

The Gift of Dyslexia  
By Tanya Koehn

My story begins with my own childhood struggles. Attending school was both challenging and difficult and then in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade I found out I was dyslexic. The diagnosis was a relief because I could now put a name and reason with my struggles; I wasn't just dumb. My response to this was to become focused and to show the world just how smart I was. Consequently I began working harder, much harder than most of my classmates, to understand the lessons. As an adult the drive and focus I developed in childhood helped me to manage my dyslexia in a manner that enhanced, rather than hinder, my career. Life kept moving forward and I never thought any more about my dyslexia until my oldest son began schools.

During my son's 1<sup>st</sup> grade school year I became very concerned when I realized he was struggling academically. I immediately organized a meeting with his teacher and demanded to see his test results. Upon doing so, I was suddenly faced with a very familiar feeling and I had to ask myself a difficult question "Could my son be dyslexic?" This began my quest to not only determine why he was struggling but to also find all the help I could for him. Once we received the diagnosis identifying him as having dyslexia, my mission began. I knew one of the first things I needed to do was to get him help in school. It is safe to say that he has always struggled in school and his struggles only increased when he entered junior high.

Caleb is my son's name and he is a wonderful, smart 13 year old young man. Unfortunately, all his incredible qualities sometimes get lost in the school setting and, sadly, are overshadowed by his struggles. Every school year is a battle for Caleb beginning with the first day and continuing through until the very last day of school. Most parents dread

summer break. I, on the other hand, look forward to it every year because it gives us a break from all the battles over homework and the late nights completing assignments. Most heartbreaking though, especially as a parent, is to see the stress this brings to Caleb. So it is easy to see why summer break is a both a relief and escape because it gives my son a break from feeling stupid every day when he enters the school building.

I explain to the teachers each new school year that I spend several hours every night helping Caleb do his homework and building up his self-esteem as high as I can so that when he goes to school the next day there is room for it to be knocked down. This is difficult to admit as his mother, but it is the truth. Caleb has told me many times how dumb he is; as a matter of fact, he wrote a story about himself in which he stated, "If I could get rid of something it would be my dyslexia so I can learn as fast as the other kids in my class." It is heart wrenching to hear these words spoken by my son. Caleb spends approximately 2-4 hours a night struggling on homework. You can imagine his and my frustrations as we try to keep him motivated to stay in school.

With some persistence I was able to convince the school about the importance and necessity of a 504 plan but, unfortunately, the school is unwilling to do anything extra that might cost them money. So it falls to my husband and I and we have been and will continue to be prepared to sacrifice everything we can to get him what he needs. Our goal is that Caleb will be successful in school so he will grow up and be a contributing member to our society and the community!

So why is this story titled "*A Gift of Dyslexia*"? The thing people do not realize about children with dyslexia is that these kids are some of the brightest children among our society. They don't just get to sit in their seats at school and learn, they have to become

creative and figure out how to retain the information given to them a unique way. This means they are more than likely teaching themselves in a creative way. These children have within them the capabilities and potential to be some of our greatest inventors, lawyers, and authors of the future. Children who are dyslexic have brains that work differently than their peers. This gives them an advantage as adults because they are out of the box and creative thinkers; this is a trait that schools cannot teach. For this reason I truly believe that dyslexia is a gift given to children to provide society with a variety of incredibly talented individuals to enter the workforce. I believe it is important to think of dyslexia as a gift. An incredible gift that should be nurtured and supported in a manner that assists our young children in seeing the true value of their disability because they are not stupid but rather they are intelligent children who will have an enormous influence on our society.

