

HOW TONY LEARNED TO READ

Growing up Dyslexic



TONY FISHEL *and* JUDY FISHEL

How Tony Learned to Read

Growing up Dyslexic



My name is Tony. When I graduated from preschool, all the kids knew the alphabet but me.

When I was 8 years old and still couldn't read or write, my mother took me to a neurologist. After many tests, he said, "Tony, "You are severely dyslexic. You might never learn to read or write."

Growing Up Dyslexic

Mom and I wrote this book to tell you how it feels to be the only kid in my class who couldn't read.

From first grade to grad school. I needed her help. I worked hard and I never gave up.



High school graduation

Finally, I taught myself to read. This is my story. I hope it will be helpful for you and others who are growing up dyslexic or who have children with dyslexia.

This book is dedicated to

Bob, Shanna, Thamora, Oren, Damian,
Aiden, Virginia, Mrs. Levesque.

To students with dyslexia and to
families everywhere who are trying to
understand how to help their dyslexic
children

Growing Up Dyslexic



Published in 2021
 by Flying Heron Books
 516 SW North River Point Drive, Stuart Florida 34994
 For Permissions-For information on bulk purchases
 Contact Judy Fishel jjfishel@gmail.com

Copyright © 2021 by Tony and Judy Fishel

All rights reserved. Thank you for complying with copyright law by not reproducing scanning or distributing the book or any part of it in any form without permission or except for brief excerpts used in published reviews and as permitted by sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act.

Cover picture is a stock photo Other pictures taken by Tony's parents

Library of Congress Control Number 2020915396

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data provided by Five Rainbows Cataloging Services

Names: Fishel, Tony, author. | Fishel, Judy, author.

Title: How Tony learned to read: growing up dyslexic/ by Tony Fishel and Judy Fishel.

Description: Stuart, FL: Flying Heron Books, 2021.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020915396(print)

ISBN 978-0-9906112-7-1(paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9906112-8-8(ebook)

ISBN 978-0-9906112-9-5(audiobook)

Subjects: LCSH: Dyslexics--Biography.

Dyslexic children. |Dyslexia. | Learning disabilities--Biography. |Mothers and sons. | Reading, Psychology of. | Reading. | BISAC: FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS / Learning Disabilities. | EDUCATION / Special Education / Learning Disabilities. | LANGUAGE ARTS & DISCIPLINES / Reading Skills.

Classification: LCC LB1050.5.F572020(print) | LCC LB1050.5(ebook) | DDC 371.91/44--dc23.

“It is the loneliness
and the feeling of
isolation that is the
worst part.”

Tony Fishel

Table of Contents

Tony Introduces Himself.....	1
Introduction	8

In the Beginning

Chapter 1.Tony’s First Five Years	13
---	----

Back to the United States

Chapter 2.Back to the United States.....	29
--	----

Elementary School

A Painful Experience

Chapter 3.First Grade	39
Chapter 4.First Grade and Second Grade.....	51
Chapter 5.Third Grade and More Testing.....	61
Chapter 6.Learning outside of class	73
Chapter 7.Tony and the Apple	89

Middle School

A Whole New World

Chapter 8.Middle School: A Whole New World.....	99
Chapter 9.Four Life-Changing Events	111
Chapter 10.High School is Different.....	135

High School
Stepping Out on His Own

Chapter 11. Junior Year at Landmark..... 151

College

Increasing Independence

Chapter 12. Tony Starts College 167

Chapter 13. Grad School is harder than College..... 179

Chapter 14. An Amazing Summer..... 185

Chapter 15. Reflections 25 years later 193

Author Bios 215

Pictures of Tony Growing Up 219

Introduction



This book is Tony's Story told from two points of view. Tony tells the story as he experienced it.

His mother, Judy, tells Tony's Story as she experienced it.

They share the stories from both points of view to help both parents and students with dyslexia understand what it feels like to be dyslexic.

- what it's like when everyone else in your class thinks you are stupid.

- how important it is to feel good about yourself.
- the importance of having parents and children try to understand each other.
- and how, when nothing seemed to help, one determined boy taught himself to read.

You might notice that we use the font, Comic Sans MS, for Tony's reflections. Of the commonly used fonts, this seems to be easiest for people with dyslexia to read. It is used in this paragraph.

We use slightly larger fonts than usual and leave more space between lines to make it easier to read.

Note to Readers

Occasionally we include comments or suggestions you might find helpful.

Students: the person with dyslexia.

Parents: includes parents, grandparents, teachers, caregivers, and anyone else who is trying to help the student.

When we first discussed this book, Tony and I both pictured a ‘feel-good’ book saying:

“Tony has dyslexia. He was told ‘You might never learn to read or write.’ He worked hard. Finally, he taught himself to read.”

As Tony began writing, his image of the book was not so cheerful. He remembered how it felt to be the only kid in his class who couldn’t read.

In this book, Tony shares the pain of growing up dyslexic, the pain he never shared with his parents when he was a child, the pain that has never gone away.

We hope our failures and our successes help you find your way. We hope it helps as you are growing up dyslexic.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Chapter 1.

Tony's First Five Years



Tony was born in Manila, January 30, 1972. His family included his parents, Bob and Judy Fishel, and his five-year old sister, Thamora.

We were living in the Philippines, working with a group that did demonstration community development projects. This part of the story is important for two reasons. Years later, when Tony was tested by the school system in Massachusetts, the “experts” tried very hard to explain why Tony was having “reading

Growing Up Dyslexic

problems.” Most of their explanations were based on these early experiences.

There were also experiences in these early years showing that Tony was unusually intelligent. These helped us ignore

the “experts” when they said things like “Boys learn more slowly than girls” or “Some boys just have trouble learning to read. Give him time.”

Tony was born nearly one month late. The doctor, of course, explained that I hadn’t counted right but Tony was big at 8½ pounds. Years later, the “experts” wondered if his late birth caused his reading problems.

Because Bob and I were both working, a wonderful Filipino woman, Flora, lived with us and took care of Tony.

Flora spoke to him in Filipino, her assistant spoke Cebuano (from a Southern Island) and Tony's family spoke English. Tony constantly heard three languages.

Because he spent more time with Flora at that time, he understood more Filipino.

Thamora was already fairly fluent in Filipino and sometimes explained to Tony what their parents were saying.

We agreed with many other people that learning several languages when you are young is

Growing Up Dyslexic

helpful. The “experts,” however, decided this must have caused Tony’s reading problems.

Tony was walking at seven months. Soon he was running. Certainly, this didn’t cause reading problems.

I was an Assistant Principal at the International School. The elementary school had just hired their first special education teacher. She told me about dyslexia and asked me to be alert to students with certain problems.

Later on, this helped me recognize and understand dyslexia when Tony began showing some of these problems.

When Tony was two-and-a-half years old, we moved to the Marshall Islands. These islands are

in the Pacific Ocean half-way between Hawaii and Guam. They cover a million square miles of ocean but there are only seventy square miles of land spread over the 29 atolls. Our atoll was Majuro.

Tony

My first memories are from the time we lived in the Marshall Islands. With my blond hair, I looked a little different from the Marshallese boys but I was treated the same. I don't remember feeling that much different.

I spent my time walking barefoot on the reefs, exploring tide pools and catching fish with my bare hands just like every-one else

Growing Up Dyslexic

my age. I also learned to climb at least halfway up a coconut palm.

One of my most vivid memories of Tony was when he was four years old. He counted to 14 but then he counted 14, 14, 14, 20. His counting skills were not great, but his math concepts were amazing.

One morning when I went to wake him up, Tony asked “Mommy, how much is 100 plus 100?”

I was astonished. I didn’t think Tony knew what a hundred was.

I asked if he’d been dreaming about numbers. Tony was insistent. “Yes,” I said. “100 plus 100 is 200.

Tony continued “Does this mean 200 plus 200 is 400?” We never learned how he had known about addition.

Later, Tony asked a common question, “What is the biggest number?” We explained that there wasn’t a “biggest number.” If you said one billion, someone could say one billion and one. We told him that numbers were infinite; they went on and on forever.

Most kids stop here, deciding this is more than they want to know, but Tony kept thinking. He knew there was no way to count every hair on your head or every drop of water in the ocean but he understood that they still were not infinite.

Growing Up Dyslexic

One of our projects was starting a preschool. Tony was 4 years old when he went to the first Marshallese preschool. One day Tony came home all excited. “Today, we learned the last letter of the alphabet.”

“That’s great,” I said. “What was the letter?” Tony had no idea. He thought it had something to do with a Zebra.

They taught the children all the letters of the alphabet, but Tony didn’t know any of them. Now, remembering the special ed teacher in the Philippines, I wondered if Tony might be dyslexic.

Parents: This should have been a clear sign that Tony might be dyslexic. I should have begun then, helping him learn the letters of the

alphabet. I assumed he would learn them in Kindergarten. I was wrong.

What I should have done was buy or make Alphabet books. Asked what each letter looks like. Teach your child that letters have names. Learn the names and sounds of these letters. Make this fun not work.

Read to your children. Read their favorite books over and over. You want them to enjoy books and look forward to learning how to read.

I have a clear memory where, one day, I picked up a coconut crab. I was with other kids when we found near the preschool. I'd learned from neighborhood boys to grab and hold large crabs but I had never

seen a coconut crab before This crab didn't seem dangerous.

With each of the big snapping claws firmly held in my hands, I proudly brought it over to some of the teachers.

