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Dyslexia – a blessing in disguise

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What do Thomas Edison, Tom Cruise and Walt Disney have in common?

They are famous, well accomplished, influential and Dyslexic.

As individuals they are the personification of success in their beloved professions, colleges are named after them, they have engravings in the Hollywood Walk of Fame and holiday destinations linked with their personalities. There is nothing backward, nor disadvantaged about them.

It's been 10 short years since I graduated from High School. When I received the reunion invitation - I realised I hadn't thanked the teachers enough for their kindness, educational support and encouragement. I set out to write each teacher a thank you letter. Many of the teachers were from my primary years. As I wrote the letters it occurred to me that these teachers were the mentors and leaders that led me through my most challenging educational years. I was slow to read and even slower to write. I couldn't spell to save my life and my times tables were a simple guessing game.

I was lucky. My parents were both well educated, medical savvy and had the money to spend on outside educational tutoring. I was very sporty, so my afternoons were spent playing tennis, swimming and running. After these activities my mother would schlep me from one tutors address to the next. By the end of the week I was exhausted from brain overload and physical fitness fatigue. I think I had the same amount of tutors as teachers at one stage.

After taking many IQ tests my family and I realised I had something called Dyslexia. In the late 80's it seemed very little was known about it. I remember my parents earnestly coming home from learning seminars and talking to me things like I was a moron. I remember my mother clapping a lot and my father talking slowly. This didn't last long, as they knew I was smart, creative and thoroughly involved with all my peers. It was just when someone asked me my left from my right, I didn't have an answer.

My primary years swung by and my high school years shot past. Once I graduated high school – in the top 10% of the state, I finally proved to myself that Dyslexia was not a wallowing wound but rather the greatest blessing in disguise. I worked harder,

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longer and smarter. Naturally, I compared myself to my peers and when they were doing better – I competitively strived to outshine them. My best friend was probably the smartest person in the grade. She duxed Art and Drama and got a total score of 99.6% in her HSC. So my standards were high. I was at a private school too, so generally it was competitive but by that stage I didn't mind. I was thriving.

The profession I chose is surprising to some, considering my spelling is shocking. But thanks to spell check and several sub-editors - I'm a confident writer and journalist. Sometimes spelling mistakes slip though the lines and I get told off. But I live with it. Just as those that have asthma and have to put up with it, I too live with – Dyslexia.

I used to be embarrassed to say that I have it. But most people guess once they see my scribbled writing and back to front letters. Now, I joke about it and find that's really the easiest way to be. After all I have made something out of my life and used my small struggle to accomplish all that I have wanted to (and more).

Last week, The New York Times tracked me down and requested an article. Not quite an engraving in the Hollywood Walk or Fame or a destination named after me, but in my own small way –I've made it!

Leah is a journalist based in Sydney, Australia. She is available to speak on Dyslexia through Circles of Learning. Please enquire by phone, email, or view Leah's speaker profile via the [website](#).