

Dyslexia and writing.

Today, I'll be discussing dyslexia and my personal writing journey whilst becoming an author.

I love storytelling, whether it's film, TV, books, or theatre. I have always had stories in my life. Some of my first memories were listening to audio books. I would scour through the limited list at the local library and get excited at any new realises. Then I would lie back on my bed, close my eyes and listen to the narrator describe a magical world. As I fell asleep, the book became a dream in which I would step inside and become a part of the story; something I still do today. My imagination comes alive with stories. Inside my mind, I have the ability I see an image like a film or a TV episode. Once I was older, I realised, having such a visual mind is one of the gifts of Dyslexia.

My Journey with Dyslexia...

I knew I had a problem with writing, focusing, processing information, and reading. However, it wasn't until I was 10 someone actually diagnosed me as dyslexic. I'm a visual, auditory, and verbally dyslexic. Most people presume there is only one type, the stereotypical judgement that it is only reading and spelling that it effects. Not everyone who has dyslexia, has multiple types. They might only struggle with the visual aspects, but not the others. The thing to remember, dyslexia is how your brain is wired, not your intelligence. I believe, if you understand how your brain processes information and you're aware of your own learning style, then you can do anything. But if you or the educational system forces your brain to work differently, as if swimming against the tide, then you end up becoming tired, confused and create low self-esteem, believing the lie that you are stupid. There is still a lack of understanding and true awareness of what dyslexia is. Throughout my life they have discriminated against me because of my dyslexia, that I am not capable of learning, or worthy of teaching, because of my disability. When I was 14, teachers told me I would not pass my exams. So, my rebellion was to prove them wrong; and I did. The difference is, I love to learn, and I use my passion for storytelling and books and reading as a way of escaping. I created my North Star to focus on and drive me forward. A dyslexic person has to study three times harder to get the same results as a normal person. Want it, believe it; make it happen.

The gift of dyslexia...

The more I pushed myself, the more I realised what I was capable of. I saw the gift of dyslexia. My brain is highly visual and creative, that's where my strengths lie. With storytelling, I would think up a story and my mind would fill with characters and plots, like watching a film or listening to the audiobook, but this time I was the one creating the story, I was the narrator. When I was older, I found I could do this with art and design, see what I wanted to draw in my mind, rotate and pull it apart. I can zoom in on an image and focus on the detail or zoom out. And yet, as a writer, I didn't have the confidence or the capability yet

to write out the story and do what I could see in my head justice. Instead, I went off to university and studied stage design, costume, lighting and sound, which only fuelled my imagination and the love of storytelling. I immersed myself into the world of theatre. They were some of the best years of my life, as it helped to craft my designing skills to create imaginary worlds. I put off the idea of writing a novel, believing I couldn't be a writer, I wasn't capable of being a writer; until one day I couldn't ignore it any longer. The story was as clear to me as if I was recounting a film that I had just watched and the people seemed real to me as if I've just taken a time machine into the past, and they were walking the streets alongside me. The story didn't let me rest until I pick up a pen and began writing.

My process of writing.

When I write, I plant myself in the moment. One of the ways is by playing instrumental music; I find my dyslexic brain prefers a slight distraction rather than silence for it to focus. Next, I would imagine the characters, describe them and what they are doing, within their time and the place. If I am continuing a chapter, I re-read the last three sentences and start where I left off. But if it's a new chapter, I stare into space and step inside my mind. I create the world and once I'm a part of it; I write.

It doesn't matter what you write at the beginning, you can't edit a blank page. Write what you see, from the smallest of details to the characters talking. Then you can come back and cut out what you don't need and focus on the important details.

For myself, once I am in that moment and the characters are performing, I find they take over. They say and do what they want, and I am merely describing them. However, if I can't imagine it, if I can't picture myself there, and the characters, I can't write it. So, I have to immerse myself into that world by watching documentaries, books and shows. It doesn't matter if it's historical, present day, fantasy or sci-fi. I have to see it to write it. But the beauty of imagination is that it's endless, if you let go and allow yourself the freedom.

Over time, I focused on art of storytelling and structure behind the plot and characterisation. Start by reading or watching TV or films to study the plot of the story. Study the characters and the dialogue. You can start with something small like a scene or a person, how would you convey that person looked or felt? Focus in on the tiny details. Would you write as the first person as the character themselves, or would you write as a third person, as if you're observing from a distance, and you're describing all their nuances. As a third person, you have the availability to describe different people's point of views rather than just one.

One of the best parts of it is writing the words 'The end.' But really that isn't the end, now you have to edit, and that's when the story really takes its form.

My advice...

Whether you have dyslexia, don't let anyone tell you, you can't do it, not even yourself. It takes time and effort, but if you love it, then go for it.

- Embrace the passion. There is nothing wrong with that, but you have to love it to invest in the time.
- Figure out how your brain works, are you visual? Do you love words or struggle with them? How much attention can you give it? If it's only ten minutes a day, that fine,

use it to write a few lines and the next day add some more. Before you know it, you have a story.

- Read books, listen to books, watch films and criticise them. How would you do it differently?
- Have the confidence to try and if you don't like it, then that's ok, find another passion and try that.
- Be daring and use your own experiences.
- There is always time to try something new and give it ago.
- It's ok to fail, but try again, and again, and again.
- Be you! Only you can tell that story and your voice matters.

The signs of Dyslexia...

Part of this post is making young people aware of the signs of dyslexia and sharing my story. To show that even if you are dyslexic, then that's great and I mean that. Be proud of who you are and explore your own mind. Be strong about your gifts and limitations. Do not let ANYONE tell you how you should think, feel, and how intelligent you are. Knowledge is power, and you know your own brain better than anyone else.

If you know someone who has dyslexia, a parent, child, family member or friend; support them. Listen to them. Allow them to tell you what they can and cannot do. Give them strength to explore their own brain. But most of all, celebrate their gifts!

If you are not sure but think someone you know or yourself might be dyslexic, here are the signs to look out for.

- Might appear to be bright in some areas, but have a block in others.
- Can be very creative and good at practice tasks.
- Poor letter sound recognition, awareness of sight vocabulary and sequential ordering.
- Strong visual thinking skills such as being able to visualise a structure from plans.
- Good verbal skills and social interaction - unless they are verbal dyslexic.
- Poor short-term working memory - difficulty following instructions, forgets to do things.
- Good at problem solving, thinking outside the box, seeing the complete picture.
- Slow at information processing - spoken and/or written language.
- Might have a limited concentration span.
- Seems restless, easily distracted and/or easily tired.
- Has little to show for a tremendous amount of effort; frustrated by lack of achievement.

These are just a few examples but if you would like more information and guidance check out:

www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Positive quotes to finish on...

On dyslexia Scotland they have got quotes from people, young and old, who have dyslexia and I would like to share them with you.

- **"Because I'm dyslexic I can imagine things well, making me really good at art and design."** Lottie
- **"Dyslexia gives me a wider picture. I can read the game better and predict what others are going to do".** Innes, a footballer
- **"High levels of intuition mean I can read the mood of everyone in the room within seconds and respond in the right way".** Hamish
- **"Using my dyslexic powers, I am able to manipulate plots and characters in four dimensions with ease. It helps me see the big picture, which in turn allows me to connect them all together in my mind".** Iain McKinnon

This is my story, what's yours?

Author H D Coulter.