



My Dyslexia

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An inspiring memoir of a Pulitzer Prize winner's triumph over disability.

Despite winning the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2008, Philip Schultz could never shake the feeling of being exiled to the "dummy class" in school, where he was largely ignored by his teachers and peers and not expected to succeed. Not until many years later, when his oldest son was diagnosed with dyslexia, did Schultz realize that he suffered from the same condition.

In his moving memoir, Schultz traces his difficult childhood and his new understanding of his early years. In doing so, he shows how a boy who did not learn to read until he was eleven went on to become a prize-winning poet by sheer force of determination. His balancing act—life as a member of a family with not one but two dyslexics, countered by his intellectual and creative successes as a writer—reveals an inspiring story of the strengths of the human mind.

My Dyslexia Details

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Author : Philip Schultz

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From Reader Review My Dyslexia for online ebook

Carol says

This is a little gem of a book. I read the whole book in less than two hours but learned so much about the experience of having dyslexia. Even though Philip Schultz won a Pulitzer Prize for 'Failure', a collection of poetry, he did not learn to read until he was eleven years old. He did not even find out that he had dyslexia until he was 58! He learned that he had it when his son was diagnosed with it.

Before reading this, I wondered how a man with dyslexia could become a poet. For me it is a very difficult task to write poetry and I don't have to deal with dyslexia. But then, I remembered my friend who is a child psychiatrist who is dyslexic. Because of the tremendous amount of reading that she had in medical school, she hired a reader but she made it through because she was very determined and incredibly intelligent. Philip Schultz has those same qualities.

Mr. Schultz related the effect of having dyslexia in school and not knowing that he had it. His mind was his enemy. To escape teasing from his classmates, he stole coins from his father's vending machine proceeds to eat in a restaurant every school day. He ate the same thing each time even though he hated it. He couldn't read the menu; he ordered what he overheard being ordered. He thought of himself as being a dummy because he was put in a slow class and that is what other kids called him.

His life was filled with emotional pain and anxiety. His mind was truly his enemy. Then in his sophomore year, he fell in love with books. He still could not read them without a huge struggle but he loved them.

This book tells of the emotional journey that Mr. Schultz struggled through until he found that his brain was different from others. He found out that instead of being a dummy he was intelligent. Don't let the size of the book deceive you, he packed a lot of suffering and then finally relief and self-acceptance in it.

I recommend this book to family and friends of anyone with dyslexia and to people with it whose minds are their enemies.

I received this book from GoodReads but that in no way influenced the content of my review.

Emily says

I heard Mr Schultz interviewed on the radio, NPR naturally, and couldn't leave the car until it was over. I tuned in as he was describing having taught himself to read at the age of 11, using comic books. I and, much more so, my son are dyslexic and comic books are his salvation. So much of what he said resonated with me and the traits and tendencies I see in my son. I ordered the book the minute I walked into the house.

I have seen, in some of the other reviews, complaints that the book is too short, too unfocused, not detailed enough, etc. But I would argue that that is both deliberate and part of its inherent beauty. He did not write it to be a comprehensive explication of what is life as a dyslexic. I believe his purpose was to help people understand, not just intellectually, but emotionally and physically, how the dyslexic mind is different.

I would argue that the book is very deliberately constructed in a way that both reflects the natural, instinctual processes his brain goes through, and self-consciously builds on and reinforces especially those peculiarities of a dyslexic mind. Note the layout of the front cover - read in the "normal" order, it says, "My Pulitzer Philip Prize Dyslexia Winner Schultz" - and his passage about deliberately making wrong turns when driving because that is how his mind works best.

No amount of anecdotes about life with dyslexia could really let a non dyslexic person understand, and there are many other book that offer great detail on the subject. He uses the form and flow of the narrative to reinforce and expand the central emotional concept of the book: a dyslexic mind works in an entirely different way from a normal mind. A convoluted, tortured, difficult way that offers an unexpected and complex result with a unique beauty that could only have been produced by that very process. His is less a memoir than an embodiment of dyslexia in prose.

My only complaint - and I do not blame him, as from his perspective he could surely see it no other way - is that, despite the fact that much of the point of the book is the inherent value he has found in the results of the way his mind works, he persists in describing the wrongness of dyslexia and how it causes the brain not to process "correctly." It doesn't have to be seen that way. It is neither right nor wrong, it is simply different, and requires a different teaching method from the current standard.

As he so clearly knows, words - and especially words which label people or place on them a relative value - are incredibly powerful and leave a lasting mark, and we must take great care in applying them to our children. I will never tell my son his brain doesn't work correctly. Instead, we talk about how his brain works differently from most and how that may cause him some problems but it also gives him some benefits that others can never have. Like being very tall or very short, dyslexia is simply a trait that must be embraced and used to one's advantage.

