

Dyslexia. That means twisting the letters *d* and *b*, and reading *was* like *saw*. Right??

So I thought when I was in college and as a young mother. But then one of my children was not learning to read like her siblings. My education on the topic of reading and spelling difficulties began, and with that my definition of dyslexia expanded beyond this simplistic but common view.

Some people say that a good reader is made by exposing them to books. Books were part of our children's lives from the time we brought them home. For our twins, you could almost say we read to them *before* they were born because their older sister always wanted to hear books read to her. So why was our beautiful pre-schooler not learning to recognize letters or rhyme as quickly as her twin brother? And why was she not talking as robustly as the other two had. She kept up physically and she seemed as bright?

We began asking questions of our doctors, preschool staff and they were the right questions, but we did not get all the right answers. What we know now is that we missed some early signs of what we now know is dyslexia.

A language delay is one of the hallmark signs of dyslexia. This was explained away by the fact that a talkative and very verbal twin brother did not give her the opportunity to express herself. So we purposely provided her with plenty of 1 on 1 time where she could talk all she wanted to talk. Even with speech therapy, no great leaps ahead were made.

Preschool and kindergarten were great fun and life was good— if there were no rhyming or letters involved. But when there was, these were often written backwards or tilted on the wrong axis. She could even write her name perfectly--just backwards. This was explained away again, this time because she was a leftie. We even had her eyes checked, just in case.

At this point, my husband and I did some research and found that writing backwards is not truly a concern until about second grade. If she was still doing it then, action would be needed. However, she responded to our teaching with arrows and other visuals on the right direction to write her name and other little words she was mastering. We didn't know then that the problems with rhyming were also a sign of a learning problem.

But at the beginning of first grade, our Little Miss Sunshine was not so sunny. This was especially true when it came to those weekly spelling tests. She and her very patient daddy would work for hours every night on those ten words. She would have them down

cold by the spelling test on Friday morning and usually got an A. But after recess or lunch, those words would be gone as if she never knew them or ever saw them before.

By the time she and her classmates took standardized testing in the spring, our concerns were high. Surprisingly, her scores were high, too. She maxed out on the math sections—Gifted! If the test had been read to the class, she scored in the top sector. But if she had to read it alone, she was at the bottom of the bell curve. At a teacher conference that I requested, the teacher explained these away as making her just average. I was told not to compare her to her very gifted twin brother. Let's just say I left the building seeing red and biting my tongue. My mother taught me not to say anything if I could not say anything nice. I was seeing Red Flags in those scores, whether I had one child or ten. Why weren't they?

Luckily for us, my Army husband was currently stationed in Hawaii. I joke now that God put us in paradise so we would be near The ASSETS School for Gifted Dyslexics. We were able to schedule a complete testing series there, but not until late in the summer. Half way through the testing, the evaluator told me she was now an even stronger believer in Mother's Intuition. It was her unofficial way of telling me I was in the right place. Dyslexia—an answer to a problem that we could now tackle.

However, ASSETS had no openings left at that point. So, armed with information and a diagnosis, I went back to the public school which I really did like. My two other children were doing wonderfully and excelling. Surely, now that we knew what was going on, we could set up the help my youngest daughter needed. That turned out to be naive on my part.

The Hawaiian school district did not offer any specialized help beyond what I could work out with her teacher. She was a wonderful and capable teacher, or so I was told, and all would be well. As I cried out my frustration to God and anyone else who would listen that week, we got a phone call. There had been a withdrawal at ASSETS and our daughter could now go to a school with her distinct learning style in mind.

At ASSETS, they used a multisensory teaching method called the Orton-Gillingham Approach. Our daughter was soon thriving—Little Miss Sunshine was back! Our tour in Hawaii would not last, but we were able to extend our tour of duty long enough for two years at ASSETS to give our daughter a good foundation in multisensory phonics. And it gave me time to get the training that I needed to help our daughter to continue learning in a multisensory manner.

That time of frustration has served to make me empathetic to others who are going through the similar maze of securing the school services their child needs to succeed. There were still a lot of bumps in the road, but our daughter is now doing well in college.

And I found a new direction for my life. As my children grew older, I started tutoring other dyslexic children, teens and adults. In 2005, I co-founded the Educational Therapy Center in Parkville, MO and now serve many more students than I ever could privately. The Educational Therapy Center's Orton-Gillingham trained tutors serve students throughout the Northland.

Maybe that is another reason God put my family in paradise for a few years.