

DYSLEXIA

An Amazing Discovery



Jacqui Vittles

"I came to the conclusion that I must be a genius, not only to have survived my ignorance [of my dyslexia] but to have thrived, despite it."

Dyslexia

An Amazing Discovery

by
Jacqui Vittles



Eloquent Books

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Eloquent Books

An imprint of Strategic Book Group

P.O. Box 333

Durham CT 06422

www.StrategicBookGroup.com

ISBN: 978-1-61897-094-7

Printed in the United States of America

Book Design: Suzanne Kelly

*This book is dedicated to all
those people yet to discover
their gift, and to all those who
live or work with them.*

Thanks

I give my humble and heartfelt gratitude to my husband, who remains a constant source of inspiration and support for my efforts; to my sons, for their patience, generosity and for believing in me; to Ali, Pavel, Phil, Phil, Cris, Grant, Jo, Robin, Penelope and Lynn for their invaluable contributions and constant encouragement; to Joy for keeping my fingers tapping on the keys and guiding me through the morass; and to Irina, who sowed the seed that got me to commit my story to paper in the first place.

I give my humble and heartfelt apologies to anyone who ever asked me to read a text book—and expected me to learn something from it!

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About This Book

This book is not about dyslexia. This book is about my experience of being dyslexic and not knowing. It is about my personal journey struggling without realising it and how I came to discover what was—or wasn't—actually *wrong* with me. Having already held down high-powered management jobs, gained an MBA and run my own business, I made the life-changing discovery. It felt like emerging from a dark tunnel into the light for the very first time.

As I now know, dyslexia is a much-misunderstood condition. For a start, it isn't an illness that can be cured and therefore it doesn't have medical symptoms. What it does have is a series of characteristics that can be both inconsistent and challenging. The term *word-blindness* is often used as short-hand for describing the condition, but as I discovered, this is misleading. In fact, it represents only a fraction of those characteristics that join together to form the condition we know as dyslexia. Although I

have displayed many of those characteristics throughout my life, traditional word-blindness has never really been one of them. I am also of above-average intelligence and these two factors together militated against my discovering that my *little problems* have a name—until I was in the latter half of my forties.

I am not an expert in the condition of dyslexia but I am expert in my own experience of it. My primary motivation in writing this book is in helping others, like myself, to put a name to something they've been aware of all their lives. In sharing my experiences in this way I'm also hoping that people who do not have dyslexia may increase their understanding of what it is and how it can affect other people who may be very close to them.

As well as looking at my own experience of the condition, I have also listened to other people with dyslexia and learnt a great deal more from hearing their stories; and I have discovered that some very famous people are dyslexic, or were during their lifetime. Finally, I have included some information about where readers might be able to go for help if this book has had some resonance for them.

We are learning more and more about dyslexia with each passing year and having the condition is nothing to be ashamed of or hidden away. I hope you enjoy reading

this book. If you feel so inclined, please recommend it to someone else who may be interested in this complex and widely misunderstood condition and who may, in turn, go on to share a newfound understanding with others.

The Discovery

My husband Paul and I would often wander into town on a Saturday and have a browse through the bookshops. Paul would always head for the management and motivation sections while I would usually have a look through the sales tables or the display stands with the new releases and books on special promotion, then we'd go for a coffee before making our way back home again.

This particular Saturday was no different. Paul made his way to his favourite section while I ambled towards a table piled high with books on special offer. On one corner of the table was a stack of books about how to train your recalcitrant dog not to chew your furniture, and next to that was a large tome extolling the delights of Chinese cooking for people with no time to cook. I was being invited to brush-up my French in five easy stages and advice on making the best of my somewhat middle-aged looks was jockeying for position with guidance on successfully completing a new, quick and easy ten-point detox plan. Sitting proudly in the centre was a huge pile

of autobiographies by someone with an unpronounceable name whom, clearly, no-one wanted to read about. Then, tucked away, partially obscured by our erstwhile luminary, I spotted a medium-sized paperback book sporting a black, white and red cover which announced 'The Gift of Dyslexia'.

I was intrigued as to how dyslexia could be described as a *gift* and picked up the book, almost as a reflex action. I knew there had been studies linking dyslexia with young people with behavioural problems, and I also knew there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that dyslexia is present in a significant proportion of the prison population. I had always believed dyslexia to be a learning disability found particularly amongst people with low IQ and had never really given it a lot of thought beyond these scant few details.

On impulse, I began to read the book. This was most unusual because of my discomfort in reading in a public place, albeit to myself. It was as if the book was willing me to read it. The pages were drawing me to them, beginning with a simple list of the *abilities* that dyslexics share. I saw *highly intuitive* and *perceptive* and I thought, yes, I can identify with that. Being able to think using all the senses. Thinking in pictures ... doesn't everyone? Vivid imagination. All these things, the book told me, add up to non-verbal thought. The opposite is linear thought,

which is the way language is structured and the way we learn, using sequences and lists. Some pages whispered to me, some shouted at me. They all said something that struck a chord for me.

I stopped reading and looked up. All around me, people were going about their business oblivious of the miracle that was unfolding there, before them, in the middle of that bookshop. Slowly, I raised the book and resumed my reading. My mind flashed a picture of an Alice in Wonderland room with doors lining the walls. The doors opened as I looked at them and bright lights shone from the rooms behind. I relaxed my shoulders as a wave of euphoria washed over me. With a huge sense of relief and a beaming smile, I realised I'm not lazy, I'm not dim or stupid ... I'm *dyslexic*!

I was 46 and I felt the weight of the world lifting from my shoulders. The final piece of life's jigsaw puzzle had gently fallen into place. I no longer had to search for excuses because I had an *explanation*. I'd had no idea that my *little problem* had a name. Not only was I not stupid, I was a *genius* for getting this far, unknowingly developing complex and effective coping strategies that had allowed me to function in a world that people without dyslexia take in their stride. I had positively thrived, against all the odds. As I stood in the middle of the bookshop with all the world going about its business, I realised there's

nothing wrong with my brain; it's just wired differently so that information is processed in a different way. All these years I've had to *reprocess* life's information, turning it into a form that I can understand.

I stood, motionless, amid a sea of activity. I breathed deeply and tears welled up in my eyes as my husband ambled towards me with an armful of books on his way to the checkout. Speechless, I simply put *my* book on the top of the pile and smiled at his puzzled expression. Explanations could wait. I was enjoying the precious moment.

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