Deanna says

Short, disjointed, and occasionally poignant, with some truly beautiful sentiments tucked here and there. In lieu of a review, I'll just post some of my favorites:

"Judaism is a world constituted almost entirely of language...It's a world of passion for its own history of laws and faith and learning -- all recorded in a language invented out of this very passion. It's a language derived directly out of the heart of the mind and translated and coded in music indigenous only to itself -- the infinitely beautiful and mysterious music of a people who strove to understand their suffering in order to give

it meaning." p82

"When I first started teaching college in the mid-seventies I noticed that nearly all of my poetry and fiction students were using the same autobiographical "I" (or "me") they used to write their diaries, journals, and letters. These narrators were stand-ins for themselves and allowed them little or no distance from their characters. Once they understood that writers like Salinger, Philip Roth, and Chekhov used invented narrators - with attitudes and dilemmas different from their own - there was a remarkable improvement in their work. Holden Caulfield, Huck Finn, and Hemingway's Jake Barnes gave their authors a remove in which they could "see" their characters as actors in their stories. It isn't as obvious in poems, but the same principle pertains. The poetic "I" isn't really the poet, it's a made-up persona or personality possessing a perspective, distance, and sympathy for its characters that often changes from poem to poem...

...When I discovered that my most persuasive narrators were the ones whose personal agendas and attitudes were most different from my own, I started "borrowing" narrators from my favorite writers." p93-94

"I staved off boredom as a child by telling my grandma stories as my mother listened from the dining room, where she counted coins from my father's vending machines...

...I can still see them in their peasant dresses surrounded by the drabness of the furniture and peeling wallpaper, and myself in their eyes, where to them I was more than what my performance in school described, more than what my teachers believed I was capable of, more than what I knew and didn't know about the real world. They knew who I was from my stories. And from the love they felt for me...

...We are the stories we tell, the things we make up and invent, we are more than the answers we give to questions, more even than our limitations -- we are the cantankerous, infinitely mysterious dreams we somehow find the courage to imagine and somehow to tell others." p114

I don't necessarily agree with any of these, but I like all of them.

Julie says

This book made me so appreciate the support that learning disabled children get at our school. It's a very quick read, and inspiring to learn all he overcame with his determination to be a writer.

Kathleen says

Philip Schultz is telling me what it's like to be one of the students I tutor. He was a terrible student, often in trouble in school. He couldn't read. No one thought he'd end up a poet -- let alone a Pulitzer Prize winner. He'd been led to think of his predicament as a mix of stupidity and cussedness, with a tinge of insanity. I've always been the opposite -- what my mom called a "bookworm." I naturally turned to writing and then teaching. People like me are often reading teachers, and we can't get inside the skin of people like Schultz. But he found the name for his predicament -- dyslexia -- not long ago. When he decided to start this book he got depressed. Dyslexia had woven itself into his life in deep and painful ways. Reading still gives him pain. But words give him pleasure. I am glad he finally wrote about how this can be.

Ashley says

As someone who experienced growing up with dyslexia and aspiring to become a writer, I was drawn to this book immediately. The memoir jumps from his experiences in grade and high school, college, and after coming to the realization that he has dyslexia, it's written very beautifully. There is no denying that Schultz is a poet; in lines like, "I was suffering the mysterious, perplexing and previously unacknowledged manner in which I received and absorbed all information of any import" (20), it's easy to get lost in the lyrical flow of his writing. Schultz introduces his memoir by taking the reader through how it felt to share his dyslexia with the rest of the world—write a memoir—and all the insecurities that followed. He goes into detail about his childhood and being bullied.

As we get more of his childhood and his struggles with his faith, what truly permeates through this memoir is loneliness and the desire for solitude because that's the one place where his anxiety was completely gone and he didn't have to struggle to be normal. This theme is what stuck with me the most because I related to this immensely. Part of the reason why I'm not only an introvert but also shy is that I fear being thought of as stupid if I stumble on my words or can't find the right things to say. Being alone eases this anxiety because I'm not being held to anyone's expectations, and Schultz says it so artfully in his memoir.

I really appreciated how much meaning this memoir packed in such a short book and would highly recommend it to anyone who has a learning disability or knows someone that does have one.

St Fu says

There were times when I thought I would have to give this book only 1 star and I felt bad because the author was so vulnerable to slights that I felt he needed my protection. It was the last chapter which saved it for me.

It is the story of a man at odds with his culture believing the culture is right and that he is wrong. With insufficient insight into his situation, he attributes all his difficulties to his dyslexia when actually, most of them were the result of the horrible 50s American culture. He and I were born the same year so I know these times well. I too was at odds with my culture and like him, I suffered accordingly. Where we differed was that he fought for himself while I submitted. And my family rejected the culture so I, though isolated from my peers, at least wasn't judged by my immediate family (though they weren't much help otherwise).

