

My story about Tristan...wow, where to start...

I'm just not sure how to put into words what dyslexia means in my vocabulary. That idea that it is "seeing words upside down" is almost laughable to me now. I never understood what it was like to struggle in school since learning came easy to me. So, when my 5 year old son couldn't repeat back simple sight words just seconds after seeing them, I was extremely concerned. I tried to tell myself that he was just a little behind and would grow out of it. But, when he got far enough behind that we couldn't ignore it anymore, we were facing such things as ADD drugs, holding him back, punishing him, etc. His teachers were convinced he just wasn't trying hard enough.

I'm a faithful person and I believe God stepped in at that point by using our pediatrician. We went for a normal check up and they sent us home with an awareness flyer on dyslexia. As I read through this paper I was struck at how it described my son. The late speech development, the stuttering, the extreme fatigue, the short temper, and the extreme intelligence in areas other than reading. I now knew what Tristan was facing, but I had no idea how to fix it.

I don't know how to really effectively explain what happened next. How do you explain a year of reading, researching, and trying to figure this disability out? How do you explain to your child why he is having trouble? How do you get help from educators who have NO IDEA what they are dealing with? It was SO frustrating!! If not for the Fundamental Learning Center, I have no idea where my son would be today. They gave me the education I needed on his disability and got me in contact with a very important person in our lives.

I can't type these words without crying. Stephanie was a saint that came into our lives when my son was in 2nd grade. She is his tutor, his friend, mentor, and just simply a wonderful person! She taught him what no one else could...reading and math. Two things that seemed so basic that were so impossible for my son. I am a college graduate who owns her own business. I consider myself very intelligent, especially in the areas where Tristan was struggling. But yet, THIS IS NOT SOMETHING I COULD HAVE HELPED HIM WITH. For one simple reason...he learns differently than I do.

It took 3 years for Tristan to complete Stephanie's program. It was expensive and time consuming and WORTH EVERY PENNY AND WORTH EVERY SECOND! My son went from being leaps and bounds behind everyone, to being an A / B student which he still is today. Tristan is now 14 and a freshman in high school. He still has dyslexia. He was not and never will be "cured". But he knows how to cope and he is doing AMAZING! He has to work harder than most, but that will be the definition of his life. What started as a curse has actually installed a work ethic in him that most parents would envy.

I'm so very thankful and blessed that Stephanie came into our lives when she did. I can't even imagine where Tristan would be without the education he received from her. It breaks my heart to know that there are kids out there that struggle with this disability and don't have the resources that we did to get their child help. Our schools have a "no child left behind" montra, but yet, no public school is offering this type of learning to the 1 in 5 children that struggle with dyslexia. The bottom line is that this needs to change! There's just no reason for these kids to suffer when there is a program available that will help them succeed. EVERY child deserves that opportunity, not just the ones whose parents can afford it. So, after all of this, what does dyslexia mean to me? It's Tristan. It's Stephanie. It's strength and perseverance. I wish every dyslexic could define it in such a positive way.

Sincerely,
Kim Braungardt