



## This Is My Daughter's Story

To be shared with you all by Claire Conlan



I look at this picture of you as a 4 year old daughter and I see all of the hopefulness in your eyes and I would often ask you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and you would say "A policewoman, mummy... so I can throw all the baddies into jail", and I laugh and think to myself you can be whatever you want to be.

You started kindergarten with the bravery and curiosity of all the rest. But by 7 or 8 or 9 years old, after years of struggling with what seems to come naturally to the others, after years of holding your head up anyway and trying so hard without success, you seem removed... Separate. You realize this place is not for you. School is not for you.

Your pride is at risk and you must preserve what little self-esteem you have. You memorise things, avoid reading in class, and act the class clown to protect yourself from the reality that you cannot read, but you are constantly surrounded by the printed word; text messages, emails, magazines, internet, books and exams. It is a constant reminder.

I would often think about you walking along the corridors of school, when you were 5 and 6. I can hear you laughing and talking. There is a peace in your voice and an eagerness about being at school.

Then I see you at 8 years old and I wonder when it all changed for you? I will tell the teachers constantly, I think you are dyslexic - You do not seem to be learning letters or sounds - and they all said "We don't use the 'D' word and it will all click for her, you wait and see"..... and I would think to myself, these were the professionals, they should know.

But you were heading down the same path as almost every dyslexic kid before you. An eventual label of dyslexia was stamped on your file after I had you assessed. The diagnosis was one thing, but the real battle was about to start.

You and I became a team as we go down a path of:

- Tutor after tutor after tutor
- Trying SPELD
- The Davis dyslexia program
- Neuro-feedback sessions
- Counselling
- Testing for glasses/tinted lenses etc

And you look at me...tired..."Mum what on earth are you taking me to now?

Teenage years, and the ensuing battle for you to get to school each day. After years of being brave and strong, the overwhelming feelings of anxiety and depression kick in which adds to these layers of struggle and we fight to keep this at bay. Your teacher calls me wondering why you are not at school today, why homework has not been completed, why the book has not been read. Some teachers just want to pass you on to the next year level, not a clue how to help and work with you. There are others that are very eager to help but these are few.

It's a confronting moment when you realize the system is not for your child. It's a confronting moment when you realize that no matter how hard you try and no matter how hard the special education team is trying, school is structured in a way to benefit one type of child with one type of mind and abilities.

I get small glimpses of what it is like for you at school and what it must be like:

- To sit an exam and sporadically colour in the multiple choice answers, because you cannot read the questions.
- Asking what is on the board (embarrassed) and...
- About how you don't have any reading jobs and you want reading jobs because all of the other kids have them.
- And all you ever wanted was to read "chapter" books.
- Signing forms that you are not sure what they are all about, not sure how to spell the street name that we live in when completing the plethora of forms that you will be asked to complete over a lifetime.

I consider taking you out of school to learn in other ways, but I do not know how to teach a dyslexic child to read.

So I send you off to Year 10, trying to make sure you are not one more casualty, one more bright, capable mind slipping through the cracks, moved onto become next year's problem, passed on because nobody quite knows what to do. Everybody is trying, but the system is not meant for kids like you.

I tell you that you are smart, creative, funny, but you are in an environment every day that does not always recognise this.

I drop you off at school each day and you get out of the car, and you walk bravely ahead, alone. I think about you sitting there watching the teacher write on the board. Maybe the other kids start writing right away, answering her question, responding "as they should." Maybe hands shoot in the air. And I wonder what you're thinking in those moments?

As we head towards the business end of your schooling life, I ponder can a bright, capable mind such as yours, actually achieve whatever you want to be? Can the current Victorian schooling system that currently does not facilitate and support a person with dyslexia, become a nurse, or a vet, or a policewoman so you can "throw all of the baddies into jail"?

Your school years are almost past. What is the future for a caring, intelligent, nurturing child whose only difficulty is the written word? How can you become the nurse or the vet that your heart desires? How can a teenager with intelligence and compassion achieve the goals that she covets simply because she is dyslexic and is tormented by the written word? I feel we have explored many avenues for assistance but there are many dead ends. How many other children continue to run out of options and optimism? My daughter is bright, active, nurturing and has a great ability to work with and care for people and creatures in need.

As Albert Einstein once said - "Everyone is smart, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its entire life believing it is stupid?" What more can be done to enable her to climb her tree?

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