

When someone mentions dyslexia to you, what's the first thing you think of? Can't spell? Can't pronounce things? When I first found out I was dyslexic, I thought I might be broken. I didn't actually find out I was dyslexic until the summer of Year 10, which was difficult for me because I went all those years just thinking I was stupid. When I was younger, reading felt like trying to decipher an alien language. Letters danced on a page, flipping and twisting until 'Cat' became 'Tac' and simple maths equations looked like some type of abstract art. All that time, I thought everyone saw words like me, but turns out they didn't.

Primary school was just chaos. Imagine sitting in class, listening to people speed through sentences perfectly while you're still stuck stuttering on the first word trying to figure out what on earth 'blate' meant, turns out it was 'table'. And when it came to reading aloud, it was just pure humiliation. I would always pray the lesson would end before it got to be my turn to read. And when it didn't, the words stumbled out like a train wreck. My friends would laugh and others would just stare, I remember laughing along too but really I felt small. It felt like every other kid was normal and I was just... different.

I found little tasks like homework the end of the world. My parents would sit with me at the kitchen table for hours trying to help me untangle sentences that didn't make sense. I could never understand why it was so difficult for me and not for anyone else. My worst nightmare was spelling tests. When I was in year 4, I was put into extra intervention classes where we'd do spelling tests once a week. I once spelt 'remember' with 4 M's, so you can kind of guess how those went. I would spell my own name wrong for a while and wouldn't even notice. It took about a year to learn how to spell february and even longer to learn how to pronounce it correctly. One night in year 3 parents evening, my parents asked my teacher if she thought I might be dyslexic and she replied, 'I don't think Selena is dyslexic, to be honest I think she's just lazy'.

Secondary school was pretty similar, I thought I was striving because I had somehow managed to get into a grammar school. However, there was a top set, for those who 'deserved to be in grammar school' and there was a bottom set, for those who were 'mentally challenged'. Well that's what my form tutor told me. And I think you can guess which set I was in. The teacher's couldn't care less about our learning. They would turn up to the lesson and just sit at the front. And some days they wouldn't even turn up. We were pretty much teaching ourselves, and can you guess how that went for a dyslexic? Obviously no one took the lessons seriously and at the end of the year I had somehow managed to earn myself 8 Us and one grade 2.

And then on top of that the girls were horrible. It being a girls school, it was a constant competition on who could be the best. You were judged on pretty much everything you did, from how you carried yourself in the corridors to how excellent your history presentation was. I would find myself skipping lessons and hiding in the bathrooms just so that I didn't have to attend classes with teachers that didn't care about your feelings and social reputation. I was constantly told that 'I wasn't trying hard enough' or that I was 'so incredibly dumb that words just couldn't even describe it'.

Over time I became more and more conscious about my disability and little comments and actions started to stick with me. You will quite often see my glasses sitting on my head rather than my face. Some people notice me squinting when looking at the board. I always get asked, "Selena, why don't you just put your glasses on?" And I never have an answer to respond with. I know that there are a lot of people that refuse to wear their glasses. Even

though it makes life so much easier for them. For my GCSE's, I was given glasses which had my prescription and also had a pink tint to them to help me to read fast and without any fuss. However I refused to wear them at all as I found them embarrassing to wear in front of people. Not only did they look like I was wearing sunglasses indoors but I'd stick out like a sore thumb and that's not something I want to do.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that school was definitely not my thing. I was officially a lost cause. When my mum decided that I wasn't getting anywhere at this school and even though she would have multiple meetings with the headteacher and send emails after emails, she decided to get me out of there and send me to kings. Almost immediately we all noticed a change. I was introduced to so many different things that could help me. And I started to see myself as the kid that wasn't different in a bad way but just had a different way of learning. I was able to get the support I needed and learned to advocate for myself.

I mean, if you had told me 3 years ago that I got a headmasters commendation for an outstanding academic report, I think my head would've exploded. As I finished my lower 5th end of years, it became quite clear that something needed to change. So my mum got me in for a dyslexia test, and the woman told my mum that she knew I was dyslexic before I even began the test. Then on top of that I was also diagnosed with irlens syndrome which is a slow processing disorder. Which is kind of double bad luck. I have to use coloured overlays which explains why I have coloured glasses. Unfortunately I struggle to read words on white paper which I know. It sounds stupid.

The coolest part about growing up with dyslexia is that it made me creative. Since reading and writing didn't come naturally, I learned to think outside of the box. I found ways to explain my ideas through things like music, even though I cannot read sheet music to save my life. It also taught me resilience. Every 'failed' spelling test, every misread word, was a lesson in perseverance. Today, I see my dyslexia as a superpower. Yes, it's frustrating when I mix up dessert and desert but what kind of genius decided to spell them so similar. And don't get me started on their, they're and there.

Growing up with dyslexia wasn't easy, but it shaped who I am. It taught me that success isn't about being perfect, it's about working hard, finding your own way and never giving up. Don't let stereotypes describe you, you're not dumb for not knowing how to spell words like remember. And don't be embarrassed about reading out loud in front of people, it's not as scary as it seems.