Instead of being impressed, they freaked out. They were concerned that I would get my fingers snapped off. I had no idea that a crab could be so dangerous.

The first dream Tony remembers is about a place we went swimming. Dredged sand formed a pile 20-30 feet high. we laughed and called it Sand Mountain, the highest point in the Marshall Islands. The water was shallow and calm. It was a nice place for children to play.

I remember the ocean, the sand, and isolation. I liked being at the beach but I was afraid because I couldn't swim and, for some reason, I was afraid of the large pile of sand. I was also afraid of the older children.

The first dream I remember was one I had when we lived in the Marshalls. I dreamt of being on a small homemade raft out at sea.

I was in the trough between the waves and they were big, so big that I could not see Majuro.

I felt afraid but I knew that, as the wave passed, the raft and I would be buoyed up and, from the crest, I would see Majuro.

Growing Up Dyslexic

But, as I rose to the top of the wave, all I could see were more waves in every direction.

I'm not sure if I passed out or how I got there but the next thing I remember was being on the giant sand dune on Majuro, the one that they made when they dredged out the channel for the big ships to be able to refuel.

I'm on that mountain of sand and I expect to see the island and our little group of houses but again, when I get to the top, it's not what I expect,

I am not just a short walk from home. I am on top of a sand dune in a desert. Before,

all I saw were waves. Now, all I could see were waves of sand.

It is strange that Tony was afraid of that beach. He and the other children of people on our staff never went there without me or another adult.

I was surprised when Tony wrote about his dream. I considered leaving it out. It had nothing to do with dyslexia but, as we continued working, Tony referred to that dream several times. To him, it was important.

Another of my strongest, most lasting memories was when my parents were away for a few days, leaving me with friends.

I missed them terribly. I thought it was my heart that hurt so bad. That made sense to me.

Then, for some reason, the roof of my mouth hurt. I remember thinking that this did not make any sense. For many years, when I was homesick, I felt that same pain in the roof of my mouth.

At first, I had no idea what Tony was talking about. Finally, I remembered taking a group of kids in fourth to sixth grade on a copra ship. The ship went from one atoll to another collecting copra (dried coconut) and trading for food. It gave us a look at the outer islands.

We were gone six to eight days. Thamora was with me on the boat. I have no memory of Bob being away but I wouldn't be surprised.

The families we worked with would take care of Tony just as we would care for their children if we were away.

I really had no idea this upset Tony so much. He might have said "I missed you Mommy," but I don't think he ever told us how terribly he missed me.

Growing Up Dyslexic

The first time I was diagnosed with dyslexia was in 1970, when I was 17 years old. I had been struggling with reading and writing since I was a child, but it wasn't until I went to college that I realized I had a learning disability. I was told that I had dyslexia, a condition that affects the way the brain processes written language. At the time, I was told that dyslexia was a "brain injury" caused by a lack of oxygen to the brain during birth. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life. I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

I was told that I would never be able to read or write properly, and that I would have to live with this condition for the rest of my life.

Chapter 2.

Back to the United States



We left the Marshall Islands when Tony was five. Their first stop was in Hawaii where, at the airport, Tony was introduced to escalators and the elevator. When the elevator door opened, Tony thought this was a hotel room. He'd heard of hotels but had never been in one.

When the elevator opened on another floor, Tony was amazed. "How'd you do that?" he asked, thinking his father had somehow changed the scenery.

Growing Up Dyslexic

The next stop was San Francisco. Here Tony saw his first tall buildings and he had trouble understanding the “people” he saw in store windows.

He continually said things like “There sure are big buildings on this island.”

It was hard to explain why this wasn’t an island and why he couldn’t find the ocean.

The third stop was in Chicago, the headquarters for the organization we worked with. Because adults would be in all-day meetings, the children all went to a summer camp only for children of families that worked with us.

For Tony, this was not a happy experience. He was one of the youngest kids. He was away from

his parents and, unlike the other children, he didn't know anyone there except his sister.

To say that it was not a happy experience might be a euphemism. I don't have any positive memories of that camp other than my sister. We were apart most of the day. At meals and sometimes at the waterfront, we would see and talk to each other.

I remember telling her how terrible it all was. I remember Thamora's sadness she had when she saw me with a real bad black eye. I had tripped and hit the bricks next to the fireplace in the cabin.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Looking back, that was the first time I remember Thamora caring about me and being there for me.

This was one of the most terrible experiences in my life. I felt profoundly anxious. The only person I trusted was my sister. She had a good time but I felt abandoned.

This was the first place I felt that other people were out to get me, that they were not to be trusted, that I was different. I even felt that some of the kids were evil.

I knew this would be hard for Tony at first. Thamora knew some of the girls and she made new friends quickly. When she realized how

upset Tony was, she tried to spend time with him and comfort him. If I had known this would be such a traumatic experience for Tony, I would certainly have tried to keep him home.

Did these difficult events, his fear of Sand Mountain, missing his mother when she was away, or being at camp cause Tony to have similar fears later?

Perhaps Tony began to connect new difficulties with past fears. However, it seems unlikely that his early fears could have caused his dyslexia or affected his reading in any way.

While Bob spent the year leading training schools in India, Korea, Jamaica, and Venezuela, the rest of the family spent the year in Davis, California.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Thamora was in sixth grade. It was her first experience in an American school.

Tony was in kindergarten. Both seemed happy. There were no clues that Tony might be dyslexic.

We took several trips to National Parks and once drove up into the mountains to see snow.

The main thing I remember about Davis was these two foster kids. I was afraid of them.

As I write this, I question how much of this was only in my head. My lens of insecurity can turn any normal healthy interaction into a twisted image.

This was a shock. At first, I didn't know what Tony was talking about. These were two little boys Tony's age or younger that lived in some sort of foster care facility.

I needed to use every chance I could to earn a little extra to help pay the bills. I got about \$20 a week for two hours with the two boys. I could take my children along. We did things like going to the Zoo or to a playground.

I'm sure I explained to my children why we were doing this. It was both to give the boys a chance to have some fun and to help us earn some extra money. Neither of my children objected then. I think Tony must have associated them with the boys in summer camp.

Growing Up Dyslexic

One of my memories that year was Tony using a microscope. We visited my parents before moving to California. When we left, I took an old microscope. I'd been given when I was young. I thought I'd use it or that Thamora might be interested.

But no, it became Tony's microscope. On his way home from kindergarten, he collected bits and pieces to look at. When possible, he found something to hold water and collected pond water.

I'd get home to find Tony at the kitchen table with his assorted samples on glass slides. He'd urge me to look at what he'd found. Tony was an amazing child. He was sure to do well in school.

Now I wonder why Tony remembered two boys but never mentioned the microscope.

I assumed Tony's kindergarten teacher would tell me if Tony hadn't learned his letters. I should have been sure.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Chapter 3.

First Grade



At the end of the year in California, we joined Bob in Guatemala to help with a workshop in a small village.

Then we went to Brockton, Massachusetts where Bob began work as the pastor of a small United Methodist Church. Thamora was in seventh grade. Tony was in first grade.

Tony seemed happy enough in first grade but it soon was obvious that he was reversing many of

Growing Up Dyslexic

his letters. This was accepted as normal in kindergarten but not in first grade. I tried helping him but had no success.

His teacher said we shouldn't worry, that he would outgrow this soon enough.

One of my favorite memories from that year was meeting Tony's first grade teacher. She told me this story.

She had asked the students to give examples of words starting with the c/k sound. Because they had practiced this before, most of the children repeated words they had learned in class: C is for cat, candy, cake, etc.

Tony's contribution was original. "C is for compost pile." The other children were sure he

was wrong. “That’s not a word.” “You made that up.”

I suspect they thought they were supposed to name only words they had heard in class. The teacher, however, thought it was a great answer.

She asked Tony if he would like to tell the class what a compost pile was. Tony explained why compost piles were helpful and then described how to build one.

His teacher assured us that Tony was reading very well and that “unlike the other children, Tony read with such expression.”

At the end of the year, Tony came home with a class picture. A few days later, he tore the

Growing Up Dyslexic

picture into little pieces left on the floor. We didn't really understand why.

My understanding was that I really could read but I knew it wasn't the way the other kids read. Somehow, they all knew a secret method that I never understood.

My system for reading was to listen carefully when the other kids read so I would understand the story. I might look at the first several letters or even the first letters of several words.

When I had an idea how the sentence started, I'd predict the rest of the sentence based on what I knew about the story and sometimes based on the pictures.

This wasn't fake reading. This was the way I read. When the teacher said I read well, I knew it was a good method even if I didn't know the secret method.

We knew Tony wasn't really reading. We sometimes said he could "read" just as well with the book upside down or on the wrong page. We did not realize that he still didn't know his letters.

What we should have done was have him tested right away. The earlier dyslexia is identified, the easier it is to help the child. If the school doesn't help, look for a pediatric neurologist.

That summer Tony tried reading familiar signs. He asked "What is N-K-B-O I was confused. No

Growing Up Dyslexic

signs I could see included those letters. Finally, I figured it out. The letters were MCDO. You might recognize it better as McDO.

Later, I tested Tony's ability to recognize other letters and was shocked. Sometimes he guessed right but most of the time he was wrong.

I handed him a copy of *Hop on Pop*, not realizing that this was one of the most difficult books to read for someone who is dyslexic. Tony guessed at some words but clearly, he could not read any of them.

