, my mother knew that what the teacher was doing was punishing me instead of trying to figure out a way to help me. We started talking to the special education to figure out what they could do to help me. As a result of this meeting, I had to be pulled out of my science class to take an extra class that focused on reading skills. Everyday after math, me and two other people would go to the reading teacher while the rest of my class got to watch videos. I can still feel the disappointment of opening my classroom door and seeing the funny Bill Nye science video everybody was watching was coming to an end. After about a month of the extra pullout class, my mom noticed that my reading wasn't getting better, AND I was missing out on science.

To be honest I don't know how my mom came up with the conclusion that I might have dyslexia. She told me that I was going to be pulled out of school for a day to be tested at the Children's Hospital. Being a 10 year old, the word "hospital" was scariest concept in the world. In my head, "hospital" meant being hooked up to machines, needles, poking and prodding, or an MRI to see what was going on with my brain. Needless to say, our 45-minute drive from Longmont to Denver felt like 2+ hours of fear. Then when we finally got there, we went from a huge waiting room to a smaller waiting room, where we flipped through catalogues. Eventually a little lady with black hair came out and called my name. I was relieved to see that there were no needles or machines in the testing room, just a desk with a picturesque view. The woman testing me brought out blocks and told me to make a picture; this was fun and not at all what I thought it was going to be. After hours of being tested, she pulled my mom into the room with me. I was so tired from the testing that the

rest of that meeting is a fog. What I do remember about that day was being told I was dyslexic. Receiving that diagnosis was an enormous weight off of my shoulders. I wasn't stupid, this wasn't my fault; there was a name for why I wasn't doing better and it was because of how my brain was wired.

Now, five years after being diagnosed, I look forward to going to school instead of dreading it like I used to. In middle school, I depended upon my mom to advocate, but now being in high school I have started to speak up for myself. Test taking is still difficult, but I have learned ways to make studying more effective. My educational therapist helped me figure out that I am a kinesthetic learner, so she taught me hands-on games to make studying less boring. Another way school has become more manageable is due to color-coding my notes, and it also makes note-taking fun! Having reading deadlines is still difficult, but a tool that I learned to use for reading is my Kindle. It allows you to play with how big the words are and the spacing. Another tool that helps with reading is Solo 6, or Read-Out-Loud. When there is a computer reading assignment, you open up Solo 6 and it will read the web to you. Besides Kindle and Solo 6, there are various other technological tools I use to help me compensate: downloading worksheets onto Microsoft Word and re-spacing them, calculators, and spell check.

Today I feel more confident because I have so much support and I have learned to adapt. However, whenever I am called to the board and make a spelling mistake it still gets to me and puts me in a bad mood for the rest of the day. Hopefully in the future, when things like this get to me, it won't be as dramatic as it is now.