I was hoping he would give me some insight into dyslexia but he did not. You could have swapped in almost any other (so called) learning disability or even undiagnosed bad vision/hearing and the story would have gone the same way. I know this world and I know about the Churchill School at which he starts the story. Like him, I have a son with a diagnosis (ADHD), and like him, I probably have the same one only back then they weren't diagnosing such things.

For much of the book, Mr. Schultz is desperate for someplace to belong and for much of the book he fails to find one. He is accepted in Judaism (though doesn't feel like he should be) and he is accepted in the "dummy" class. Finally, he is accepted in the learning disabled community. His diagnosis is also an identity. He is unaware of the price he pays for this last membership. It is the belief that his brain is broken. In return he gets to no longer feel like his suffering is his own fault.

But his brain isn't broken. It is merely different in a culture that rejects difference. We are still in such a culture, but it was much worse in the 50s. Now we have gay marriage. We also have AllKindofMinds.org, a group that understands the plight of those whose ways of functioning are outside the norm. We are living at a time when many people brag about being "on the spectrum" and companies think about hiring them as employees to work in high tech development.

In the last chapter, he notices that his son doesn't hate himself for his "disability." Mr. Schultz, it appears, still hates himself, but he recognizes that his son might have found a way out.

I'm still waiting for a book that has insight into dyslexia.

Amyiw says

Hmm, I guess I wanted to know less about how dyslexia affected him emotionally and more the nitty gritty. I believe he also has Dyscalculia as he talks about trouble "reading" a clock. This is more a visual spacial issue, trouble with numbers and ordering. After hearing of he and his son arguing whether the maps is "saying" to turn left or right, also visual spacial not word oriented. Frequently dyslexia and dyscalculia or visual spacial issues can go hand in hand. Just as dyslexia affects us in many different ways, and is caused by differing learning problems in the brain, decoding, working memory, short term memory, memory retrieval, processing issues, etc..., we all have a myriad of ways it presents.

So it was interesting to read about his problems in school and the frustration and physical outburst due to bullying. I haven't seen this so much though the frustration is definitely there. The feelings of inadequacy and unintelligence, mainly because of peers (bullying) or just seeing that others are getting there quicker, can be difficult. Luckily today children are identified quicker and support can be given.

So I liked this mainly except that it really is "his dyslexia". And parts of what he attributes to as dyslexic influenced issues for him, were not interesting to me. Reading the Torah, visiting a Jewish memorial and not being able to read the Hebrew description, and other issues because he couldn't read Hebrew in a Jewish family, just droned on for me. I got it the first time that language can be very difficult for dyslexics. Guess what, it is not impossible. Just like he learned how to write, some dyslexics go on to speak foreign languages as an adult.

That lead in to characterization and acting the part. So while in Synagogue because he could not understand, it would be an act. This he writes a poem about and then many rabbi use it as a deeply moving and profound reading... even though he couldn't understand the sermon, hmm. OK, impressive but being a poet laureate we are already impressed so this was just more drone for me. Then this leads into characterization and how it helped deal with situations. I get that but he went into other authors and explained their works and the voice used, like Moby Dick. Argh, suddenly I'm not reading the effects of dyslexia but I'm in a writers class on voice and character, POV, and such. He is a teacher so, he went off on a tangent with a sliver of interest to the "how dyslexia affected me" theme.

So part of the book was quite interesting though not quite what I wanted, and part just had me in deep concentration just to get through it. I felt like how he talked about his love of books and hating of reading from the beginning of the book. If I really wanted to know what he was talking about, I had to pay attention and possible go over it again. Unluckily, it wasn't really something I wanted to understand really well. So half good.

Angela Jacob says

I loved the book. I can relate to a lot of the experiences and emotions.

Rita Metzinger says

As a dyslexic who was also diagnosed late in life this one hit home. It was good to read about another's struggles. In many of his examples I saw myself. If you have or have someone with dyslexia in your life I'd recommend reading this.

Kerry says

A gem of a book by a Pulitzer-prize winning poet about the trauma of living with undiagnosed dyslexia.

Peter says

Eye opening as to the world of a dyslexic writer. I never in my insular way was aware of the price those with learning difficulties pay to live in a world of 'normal' learners. A journey to another part of my/our world that was unknown to me

Sam Sattler says

Philip Schultz's story will inspire and encourage anyone whose life has been impacted by dyslexia. Schultz, who did not learn to read until he was eleven, did not discover he was himself dyslexic until he compared his own reading difficulties to those of his young son, a confirmed sufferer of the condition. Today, despite his continuing struggle with language skills, Philip Schultz is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. His remarkable story and insights into dealing with dyslexia can be found in *My Dyslexia* the memoir in which he recounts his early schooling struggles, how he overcame the condition, and what his life is like today.