I borrowed simple pre-primers from a kindergarten teacher. Tony and I spent several hours a day all summer working on letters, sounds, and simple reading.

I was a teacher. I'd even taken a class on teaching reading. I kept thinking I should be able to teach Tony to read. When he showed no improvement, I felt like I was the one who had failed, not Tony.

Just before school started, we talked to the principal. We wanted Tony tested for dyslexia and wanted him to repeat first grade. (We talked to Tony first and he agreed.)

Massachusetts had a reputation for being really good about helping kid with learning problems. We trusted those doing the tests. Tony took one test after another for about a week.

One test involved copying shapes, some quite difficult. There were also letters of the alphabet.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Tony did well with the shapes but had problems with the letters.

Another part of the testing involved an interview with the parents. This is where the “experts” asked about Tony’s early experiences and came to the conclusions that Tony’s reading problems must have been caused by learning several languages at the same time or because he was born late.

They insisted Tony was too young to test for dyslexia. Now we know that wasn’t true.

I only have a vague memory of those tests. I now understood I confused letters like b and d, and p and q. It was hard for me but it really didn’t seem like a big problem. I still

thought I was reading well enough even if I used a different method.

When my parents suggested that I repeat first grade, that was OK with me. I thought it might help me learn the secret.

Bob and I went to a meeting at Tony's school to learn the results of the testing. It certainly wasn't what we had expected.

They said that, even if our daughter had no problems learning to read, we should not expect our son to learn as quickly. Boys learn more slowly than girls. They also said he was a **slow learner.**

Tony was not a slow learner. But it was hard to disagree with "experts" who had just spent a

Growing Up Dyslexic

week testing our son. We hoped that, with a second year of first grade, Tony would catch up. We really should have gone to a neurologist.

We now understand it was not unusual for the “experts” working for the school department to avoid saying the child needed special help. They down-play the child’s problems so the schools would not be required to offer special services.

Remember this didn’t happen recently. It was over 40 years ago. Yet, even now, there are still teachers and others in the school system who are not aware of dyslexia. They don’t realize that children like Tony should be tested as early as possible.

In better school systems today, you might find well trained staff to help your student They will

also be able to suggest qualified neurologists and others trained to help students like yours.

We were still depending on the teachers to teach Tony to read but now I don't think his teachers had any idea how to do this.

Today parents can use a computer to search for programs that claim to help dyslexic students. There are many such programs. You might try several of these programs to see if any seem helpful for your child.

Chapter 4.

First Grade and Second Grade



After a month, Tony's teacher said she'd like him in math with second graders. This sounded good. Later we asked ourselves how we could have been so stupid? We should have asked about his reading.

A month went by before we found out second graders had math while first graders had reading. While his class did math, the teacher gave Tony reading worksheets.

Growing Up Dyslexic

We were furious but knew it was partly our fault. We should have talked to the teachers more often about Tony's reading.

The principal suggested we move Tony back to second grade. He could go to a reading specialist every day. We wished he had suggested it earlier.

After a few weeks we talked to the reading teacher. She explained she rarely had time with Tony because she had so many other students, all at the same time, all with different problems.

I don't remember caring if I was in first or second grade. I do remember feeling isolated. I never seemed to fit in. The other kids didn't tease me or bully me, but they

occasionally laughed at me like the time I asked someone how to spell "us." Sometimes I felt like everything I did was probably going to be wrong.

I never had friends that went to my school. I'm not sure why, maybe because they didn't want a friend who couldn't read. Maybe I just didn't know how to make friends.

I had friends from the neighborhood. My best friend was a boy in our church.

I remember having many fears. I was afraid of being abandoned and afraid of older children. I was especially afraid of teenagers I'd been told were out in the woods where I often played. I'd never seen them but I had

Growing Up Dyslexic

heard they were out there in the woods smoking pot.

I couldn't imagine how they could smoke a pot and that made it even more scary.

Tony began sleep-walking. He'd get up at night, go out the door, and start walking toward his school. This continued through seventh grade.

There were several hopeful signs that year. One student in Tony's class asked the teacher why it was hot in the summer and cold in winter.

The teacher said "It is hot in the summer because the earth is closer to the sun. In the winter we are farther away from the un." It sounds perfectly logical, doesn't it?

Tony raised his hand and said “It’s the other way around. We are closer to the sun in winter and farther away in summer.”

The teacher asked if he’d like to go to the library for an encyclopedia. He said no, he’d bring his own. How could he use the library encyclopedia? He couldn’t read.

He had learned this by watching science programs on TV. The temperature on the earth is related to the tilt of the earth, not the distance from the sun.

The next day, the teacher let Tony explain what he had learned, and even better, she thanked Tony for correcting her mistake.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Another great event took place in church. During the sermon, Tony grabbed my arm and whispered “Mom, did you know six times seven and seven times six were the same?” “Yes,” I said. “I know that. How did you know?”

Tony pointed to the church windows with six panes across and seven panes up. Six sevens and seven sixes made the same number. Tony was still exploring math.

Parents: Ask your child regularly about how school is going what’s easy, what’s hard, how they’re feeling, if they have any problems, and if you can help.

Never push them to try harder. They are already trying harder. Accept them. Encourage them. Love them just the way they are.

An article by Emily Hanford, says many schools use the worst method of teaching reading, the 3-cue system:

[www.ampreports.org/episode/2019/08/22/what's - wrong with how schools teach reading?](http://www.ampreports.org/episode/2019/08/22/what's-wrong-with-how-schools-teach-reading?)

Students look at pictures and guess what the word is. They ask if the word looks right and sounds right. This method is commonly used by poor readers.

Students cannot learn to read only by sounding out words. Try sounding out night, cough or thought.

Whole language focuses on learning to recognize the whole word. The best readers do

Growing Up Dyslexic

this but they still need strategies to use for words they haven't learned.

Children need phonics to sound out words they don't know. They need to understand the structure of our language. They need vocabulary to understand the meaning of words.

Finally, they need Visual Memory or word recognition so after they learn a word, they will know it when they see it again.

If I had known this forty years ago, I might have been able to help Tony learn to read. I had never heard of a dyslexia tutor or therapist.

If these wonderful people existed 40 years ago, no one told me about it. Now, search on your computer for "find a dyslexia tutor" and you'll

find a list of those in your area. Some even offer online programs

You want someone who works with dyslexic students the age of your child. If one method doesn't work, you can try others.

They often charge \$25-\$100 or more per hour. This is sometimes covered partially computer to learn about free programs or completely by insurance. Use your programs you can use yourself. I'd suggest starting as early as possible.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Chapter 5.

Third Grade and More Testing



Tony finished second grade, still not able to read or write. When he began third grade, we asked them to test him again.

After another week of testing, we went to get the results. We will never forget their conclusion. A man stood and said firmly.

“Tony’s only problem is a pushy mother.”

As I said later, “I was pushing them to help Tony. I’m not pushing my son. It wouldn’t help

Growing Up Dyslexic

to tell them they were wrong. Obviously, they had no plans to help Tony learn to read. When they left the room, one woman who stayed behind spoke to us. “Don’t you believe that nonsense,” she said. “What you need to do is take that boy of yours to a neurologist.

“Then, when you get a paper saying that your boy needs to be in a special class for dyslexic students, you take that paper to the school superintendent.

“The superintendent will say they have a program for students who have dyslexia but it’s full; He will put your boy on a waiting list. You tell him it’s against the law to put a child on a waiting list.

“The superintendent knows that but he will be surprised to find that you know. It might take a week or two but they will place your boy in a special class. It’s a small class with only seven or eight students and a teacher trained to help dyslexic students.

“If anyone can teach your boy how to read, she’s the one who can do it.”

That afternoon, I called a neurologist in Boston. The usual waiting time for an appointment was 2-3 months but they had just gotten a cancellation. Could I bring him the next morning? Of course, I could.

I sat silently in the back of the room until the testing was over. This was about forty years ago

Growing Up Dyslexic

so I don't remember very much but two tests stick in my memory.

The neurologist gave Tony a subtraction problem. It was something like $3602 - 824$. Tony looked at it carefully, closed his eyes, and answered. The neurologist was shocked. I was shocked. Tony was correct.

As far as I know, no one had taught Tony to do math in his head. Tony was then asked to show his work on the paper. He gave it a good try but, as usual, he confused left and right. He borrowed from the left one time and then from the right. He crossed out things and tried again. He knew the answer but could not get the answer on paper.

In one test, the neurologist had a book. On one side were perhaps six shapes, all different, each with a different pattern. On the other side was a single pattern.

Tony needed to find the one shape matching both the shape and the pattern. Each time the page was turned there was another similar problem.

Tony understood what he was to do right away. Quickly, he'd point to his answer. The neurologist suggested that Tony slow down. There wasn't any hurry. But Tony knew he could do this. He went faster and faster as if it was a game.

The neurologist asked Tony to explain why he chose a certain response. Tony had no problem

Growing Up Dyslexic

with this. I was pretty sure he got every single one correct.

Most people taking this test would have taken their time, double checking their responses. Tony never explained why he went so fast. Maybe he was just having fun. Maybe he wanted the neurologist to know that he wasn't dumb.

After two hours of interesting tests, the neurologist turned to Tony who was only eight years old and said very seriously,

“Tony, you are incredibly intelligent, not just in the top one percent but in the top half of one percent. You are also severely dyslexic. You might not ever learn to read or write.”

I sensed what Tony heard and asked a question. “You said Tony **might** never learn to read or write. Does this mean he still **might** learn to read and write?”

