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Title :

A Dyslexic Day

Abstract :

“An inside look at how someone described as having dyslexia might spend a typical day.

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When the alarm goes off for most people at the start of a new day. It is up, washed and dressed. However, for a dyslexic person, the cry from the heart is *“Please let it be less of a dyslexic day.”* Depending on whether or not they have set the alarm clock correctly, some dyslexics have difficulty with numbers and have a problem with the conventional clock face (although a digital clock doesn't seem to present the same problem), but you still have to work it out. Consequently, they could have been mixed up and this will determine how well a day will start. Depending on what kind of a day was had the day before, this will also effect how they feel. It is difficult in words to describe a “dyslexic day” because they are feelings, emotions which run deep into their psyche. But what is constant is the embarrassment or humiliation and frustration that comes with being a dyslexic everyday, and every word I use could compound that humiliation.

I have lived with this humiliation, frustration and anger at myself and others, similarly the embarrassment for forty years. I would like to say it gets easier to deal with, but alas, just by finding different ways and skills to deal with it. (Dyslexics become very good at deception and masking the truth). Much of the day is taken up by this. However, it is always there just waiting to strike, rearing it's ugly head when you least expect it, and it usually does like a pantomime, nasty, just waiting in the wings of my life to appear as large as day. But instead of the hissing and booing of the audience, it is looks of disbelief. It brings about internal turmoil for the dyslexic, too painful to describe.

Living with dyslexia in a world where the written word is seen as the vein of society, especially in the western world, is a problem for the dyslexic. As the world has evolved so has technology and science developed, bringing with it more problems for a dyslexic person. Neon lights, different kinds of writing, fancy hieroglyphics that sometimes does not even look like writing, these are all hazards for the dyslexic. Like most things the experience of a dyslexic person is analogous to the aerial on a television being not quite focused on the transmitter. The television itself is in perfect working order but the sounds and images it receives get blurred and inaudible (much like the experience of swimming under water with your eyes open). The pace and speed of life in general gives no room for thought or hesitation, people speak fast in different dialogues, accents, slang etc. Dyslexics do not hear or see images in quite the normal way so in a dyslexic day this can cause much confusion and anxiety.

Therefore catching a bus or train is just as confusing. A dyslexic person may also have difficulties with orientation (for example distinguishing between left and right). Going anywhere for a

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dyslexic person is somewhat of an ordeal. With experience you know to plan, take a dummy run if possible, to allow time for “getting lost”. Given the nature of the dyslexic pattern, even if you go anywhere for the dozenth time, you are just as likely to get lost. My own personal experiences magnify these experiences. Since being a child going to school or work could be a nightmare. You start to use clues in the environment like people who catch the same bus at the same time as yourself, people who walk the dog etc. This is risky especially if you are late or they are also late. Thus, it is on a wing and a prayer that you are getting on the right bus especially if the numbers are the one you have a problem with (51,15,97,67,55,66,99), the list goes on. I am personally having difficulty with this year (97). I am constantly mixing them up, putting 79 or 67. I can't count the times I have got on the wrong bus or train even though I am sure I was correct. This is all part of a dyslexic day.

Shopping is something that ordinary people take for granted and most enjoy, but it is full of hazards and pitfalls for a dyslexic person. Making sure you are reading the label properly. Most of the signs are white and glossy, they use letters that are attractive but for a dyslexic it causes confusion and anxiety. I am sure many dyslexics are quite surprised at the items they put in the shopping basket. I feel at times somebody else has done the shopping, it never fails to amaze me that something so simple can be a nightmare.

For people afflicted by dyslexia every day is like a “maze” or a “fog”. For a dyslexic person pain, humiliation, frustration, anger and anxiousness is somewhere on the daily agenda. Like most handicaps it is a courageous battle and struggle to get through a day, ducking and diving the blows which must be overcome to survive another day, when people live within a society that is based on academic achievement for status and self worth. When people look to the written word as identifying intelligence, then if you are unable to *fit* or *master* this *unwritten law* then you are different. There is more to dyslexia than not being able to spell. There is the embarrassment and humiliation. There is the frustration of never being able to write a quick note, be it a message to an employer or a letter excusing a child from school. For even the basic forms of communication require time, *time* to think, *time* to write the note in rough, *time* to find the dictionary, then pray that you will find the word in the dictionary, then the *time* to write maybe a few rough copies until an acceptable one arrives. Often you cannot find a word in the dictionary and if this happens, you have to rethink the sentence, (more **bl---** wasted time and frustration). This is just for a basic wee note.

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For anything more formal or indeed in my case, academic work, the scenario is like above but with double the work, double the frustration, blood, sweat and tears and because the anxiety level is up, the dyslexic part of you pounces like a *cheater to catch it's prey*. All the old negative anxieties caused by past events and situation (the pass or fail feelings) including ridicule, sarcasm and most of all failure. I suspect this is when what the professionals call the enhanced artistic or creative part of a dyslexic comes into play. Words jumping, letters looking strange, whole words lost off the print to re-appear as something else, or indeed move somewhere else. Similarly, using a word that has nothing to do with what you are talking about and, astonishingly indeed, make up a new word, now that is a skill, a talent. Dyslexics can jumble letters, make incoherent mixtures of shapes that somehow have to be perceived as a sensible pattern. Making pretty patterns, you could say a kaleidoscope of words and letters is a hidden talent a dyslexic person has. Taking ages to read a book and understand it, (constantly looking back to check the content) consequently, missing the key points, the concentration is so great on the words and letters that their meaning is lost. When handing in assignments because of the physical and mental strain and effort involved, it feels like you have just delivered a baby, waiting to see the outcome and if there is something wrong.

Worst of all is the bewilderment in the head. The frustration because nothing seems to “go in”, like an empty vessel. Some days are worse than others, of course, as with most of what they call the symptoms. I suppose if I had to pick one thing that is the biggest anguish it would have to be the short-term memory, or lack of it. This I feel, is one of the hardest things to deal with personally and especially for others who have not experienced it to understand. A very close second is the losing of the word you want to say or indeed uttering the wrong word, especially in the most public of arenas, causing confusion for self and others. (No wonder dyslexic people feel stupid, embarrassed and humiliated and have low esteem).

I wonder how I have deluded myself and others for such a long time, masquerading as something else, an impostor. My secret is out, and my secret is no more. The mask is off, the tear of the laughing clown is no more, it has been washed away by a tidal wave of emotions.

I can see by the way I have written this passage that I personally see dyslexia as something alien to me, in the abstract, not part of me, although it is part of me. It is something I will live the reality of every day I accept the obvious truth, learn to laugh at what is so painfully obvious, understand the part, forgiving the past and forgiving myself for dyslexia. You see I too was under the impression that a dyslexic person could not read or write but the issues surrounding dyslexia are very wide and

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complex. When taking into account the confounding variables, the symptoms fit me like a glove made especially *for me*.

What is wrong in saying "help I can't spell!" However there are no lessons to cope with the humiliation that those words conjure up. I long for the day, like many others, to say without any pain and in confidence: "Sorry, it's a dyslexic day, let's try again."