Much of what Schultz describes will be heartbreakingly familiar to the parents and grandparents of children struggling to keep up with their peers in the classroom. Learning disabilities are difficult to cope with – as parents and grandparents of children who suffer from them, we already know that. What most of us probably fail to understand fully is the emotional pain our children are suffering as they deal with the social stigma of being different from the majority of their friends and classmates. Tragically, as Schultz stresses, these emotional scars are likely to last a lifetime.

Schultz, poet that he is, has a beautiful way with words that allows him to describe in vivid images what he has gone through, how he very suddenly learned to read at age eleven, and how he must compensate for his poor reading skills even today. Consider, for instance, his description of what reading is like for him now:

As I read, a kind of subtle bartering between uncertainty and hunger for knowledge goes on in my mind, in which I must conquer a feeling of hopelessness and anxiety. I've learned to read the way a runner learns to expect and find his second and third winds, the way an athlete pushes himself beyond where it is comfortable to go. I read word by word, sometimes congratulating myself on the completion of a sentence, each paragraph and chapter,

Or this description of what it was like for him in the classroom:

I understood that I was different from other kids. I lived in a world of differences measured not by appearances, wealth, or even intelligence. The world I lived in involved struggle for control over my thoughts and actions. My differentness felt freakish. My brain wouldn't obey me, nor my parents or my teachers. If I had trouble learning to read a clock, know my left from my right, hearing instructions – things everyone else seem to do easily – how could I trust my own thoughts or anything about myself?

The topics addressed by *My Dyslexia* should help parents and grandparents better understand what their children are experiencing. Among subjects addressed are: why the children often prefer being alone; why they so often attract the attention of bullies; their difficulty with poor self-image; and the disintegration reaction experienced when such a child feels great pressure to explain himself. Books like this one will make it easier for parents, grandparents, and teachers to find the patience and understanding needed to help their children and students cope successfully with a condition that will so critically impact the rest of their lives.

The good news is that there is hope for them – and Philip Schultz proves it.

Mark says

Readability 7. Rating 4. Perhaps I came at this the wrong way. I was hoping for insights into a life of a person with dyslexia - and to a small degree, it does provide that - but it is very much more a more encompassing memoir of a seemingly very wounded person who becomes a poet. The title, then, to me was pretty misleading. It was as much about growing up with a bad father, being Jewish, or being a poet as it was about dyslexia, even if all of those aspects of his life were impacted by being dyslexic and not knowing it.

Brittany Garcia says

After reading "A Fish in a Tree," I never realized how much of my childhood was shaped by dyslexia. since I realized that I struggled with dyslexia until I was an adult. the author's account is nice for any adult realizing later in life they have a learning disability and what that may mean.

Katie Kenig says

I was myself diagnosed with dyslexia in college. Like the author, I had already built up coping mechanisms and had struggled without support in primary and high school.

I cried through much of this book, because I felt understood in a profound way that I've never felt before. So

many aspects of my life that I thought were just my quirks were explained in the context of a dyslexic brain. Amazing.

Extraordinary if you want to understand how a dyslexic person functions, or if you are yourself dyslexic and are interested in a perspective on this life.

Huda says

A dyslexic father of a dyslexic child. This memoir shows how important it is for a person to understand and accept their own disability. Is it ever too late to accept what you are and what you have??

The father had a life where nothing made sense to him; he would read a poem and jump to the other without even noticing something was wrong. He didn't know why he was constantly bullied, why students used to shy away from him or avoid sitting next to him. He sounds relieved whenever he mentions his son; who's unlike him, not only relaxed with what he has, but he also enjoys it.

This is a guy who tends to create characters living his own life with a happier ending!

"How can you write a novel while you're so busy living one?"- My Dyslexia by Philip Schultz

David Hornik says

This book literally changed my life. For years I have dismissed the impact dyslexia has had on my life. I have been happy to sweep it under the rug. But as I read this book on an airplane I found myself weeping. Philip Schultz captures the challenges, the pain, and maybe even the joy, of growing up with dyslexia. A hugely important read for anyone with dyslexia and any parent of a dyslexic.

Miranda Head says

Good little book. I knew a little bit about dyslexia as a teacher but he gives a great perspective about what it means to be dyslexic AND a writer.

Flora Smith says

This is an interesting look into the life of a dyslexic. Philip Schultz talks about his life as he was growing up as a child with an undiagnosed learning disability. He described how it felt to be bullied and made fun of by other students because of his inability to learn to read. And he described his determination to learn to cope and overcome his dyslexia. It was interesting to me to learn that how much more there is to dyslexia besides difficulty reading such as difficulty telling time on an analog clock, doing math, or following directions. As a mother of a dyslexic child I found it interesting viewing life from this perspective. It definitely gives a glimpse into their view of life and the difficulties they have to deal with. I would recommend this book for

anyone that has a loved one with a learning disability.