“Yes,” he said. “Some people who are severely dyslexic do learn to read and write but we can’t say what makes the difference between those who do and those who don’t. All I can say, Tony, is work hard and give it your best try.”

We left with Tony’s results and the neurologist’s recommendation. “Tony Fishel is extremely intelligent and severely dyslexic. He requires at least 50% of his day in a program for dyslexic students.”

Growing Up Dyslexic

We took copies of the neurologist's papers to the school superintendent. As predicted, he said he'd put Tony on the waiting list.

Bob told him that we understood it was illegal to put a child on a waiting list. Finally, the superintendent said he'd need a week or two to make arrangements, and sure enough, before long, Tony took the bus across town every day.

He spent half the day in a small class with about seven other children. For the rest of the day, Tony was back in his usual class.

Now, teachers who had said how well Tony read said "I was just beginning to think Tony had some sort of problem."

I remember going to Boston to see the neurologist but I don't remember much about the tests. Some of the tests were really easy for me. He told me to slow down and think about it. I kept going fast. I knew I could get them right.

The math problem was like being in school. I could do it mentally but couldn't do it on paper.

It was like reading. I couldn't do it like everyone else. I had to do it my way. I start with the answer, then try to do it on paper.

What I remember most was what the neurologist said at the end. He said I was

Growing Up Dyslexic

very intelligent (I knew that) but that I might never read or write.

I didn't think about the word, "might." I felt like it was hopeless. I would never learn to read.

The special class was okay. I tried really hard to read their way but I still learned very little.

Parents: Talk to your child about dyslexia about what it means about famous and successful people who have dyslexia (check the Internet) that having dyslexia does not mean you are stupid. It means you learn differently.

Students: Explain that you have dyslexia and you learn differently. When you have questions

or problems, talk to your parents. Tell them if you are feeling upset or unhappy. Be sure to tell them if they can help you in any way. They love you and they really want to help.

I think the first three years of school, especially without a proper diagnosis, was the most painful time in Tony's life.

Yes, knowing he might never read or write was hard, but once you have a name for it, you can talk about it, explain why you can't read, and maybe try new strategies.

When Tony started going to this class with a teacher using the highly recommended Orton Gillingham method, Tony and I both began feeling more hopeful.

Growing Up Dyslexic

We were lucky to live in a city with a program for dyslexic students. Even today, it might be hard to find a program like that.

You might find a specialist who works with kids several times a week or a list of specialists in your area you can hire. You might search your computer for programs to use at home. Whatever you do, don't give up. your child needs your help.

Chapter 6.

Learning outside of class



In fourth, fifth and sixth grades, Tony spent half of each day with the dyslexia reading specialist. Meeting other dyslexic students might have helped him realize he wasn't the only person with this problem.

They were also good years in other ways. Tony was in third grade when we bought a computer. The only thing we could do with it was play a game called Pong.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Their computer was the first one in the neighborhood. Kids came home from school with Tony just to see it. Showing other kids how to use the computer seemed to give Tony a little more selfconfidence.

It was even better the next year when his school bought the same kind of computer. None of the teachers knew how to use it. When teachers had a question or problem, they asked Tony to help them.

The teachers were afraid they'd break the computer if they hit the wrong key. Tony assured them that to break it, they'd need to hit it with a hammer.

The teachers also went to Tony when the computer stopped working as it often did. Tony

showed them how to turn the computer off and then turn it on again. That always solved the problem.

Explaining the computer to kids built his self image a little; showing teachers how to use a computer built his self-image a lot more. Every student in his class knew that teachers came to get advice from Tony.

When Tony was in fourth grade, I was working on a Master's degree in Biology. For a class in entomology, I was required to make an insect collection, all correctly labeled. I started this project during the summer and had great helpers. I bought extra butterfly nets.

Tony often invited a friend. I set up a folding chair where I sat with my killing bottle, pins,

and display boxes. The boys did nearly all the running and catching. They had fun and I had twice as many insects as were required for my class.

As we did this, Tony and I learned to identify the butterflies and sometimes we even recognized them from a moving car. I read books about research in the area and shared the most interesting stories with Tony.

When he started fourth grade Tony wanted to take the butterflies to show his teacher and the class. We first got the teacher's permission.

Tony showed up with several large display boxes filled with butterflies and other insects. Tony could identify all the butterflies and many of the others. He also shared some of the

research stories he'd learned. His teacher was impressed. She got permission for Tony to take his display to every class in the school.

When I returned to my school, I learned that the entomology class had been cancelled. Too few students had signed up. I didn't care. I had learned everything I wanted to know, and Tony and I had a wonderful time.

That year Tony joined Cub Scouts. He enjoyed the Cub Scout activities. These boys were not in his classes so they didn't know that Tony couldn't read. By the time he reached sixth grade, he was a Boy Scout.

One of the strongest memories of that year was going overnight camping with the Boy

Growing Up Dyslexic

Scouts for the very first time. I was excited and nervous at the same time.

I had felt this same way going to sleep overs with my friends. Many of those nights ended with me becoming too anxious. My mom or dad came to pick me up and take me home where I felt safe. As we set up our single person tents, I felt only freedom and exhilaration.

I had always wanted to go camping but our family never did that. I felt safe enough being surrounded by not only the other scouts of my troop but 50 other troops at the Jamboree we were attending.

Then, my nightmares came. I was running from something but not sure what. It was dark. The ground was cold and wet. Branches seemed to reach out and claw at me. I turned back to see what was chasing me and saw only trees and their claws and darkness.

I tripped and felt the Earth and the leaves and dampness with such clarity that I realized I wasn't dreaming.

I could taste blood on my fat lip, and I was breathing heavily. I stood up, looked for the monster, and saw a fire in the distance.

I looked down and saw that I was in my "tighty whities," sleep walking alone in the woods in the middle of the night.

I was no longer on that island in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean, but I was still alone. That first, long ago dream, felt like a prophecy.

The feelings of isolation and loneliness that I first felt in the Marshalls had not gone away.

While we couldn't help Tony learn to read, we tried very hard to make Tony feel better about himself and to help him succeed in other areas.

One summer, Tony decided to play Little League baseball. He wasn't very good at it and wasn't interested enough to practice.

In fifth and sixth grade, he played on a basketball team. While he was having fun, Tony

didn't have the skills he needed and had no desire to spend hours throwing a basketball through a hoop.

For other children, sports might be an area where they could excel but not for Tony.

Parents and students: It's important for each child to have activities they love doing, something they are good at. If a child loves art or music, model planes, dancing or sports, parents should encourage them.

Students: help your parents understand what things you'd love to try doing. They won't know if you don't tell them.

It would have been nice if I had been good at sports but I wasn't. Playing baseball and

basketball were things I wasn't good at and never would be.

In fifth and sixth grade, I played on a basketball team. I especially remember one of the boys on my basketball team. He was twice my size and seemed to have been playing for years. He could throw the ball at the basket and it nearly always went in.

He made more points in one game than all the rest of the team together.

Tony's friend from church taught Tony to play Dungeons and Dragons. We gradually bought him all the books. It did seem strange to buy books when Tony couldn't read.

Eventually, Tony wrote his own Dungeon and Dragons games. He dictated and I wrote them down. He then taught other kids to play.

I enjoyed playing Dungeons and Dragons partly because it was something I really could do and I could do it well. I also hoped playing these games would help me learn to read.

When I was in school, I never felt like what I was trying to read was terribly important. For Dungeons and Dragons, I needed to learn all about the characters to play well.

No one was helping me by explaining the answer first. I understood the kind of information I needed and I learned how to find it.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Tony also enjoyed building model airplanes. He showed them to one of his teachers who happened to have model planes he never got around to building. He shared some with Tony.

Then we saw a competition of a Military Miniature group. The men took small metal figures and spent hours painting them and creating historical backgrounds.

Tony talked to the men and was invited to a meeting. The men all were over 60. Many had figures they never used and shared them with Tony. While they did military figures, Tony also painted fantasy figures. I drove Tony to these meetings and joined them, the only woman in the group, and I began painting figures too.

Chapter 7.

Tony and the Apple



When Tony was in fifth grade, I was teaching seventh grade science. Tony often asked what I'd taught my students that day. One day my lesson had an ant on the hat of a man on a moving train.

If the train is going 60 miles per hour north, and the man on the train is walking 4 miles per hour south, how fast is the man going? Then, if an ant on the man's hat is going 1 mile per hour north, how fast is the ant going?

Growing Up Dyslexic

Students were supposed to take the train's speed, 60 miles per hour north and subtract the man's speed in the opposite direction so the man was going 56 miles per hour north. In the question with the ant going 1 mile an hour north, the same direction the train was moving, the ant was going 57 miles per hour north.

I then explained that the book left out one important part. Speed questions should be "in relation to what?"

The man was actually walking 4 miles per hour south in relation to the train, but 56 miles per hour north in relation to the ground. Little did I know how fascinating this concept would be for Tony.

How Fast is an Apple?

Several weeks later, I returned from work to find Tony sitting at the kitchen table, staring at an apple. “Mom,” he said, “How fast is an apple?”

“That apple on the table?” I asked. “It doesn’t look to me like it’s moving at all.”

“Come on, Mom. Think about it,” Tony insisted. “How fast is it moving?”

I pondered this problem for several minutes and finally said, “I guess the apple is going as fast as the earth is going.”

“Good,” he said. “Now we need to think about how fast the earth is moving. But you know, the earth moves different ways.

Growing Up Dyslexic

“It’s moving around its own axis. It’s also moving around the sun. The sun moves in relation to the solar system and the solar system moves around the galaxy and probably even more ways.”

We got an encyclopedia and began with the easy part. The earth is about 25,000 miles around at the equator. The earth turns around once on its axis in one day, so the apple moves about 25,000 miles a day at the equator. With 24 hours in a day, we divide 25,000 by 24. The apple moves about 1,000 miles per hour.

Over the next several months, Tony added to his observations. The first were two fairly obvious. First, the distance around the earth is greatest at the equator and very tiny at the poles. This

means the measurement of the apple's speed would need to include the distance from the equator.

His second observation was that climbing a mountain made your circumference larger. Digging a deep hole and going down into the earth, your circumference would be less. We need to know the apple's distance from the equator and its distance above or below sea level.

The observation that surprised me most was when Tony came home from school one day all excited. "Guess what Mom? Did you know that the apple moves faster at night than it does during the day?" Try to figure that out.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I had no idea. I did wonder what he should have been doing in school when he was thinking about the apple.

“At night,” Tony explained, “the place where you are on earth is going the same direction as the movement of the earth around the sun. You put the two speeds together so the earth is going faster.

During the day, the movement of the earth’s rotation is opposite to the movement of the earth around the sun. With the combined movements, the earth is going more slowly in relation to the sun. This means that to calculate the speed of the apple, we need to know what time it is.” (If you don’t understand this, don’t worry. It really is confusing.)

The last insight about the speed of his apple came when Tony was in high school. “Did you know,” he asked me, when he got home from school, “that the speed of the apple depends on the day of the year?” Again, I had no clue.

“You know how the earth goes around the sun? It doesn’t move in a circle; it’s an elliptical orbit.” I nodded.

“When the earth is closer to the sun it goes faster because of the sun’s gravity. When it’s farther away from the sun, the earth moves more slowly. So, if you want a formula for the speed of the apple, it needs to include the day of the year.”

Thinking about the apple was exciting. I was asking a question I’d never heard asked and

it pushed me to think creatively as well as using my knowledge about the solar system to answer it by myself.

That was fun and it was something I really could do well. Talking to my parents about it was also fun because I could understand something they hadn't ever thought about.

Thinking about the movement of the apple was fun. I enjoyed listening to his amazing discoveries. It was obvious that Tony was extremely intelligent. He often asked wonderful questions but this was his most memorable question.

Tony's friend, David, had gone to a summer program the summer before. College Academy

was a program for gifted kids in grades 4-8. Tony decided he wanted to go. Judy called to ask if her son who was very bright but dyslexic could attend their program.

They said certainly, he could. He would not need to read in these classes.

Just being accepted in a program for gifted students seemed to improve Tony's self-confidence. He had a great time. He took classes like Dungeons and Dragons, Rocketry, and a class in Small Engine Repair.

In the Small Engine Repair class, students learned to take apart and put together lawn mower engines. Tony managed to take them apart and put them together twice while other students did it once.

Growing Up Dyslexic

His teacher was so delighted with his skills that he built a little trophy and gave it to Tony at the end of the program. Tony returned to College Academy every year through eighth grade.

I loved College Academy. It wasn't like school. No one cared if I could read. I was good at doing the various activities and enjoyed being in classes with other smart kids. I really fit in. I wished school was like this.

Now, at the end of sixth grade, we had the all-important question. After 3½ years in the special reading class for children with dyslexia, did Tony learn to read?

By this time, we had learned to check Tony's improvement for ourselves. His teacher said Tony was now reading at a second-grade level.

Tony seemed to read fairly well from the second-grade book they used in his class, but, with another second-grade book, Tony was lost.

We tried a first-grade book. He couldn't read that either. Tony thought he was reading, not faking it, but neither Tony or his teacher realized it was still mostly memory and guessing.

My mother asked me if I remember working hard in the special class or if I had given up trying. I think it was both. I tried really hard in the beginning but, when nothing helped, I just gave up.

My mother asked another question. She wanted to know how I felt about myself in elementary school if I thought I was stupid or if I felt good about myself.

To begin with, I always knew I was really smart. It wasn't just the neurologist telling me this. My parents told me this many, many times.

But it didn't make sense. If I was so smart, why couldn't I read? I also remember thinking, "Why me? Why can't I fit in?"

Parents: Notice that in spite of his problems, Tony firmly believed that he was really smart. This is very important.

Children who believe they are stupid have no reason to keep trying. Tell them over and over how smart they are.

Tony seemed to have learned the letters of the alphabet and most letter sounds but he still could not read and he could not write well enough for anyone to read.

If the best trained teacher in Brockton couldn't teach him to read, how would he ever learn?

This meant Tony would begin middle school, still completely unable to read or write.

Chapter 8.

Middle School: A Whole New World



Soon after Tony finished sixth grade, we moved to Rhode Island. We asked which schools had the best programs for dyslexic students. Two school systems were recommended. We chose Barrington. This opened up a whole new world for Tony.

Growing Up Dyslexic

We asked Tony if he thought it would be best to repeat sixth grade or go straight to Middle School. He chose Middle School.

Now we know another year of elementary school would have been a terrible choice. In Middle School, reading was less of an issue. He could really be a success.

We moved to Rhode Island early in the summer and read in the newspaper that they had a Pop Warner Football Team for students Tony's age. He decided to try it, mainly to meet some of the boys in his school. Tony looked great in his uniform but spent most games sitting on the bench.

In the Middle School, Tony was placed in all regular classes. He also had a special education

teacher, Mrs. Levesque, who helped him when needed.

All of his teachers knew Tony was dyslexic. They knew he couldn't read or write. When he had a test or work sheet, he'd leave class with the test and hurry down the hall to the special ed room.

Mrs. Levesque stopped what she was doing and read the questions. Tony told her the answers and she would write them down. He took his paper back to the class before most of the students had finished.

Middle school was a happy time. At first it was hard to adjust to being in a new house, a new neighborhood, and

Growing Up Dyslexic

a new school where I didn't know anyone. I missed my old friends.

The best thing was that, with help from Mrs. Levesque and my mother, I could do well in all my classes.

Once school started, Tony joined a Boy Scout troop. Troop 2 had a great reputation. They were the boys who all intended to work hard and become Eagle Scouts. At Boy Scout camp, they were the boys who were up early, who marched a mile, and then jumped into the cold lake before the other troops were awake,

In the Memorial Day parades, the other scout troops walked; these scouts marched. In fact, they marched quickstep.

Tony earned badge after badge. He was proud to be in Troop 2. They went camping, sleeping in tents in the coldest part of the winter. Like the others, he wanted to show he could do things that were hard.

I loved being in Boy Scouts. My inability to read was not a problem there. The discipline in our troop was tough. It was tough for all of us. The discipline in our troop was tough. It was tough for all of us.

When Tony came home after school, I helped him with his homework. I never did his homework for him. Like his special ed teacher, I would read the lesson or his worksheets. Tony told me the answers, and I'd write them down.

Growing Up Dyslexic

At the end of the first grading period, we were surprised to read that he needed to do his homework. I knew Tony had done all the work. Why weren't the teachers getting it?

There was a simple answer. The homework was lost in Tony's backpack. When the teachers asked for homework, Tony felt around in his backpack, but if he couldn't find it, he forgot about it.

We finally used a homework folder. One pocket was for homework he needed to do. The other pocket was for completed homework.

I had read that it was best for parents not to try teaching their own child because they so often would end up nagging the child to do their homework.

Our solution was to put Tony in charge. When he came home from school, I would ask these questions.

First, what do you have for homework?

Second, how long will it take to finish?

Third, how long will you want my help?

Fourth, will you start now or after dinner?

Finally, let me know when you need help.

I missed my old friends. But now, with the help from Mrs. Levesque and my mother, I did well in all my classes. Best of all I had several friends in my classes and two friends in my neighborhood. I was still shy and not

Growing Up Dyslexic

good at making friends but I felt like I fit in.

Sure, I had some problems. There were a few bullies in my neighborhood. I had never dealt with bullies before, but there was a tough kid in the neighborhood who threatened to beat up a smaller and younger boy.

I had never been in a fight before but I defended the younger kid and won. The bully hurried home to complain to his father who happened to be a policeman.

His dad called my father, threatening to take us to court and sue us if I beat up his son again.

I'd already told my father what happened. The bully's dad yelled that he would wear his police uniform to court. He said everyone would believe him.

My father calmly responded, "Please, go ahead and wear your uniform and I will wear mine, my clerical robes." Yes, my Dad was a preacher. Then, he nonchalantly hung up the phone.

Seeing my father stand up for me like that was, and still is, one of my best memories. I sometimes take for granted how hard and how much my mother, my father, and my sister supported me and stood up and fought for me.

Growing Up Dyslexic

There was also a bully in the Middle School who tripped students going up or down stairs. I got mad one day when he tripped someone and I and punched him.

Both of us were suspended for fighting. The principal told my parents not to punish me. He said they should be proud of me. The other kid was a trouble maker. Many students complained but the teachers never caught him tripping kids. The principal said, "It's about time somebody did something about it."

Tony started seventh grade without being able to read or write but his self-confidence improved. Before, he walked around hunched

over, not saying much, as if he wanted to be invisible. Now Tony was standing tall, smiling, and making friends in his classes for the first time.

Parents and Students:

We helped Tony organize his time. We did not tell him what to do and when to do it. We asked questions that helped him plan his own time. We worked hard to improve Tony's self-confidence.

A student who expects to fail probably will fail. When you feel good about yourself, you are usually more successful.

Chapter 9.

Four Life-Changing Events



The most astonishing event in seventh grade was Tony's trip to Yale where his sister was a student. Thamora gave Tony a Yale sweatshirt for Christmas. Later she invited him to spend a weekend with her to see what it was like in college.

To get there, he would have to take the train. Tony had never been on a train. He would need to recognize his stop, so his parents wrote "New Haven" on an index card. He assured us he

would recognize it when he heard it announced or when he saw a sign.

When he got home, he told his parents what happened on his trip to New Haven.

I wore my Yale Sweatshirt on the train. Someone asked if I was a Yale Student. I told them, "Yes. I'm doing graduate work at Yale."

The people who were listening said "You look awfully young to be a graduate student."

"I know," I said. "I started college when I was twelve." (Actually, I was twelve then but I'd just heard about students starting college when they were twelve.)

"What are you studying?" they asked. "I'm doing research in Particle Physics," I told them. Then I explained Particle Physics and described my research.

My parents first question was "Tony, HOW did you do that?"

I said "You remember. It was on a Nova program a couple months ago." They vaguely remembered the program but had forgotten all the details. Maybe they didn't find it as exciting as I did.

"Did they believe you?" Dad asked. "I don't know," I said. "Maybe not at the beginning, but by at the end they might have."

Growing Up Dyslexic

Tony didn't always have an amazing memory. He could forget his homework assignments. He could forget people's names. He could forget to tell us about a phone call that we should return. But when it was related to science, his memory was amazing.

I hadn't planned to do this and I didn't really expect them to believe me but when they asked if I was a Yale Student, I thought it would be fun to say I was.

Then, when I started, I kept going, telling them the most outrageous things that came to mind. They probably learned something about particle physics. That part was true.

I had great fun on the train but never tried to do that again. The best part was shocking my parents when I got home. Being at Yale was also great. I met a lot of Thamora's friends and started to think about going to college.

Each year the Middle School had a Science Fair. Participation was optional. Tony compared the effects of acid rain on Narragansett Bay (salt water) and the Palmer River (mostly fresh water.)

Tony's project won an award at his school and he went on to the State Science Fair. At the state fair, he won a second-place ribbon in his category.

More important was the opportunity to check out all the other projects and to see what kind of projects won the big awards. Tony began thinking about what he might do the next year to get a first-place ribbon.

In eighth grade, Tony was eager to do a Science Fair project that was better than before. He and I did some serious brainstorming and decided to use planaria.

If you cut these small flatworms in half, each half forms a complete flatworm. You could slice the head and grow a flatworm with two or more heads.

Tony's research question was "Do planaria regenerate differently in water mixed with different substances?" He decided to add a little

salt, vinegar, ammonia and other substances to the water.

To his dismay, on his first efforts, the planaria all died. We ordered more planaria and tried again. They all died again.

This time Tony made an interesting discovery. Some planaria died by curling up tightly; others died in a relaxed position. This became his new question. “Why do planaria die one way in some chemicals and die differently in others?”

Tony took a first-place ribbon in his category and won awards for projects related to medicine, and the best use of pictures.

I still call his project “How many ways can an eighth-grade boy kill planaria?”

Science Fair projects were fun but they were a lot of work. I knew I could do them well and, if I was going to teach physics, I needed experience doing experiments.

I also liked thinking about good questions and trying to discover the answers. Again, I could not have done it without my mom's help.

I let Tony do the hard work and was sometimes surprised at his conclusions. With library research, I still had to find the important information and read it to Tony.

When we did displays for Science Fairs, we planned the layout together but I did the writing. You couldn't read his writing.

Tony was on his own, of course, when it came to explaining his work to the judges. He had no problems. This was one more activity that helped Tony feel good about himself.

The next major event occurred when Tony was in seventh grade, Tony's school had a teacher workshop day. My school was in the next county; we had school as usual.

Tony announced that he was to going to school with me and I thought it was a great idea.

Tony's next announcement was that he would teach my classes. Notice that he didn't ask if he could do this. He knew I'd agree.

I expected him to teach something related to science, that he might tell them about his apple.

Growing Up Dyslexic

“No,” Tony said firmly. “I will teach them about dyslexia.”

I was teaching seventh grade science so Tony would be teaching students his own age. I couldn't imagine what he could tell my students that would fill the one-hour classes. She suggested that Tony work on his lesson plan.

In each class, I introduced Tony and he explained what he planned to tell them. He then he was dyslexic and that they could all read and write better than he could.

He said being dyslexic or having other learning differences did not mean that you were stupid. You could be dyslexic and still be very intelligent. His main lesson was that people learn differently.

It also meant they needed to work harder. He told them he planned to go to college. It wouldn't be easy but, if he worked very hard, he was pretty sure he could do it.

The response was amazing. These students hurried out to find brothers, sisters, or friends with learning problems, telling them about Tony and urging them to get one of their teachers to give them permission to hear Tony.

Each period of the day, we had students appear with notes from their teachers. Every seat was soon filled and students stood or sat around the sides of the class room. The number of students increased as the day went on. Some even came to hear him second time.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Tony's talk was an immense success. We decided Tony would come teach my classes one day every year and we soon began inviting special education teachers to bring their students.

These experiences built up his self-image and self-confidence. This teaching experience also helped him later as a teacher.

I wasn't sure I could do this, but I felt good at the front of the class telling them about dyslexia. I know some people don't like public speaking, but it was easy for me.

My mother had talked to me about her classes and she made it clear that I was not

the only one struggling to learn, be it reading, math or science.

I did not feel so different from her students. I know lots of kids found school to be a struggle. It wasn't just me.

I explained that they might have learning problems like I did, that they were not alone, and that they could still be a success if they worked hard.

I was surprised to see so many kids who were not in my mother's class come to hear me that first time.

I don't know if they came to learn about dyslexia or they if they wanted to see a

seventh grader teaching a class. Either way, it made me feel really good. I looked forward to doing this every year.

When I was teaching in the high school, Tony spoke to my high school class. When I was teaching physics, he spoke to them. Every time he spoke, we had students I didn't know who came to hear Tony.

My students told their parents and their brothers and sisters. Each year my new students would ask, "When is Tony coming?"

I will never forget meeting Billy's mother. She did not say, "You are Billy's Science teacher."

She said “Oh you’re Tony’s mother. Billy is still talking about Tony. He says if Tony can go to college, he could do that too.”

The fourth life changing event, came when Mrs. Levesque, Tony’s special ed teacher, told us that Tony would be eligible to get Books on Tape from the Library for the Blind later called the Library for the Blind and Dyslexic.

He could get all of his textbooks on tape and also get any other books he wanted to read. If it wasn’t already on tape, someone would tape it for him. We couldn’t imagine why no one had told us earlier.

Tony tried using taped textbooks but decided he preferred having me read the textbooks. He liked it when I paused to see if he

Growing Up Dyslexic

understood something or when I related the new information to something he'd already learned. He also liked to ask questions as I read to him. Being able to read any book he wanted was amazing.

His Dungeons and Dragons teacher at College Academy told him he'd like reading *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* by Tolkien.

The first book on tape he ordered was *The Lord of the Rings*. Then, Tony wanted a copy of the book. He didn't want a library book; he wanted to own the book.

Every afternoon after school Tony put on his headphones, turned on the tape player, and sat with his book in his hand, ready to listen to *The Lord of the Rings*.

No one told him to follow along with his book, but what a difference it made! When he finished the book, he started over again, still following as he read. He read *The Lord of the Rings* again and again. He read the book four or five times. Eventually, he was reading aloud along with the tape.

I suspect he had pretty much memorized the book and finally, he was able to read the book without the tape.

Then, he began reading *The Hobbit*. Again, he read it at least four times. Tony did not do this so he would learn to read. Even when he finished, he didn't realize that he had learned to read. He assumed he had just memorized the words.

Growing Up Dyslexic

We had no idea he was learning to read. We should have understood that memorizing words really is another way of learning to read. Tony later discovered this was called the whole language approach.

We were all surprised, when the “end of the year test scores at school were released. Tony was now reading at a third-grade level. Tony had done what his reading teachers couldn’t do but he didn’t know that he had done it. He taught himself to read.

I don't remember anyone suggesting that I follow along in the book. I don't think I expected I could learn to read this way. It just seemed important to follow along in the book.

I really wanted to read that book. It wasn't something I had to read for class. I wanted to know what was inside the book. It made sense that seeing words along with hearing words would help me understand the book.

When I went to bed, I worried about monsters and things coming to get me. Before moving to Barrington, I tried to sneak into my parents' bed or bed room to fall asleep.

One night, before my father sent me back to my room, I heard something amazing. Someone was reading *The Return of the King* on the radio.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I loved it when my parents or teachers read to me. I found the stories in books fascinating but inaccessible unless they were read to me.

Now, I was excited to get books on tape. I don't think I ever dreamed I could learn to read this way.

I wanted to know the rest of the story. I wanted to know what was inside that book.

Seeing words along with hearing them would help me remember what the words looked like.

Sounding words out never seemed to work. Remembering words and what they sound like

usually worked faster and eventually became my default method instead of the phonics.

I knew many people with dyslexia learn best using phonics like with the Orton-Gillingham program.

For some reason, I seemed to learn best with the whole language approach, memorizing the words instead of sounding them out.

While it was exciting to be able to read, reading at a third-grade level wasn't good enough for reading books in school.

I still needed help from Mrs. Levesque and, at home, I still needed my mother to help with my homework but I went from not being

Growing Up Dyslexic

able to read to reading at a. third- grade level.

It felt good, incredibly good. I felt there really was hope.

Could other students learn this way? I don't think it would work if the student is only half-way interested. I was really totally concentrating as I read, I tried to absorb every word.

I would suggest starting with easier books. The Lord of the Rings is hard. If Tony could teach himself to read this way, you might also to be able to do it too.

Tony read some simple books, but never more than once. Perhaps he hadn't found one he was so determined to read.

Tony was still reading at a third-grade level in high school, in college, and when he finished his Master's degree.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Chapter 10.

High School is Different



Tony talked to each of his teachers at the beginning of school. He explained that he was dyslexic and that his IEP (Individual Educational Plan) required help with reading and writing.

His Spanish teacher put tests on a tape. Tony used two tape recorders, one to listen to questions and one to record his answers. When a classmate complained that Tony didn't lose points for spelling errors, the teacher said,

Growing Up Dyslexic

“That’s true, and you don’t lose points for poor pronunciation.”

In high school, note-taking is important. Tony tried taking notes but he couldn’t read what he had written. Neither could I. Tony asked for permission to tape record his classes. Only his biology teacher objected but Tony recorded her anyway, keeping his tape recorder in his backpack.

It worked well enough until the day he reached into his backpack and hit play instead of record. Everyone heard the teacher’s voice but she wasn’t speaking.

After that, Tony found girls who took good notes and asked them to make copies for him. I

read their notes and we decided which information he might be tested on.

Tony used notes on index cards to prepare for tests. In some classes, he decided he didn't need notes. He could listen carefully and remember.

The high school special education program was not like the program in the middle school. Tony wasn't even sure the teachers knew who he was. Instead of offering help with tests, they focused on helping kids with their homework. Tony preferred the help he got at home. He decided this was a waste of his time so he signed himself out of the program and then told us. We agreed. This was his decision to make.

He made another wise decision. He had joined the wrestling team. They practiced several hours

Growing Up Dyslexic

every day and Tony came home feeling too tired to do homework.

He discovered that none of his teammates were taking classes as difficult as his. They didn't need time for homework. He explained to the coach that he needed time to keep up with his schoolwork and he dropped the team. We were surprised but proud of Tony's decision.

One of Tony's goals was to make passing grades just like other students WITHOUT needing extra help but that still wasn't realistic.

I remember the first and only time he tried reading one of his textbooks. He was in tenth grade. He came home one afternoon and announced that he had already read his chemistry assignment.

Most students would think the chemistry book was the hardest to read. Tony said that because it was hard, their assignments were very short. In most books, small words looked like other small words. “In chemistry,” he said, “Big words don’t look like other words.”

In science, it helped that Tony was familiar with the vocabulary. He had a better chance than most students of guessing what the big words were.

I needed to take additional classes to update my teaching certificate. One class was “The Physics of Toys.” After the first class, I asked the professor if I could bring my son with me, explaining that he was a future physics teacher.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Tony went with me week after week for the whole semester and loved it. He understood some concepts faster than I did.

Later that year, I planned to attend a workshop on Critical Thinking. Tony was eager to go with me and he fit in well. We were in different small groups and I was only a little surprised to find that Tony was chosen to make reports for his group.

Then, when Tony was in ninth grade, we visited my parents in Florida. My father showed Tony how to run his boat, a Boston Whaler with an outboard engine.

That summer, my father died. Our family went back to Florida for Christmas and the memorial service.

Thamora was given grandpa's car since their grandmother had a car of her own. Tony was given the boat since he was the only person in the family who knew how to use it. With the car pulling the boat, we drove back to Rhode Island.

That summer, Tony decided to get rich selling quahogs, the local clams. He bought a clam rake for about \$100 and started work. Somehow, each time he earned money, he needed a propeller, gas, or he lost his rake and needed a new one. He lost money faster than he earned it.

Over the next summers, Tony forgot quahogs. He used the boat to have fun with friends. They had a giant inner tube that was especially exciting when Tony pulled the tube and a friend behind the boat.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Barrington was one of those towns with many very rich people. Just driving through the town, we see many elegant homes. At school I felt like I didn't fit in because we weren't rich.

When I got the boat, all that changed. I had a boat and none of my friends had one. I could take them on the boat or pull them on that inner tube. It was almost like being rich. Now, finally, I really felt like I fit in.

When it was time to sign up for College Academy, Tony, now too old to attend, asked if he could teach. The usual rule was that high school students could be assistants, running errands for the staff.

College students could teach the non-academic classes like Rocketry or and Dragons, but only certified teachers could teach academic classes like Fun with Physics and Math Madness.

Tony, now well known by the staff, was very persuasive. He taught Rocketry and Dungeons and Dragons and he was a hit with the students.

By the end of the summer, parents were asking what Tony would be teaching the next summer because their children wanted to sign up for whatever Tony was teaching.

This meant the staff needed to find other classes Tony could teach.

Growing Up Dyslexic

When Tony started college and had an ever-growing fan club, they let him teach Fun with Physics and Math Madness.

I was teaching new classes, and gave him my teaching materials. Tony used many activities I'd used, Then I took some of his activities and used them when teaching physics in my Physic classes.

Teaching at College Academy was great fun and I even got paid for having a good time. I worked hard to make my classes interesting. All my years as a student at College Academy made that pretty easy.

Tony and I were the only mother and son teaching at College Academy I remember

thinking that this opportunity to teach would give Tony experience that would prepare him to be a teacher someday.

I also thought it might even help him get a teaching job. After all, most students straight out of college don't have any teaching experience.

When Tony was in tenth grade, Bob was invited to lead a college work project in the Philippines. He said it would be nice for Tony to go but being away from school for a month was out of the question.

By now, Tony was an expert in self advocating. He first went to each teacher and got their permission. In gym, he'd make up every class he'd miss with early make-up gym classes.

For art, he'd stay after school to complete all of his ceramic projects. For Algebra II, he'd take his book and complete the assignments he missed. For Chemistry, the teacher pretty much just said, "Have a good Time."

Tony knew it would be hard to convince us, but with all of his teachers agreeing, how could we say no? He went and had a wonderful time.

When Tony was in tenth grade, his Science Fair project was the best yet. He studied kaleidoscopes. We found a shop that cut mirrors into the shapes he wanted.

He built kaleidoscopes with two mirrors, three mirrors and four mirrors. The four-mirror

kaleidoscope had a large opening at one end and smaller opening at the other.

Again, that year .Tony won a first place at the State Science Fair, along with an award for math (he compared the angles of the to the number of reflections you could see). And, of course, he again won an award for the use of photography.

Many people were interested in kaleidoscopes so Tony was busy explaining what he had learned.

Later, we created Kaleidoscopes using full-length mirrors. With two mirrors, you see a single row of images. With three mirrors, images spread out in all directions.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Later, we used our "Human Kaleidoscopes" in College Academy and other classes. Science Teacher Association Conference in Boston.

We had slides taken through kaleidoscopes. Mom ran the projector and let me explain what they were seeing. We also had a "Human Kaleidoscope" set up so they could look through it for themselves.

Tenth grade was also the year we decided it was time for Tony's college tours. While on this trip, someone mentioned Landmark College. They had a program just for dyslexic students. That seemed like a good choice for Tony.

We then discovered there was a Landmark High School. They had a full high school program except for AP classes.

The classes were small and, for reading, the teachers taught one student at a time.

Landmark is a residential school. Tony occasionally came home for weekends, taking the train to Boston, the subway to the bus station, and the bus to Providence where we picked him up.

Tony's reading hadn't improved in Barrington. We hoped he would improve his skills at Landmark.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I already knew that I wanted to be a high school physics teacher. I'd take physics my junior year and AP Physics as a senior.

They had a physics class at Landmark and they promised I could take it. Landmark seemed like a good school.

Chapter 11.

Junior Year at Landmark



Landmark is northeast of Boston and it cost more than any of the colleges we considered. But, with all the individual attention they offered, it seemed to be worth the cost. Tony applied and was accepted.

On the day when students arrived, parents were invited to visit the classrooms and learn more about their programs.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I have two memories of that day. First, I visited the science classroom where one of the students had a large boa constrictor draped around his shoulder. “Do you want to touch him?” he asked. I touched it.

Tony just smiled. He knew I wasn’t scared of snakes. The boy took the snake off of his shoulder. “Want to hold him?” he asked, holding the snake out, sure she would back away.

“Of course,” I said, taking the snake and putting it over my shoulders. While the boys were disappointed, Tony was proud of me.

I also remember a speaker explaining how important it was for their students to self-advocate, to tell teachers about their problems

and to ask for help when they needed it. Tony was already self-advocating in high school but it seemed great to reinforce what he was already doing.

Bob

I went to a different event. The speaker talked about how most children with dyslexia have low self-images. Some gave up easily and others were class clowns or they got into trouble in school. Tony never acted like a class clown or got into trouble. He was polite, well-behaved and got along well with his teachers.

After the talk, I told the speaker about Tony who seemed to be the opposite and I told him about Tony's adventure on his train ride to Yale. The

Growing Up Dyslexic

speaker laughed and said there was a name for this: grandiosity.

People with grandiosity think they can fly a plane without taking lessons or they do operations without medical school.

Grandiosity might have fit Tony if he tried things like that regularly, but he didn't. Tony was a well-balanced student who lacked skills in reading and writing.

Finally, we said goodbye to Tony and headed home.

Tony spent most of the first several days, walking up to other students and introducing himself, asking where they were from, and

trying for the first time in his life to make friends.

As a result, Tony was elected president of his dorm. One student told us later that Tony was obviously a shy kid pretending to be popular. For Tony, pretending to be outgoing and popular seemed to work.

The next day, the students were tested and the day after that, they received their schedules. Tony was scheduled for marine biology instead of physics.

He went to his teacher and explained that someone made a mistake. He was supposed to take physics. The teacher explained that he couldn't take physics because he needed to read at fourth grade level to take physics.

Growing Up Dyslexic

They had no idea that Tony was experienced in self-advocating. After talking to his teacher, Tony went to the department head, and got the same answer. He went to the next level and got the same answer. He finally went to the head of the school and still, he got the same answer.

Tony finally called us and we spoke to the head of the school. We began by explaining that Tony had been promised that he could take physics and that he would never have gone to Landmark if he couldn't take physics.

We also pointed out that the people at Landmark were teaching students to self-advocate. Well, Tony was self-advocating like crazy and he was still being ignored. Now we were advocating for him.

The principal pointed out that students without a fourth-grade reading level were likely to fail physics.

“That’s fine,” I said. “We don’t care if he fails. We just want him in that class.”

Finally, two weeks after classes started, Tony was placed in the physics class. We suspect the teacher had been told that Tony wasn’t expected to do well.

The next event is hard to believe. And no, we never talked to the teacher.

On Tony’s first day in the physics class, the teacher pointed at a large rock on his desk. He asked the students “How fast is this rock going?” You can imagine what happened next.

Growing Up Dyslexic

After several students pointed out that the rock wasn't going anywhere, Tony raised his hand. He pointed out that, in relation to the desk or even the ground, the rock wasn't moving, but that it moved in many ways in relation to the sun or other objects in the universe.

He then spent most of the period sharing with them the many ways the rock, along with the earth, was moving. It is likely the teacher learned things he hadn't known and he probably also realized that this student wasn't going to have any problems in his class.

At the end of the first half of the year, Tony and one other student were honored for the best work in physics.

Then, there was a program for Massachusetts students taking physics. Top students were invited to participate in a physics class at Harvard.

The class was “Waves, Particles, and the Structure of Matter.” The physics teacher drove Tony and the other top student every week to their class at Harvard. Tony was thrilled. This part of his Landmark experience was fantastic.

His other classes were just okay. His reading class was a waste of time. Tony was allowed to choose the book he wanted to read. He chose *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking. His teacher said she wouldn’t understand that book.

No problem,” Tony assured her, “You help me read it and I’ll explain what it “means.” While

Growing Up Dyslexic

he enjoyed reading the book, his reading level did not improve.

The other important event that year was that the juniors took the SAT. They had their choice of having someone read the questions for them, of having the questions on tape, or taking them the usual way but with unlimited time.

If he'd asked my opinion, I would have urged Tony to take the first option.

I had watched Tony do a practice test. He had struggled with one question and finally asked me a question.

“Mom, what is a kizel? I can't answer the question unless I know what a kizel is.” I had no idea what a kizel was either until I looked at the

test. The word was chisel. It was an analogy question like a chisel is to wood as a knife is to a fork, plate or cake.

Tony tried to sound out the word. In the word, chemistry, ch sounds like a K so it seemed reasonable that ch in chisel would also sound like K. Tony set out bravely to face the SAT.

When he got stuck, he just kept trying to figure it out. The test normally takes 3 hours. Tony worked all morning, took a lunch break and worked until dinner time.

The next day he continued working most of the day. Some students took much longer than he did.

Growing Up Dyslexic

To our surprise, Tony's scores were acceptable for most of the colleges we considered, even a little above average.

The year at Landmark was a good year for Tony, especially with his great success in physics.

It certainly helped him see how important it was to self-advocate.

Now I suspect the reason Tony's reading didn't improve the way we had hoped, was that when Tony didn't recognize a word, his teacher probably told him what it was. I think Tony would have learned more without her help.

Going to Landmark was great. I was frustrated at first when they wouldn't let me

take physics. Thank goodness, we finally convinced them.

I loved that class because it finally gave me an opportunity to show them what I already knew plus it was easy to learn more.

The class at Harvard was amazing. We even got to go in labs where they did experiments to see if cold fusion was real.

Going to a new school also made it possible for me to try a new personality. I wanted people to see me as popular, self-confident, and friendly. I wanted people to see me not as a dork or someone who didn't fit in. It worked a lot better than I had expected.

Growing Up Dyslexic

The next year, Tony was back in Rhode Island, back in a school where he could take AP Physics. When Tony started his senior year, he not only took AP Physics, he also took AP English.

We would never have suggested AP English but Tony had talked to the teacher first and got his permission before telling us. Tony explained that going back over all the boring grammar would be harder for him. He said discussing literature would be exciting and even easier for him.

One real surprise was that many students in Barrington who hadn't known Tony well didn't recognize him. now. They thought he was a new student.

He was now so confident and outgoing that he seemed to be a different person. Girls who ignored him before, now found him interesting. Later in the year, Tony even played the lead role in a play, something he'd never have tried before.

That year, I planned to take a weekend teacher workshop on Brain-based

Teaching and Learning and Tony decided to join me. He was excited about a trip to a Boston hospital where we saw slices of brain tissue comparing dyslexic and non-dyslexic brains.

For high school graduation, Tony used flowers from our garden to decorate his graduation cap. At the high school, a teacher made him take off

Growing Up Dyslexic

the flowers. They didn't notice when he put the flowers back under his robe.

Once out on the football field where the graduates were seated, he calmly took out his flowers and put them back on his cap.

What we really loved was that one of his teachers who had admired the flowers earlier told Tony she was really glad when he put the flowers back on his cap. Tony had many wonderful teachers.

Chapter 12.

Tony Starts College



Tony, still reading at third-grade level, was accepted at Boston University. They had a two-year program for students with learning disabilities.

During the first two years of BU, I was in a program called the College of Basic Studies, or CBS. Sometimes it was referred to as "Cute but Stupid" or "College of Beer and Sleep."

Growing Up Dyslexic

In the second semester of the second year, we took 2 classes at CBS and two regular BU classes.

If we passed, we could transfer to any other colleges at BU. Everything went pretty well at first.

My years in college were both wonderful and excruciating. I'm not sure if I partied so much because college was difficult or if college was difficult because I partied so much.

In most classes, taking notes was more of a distraction than a tool to help me study. My handwriting was so bad and my spelling so

illegible, that I could not decipher my notes when I got home.

I spent so much brain power taking illegible notes that I did not remember the class or lecture. In most classes I didn't take notes.

I doodled as I listened carefully to what the teacher said. I might write a sentence or two every now and then but nothing to study.

In all my classes on the first day, I would talk to the professor after class about me being dyslexic and how taking notes did not work.

I told them not to worry if I sat in the front row just staring at them or doodling. I asked

Growing Up Dyslexic

if they'd give me a copy of their notes or have student copy theirs. They seemed impressed but didn't provide any notes.

When I tried to study, it overwhelmed me. I went to clubs or raves to escape the fear of failure. I think it was then depression started to affect my life.

I'm sure it started in high school. In college it was a weekly ritual. Sunday night was a time of worrying, fear, and crippling self-doubt.

By Wednesday I'd realize things weren't as bad as they seemed or that things were so bad that partying to rave music was a solution. I'd focus on being a DJ.

From Thursday to Sunday afternoon, I had some of the best times of my life.

As the sun went down on the weekend, so would my spirits. Before long, I found myself in that place again.

I remember Tony talking about becoming a DJ. He spent a lot of money buying records and often was a DJ at a friend's party. I never realized that this was his way of avoiding his fear of failing.

For the second semester of my sophomore year, I chose my two regular classes: education and physics. This is where things really got bad.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I always enjoyed math so I felt confident that I'd have no problem with calculus.

I was looking forward to Physics. I had done so well in Physics and AP Physics. In high school. But college classes are much harder.

Weekly physics Lab reports were expected to be at least 25-35 pages with a statistics and other math I had not learned yet.

I think I understood the Physics at least as much as half the class, if not more, but proving that on paper with lab reports or times tests never worked for me. I failed the education class and might as well have failed physics because the grade was so low.

That summer, I took calculus and failed. It only took one semester out of CBS before I realized that BU was not for me.

Tony was not about to give up. He was ready to take physics and calculus again. We suggested he try the University of Massachusetts in Boston. UMass cost less and we hoped the classes might be a little easier.

While I went to UMass, I lived off campus with my girlfriend and my best friend. Actually, she was more than just a girlfriend. Perhaps I should say, my soulmate. and my very best friend.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I was in love with her. I believed she loved me. I even took her to meet my parents. I was planning to marry her and I was happy.

Then, suddenly, my whole world crashed around me. One Sunday morning my girlfriend woke up in my bed. That Sunday night she walked across the hall to my best friend's bed and that was that.

On Monday night they told me they were moving out. They left me all alone and expected me to pay all the bills.

I called my parents and they tried to help. They suggested I see a therapist. I really should have, but I didn't. I fell into a depression so deep and all-consuming that it

affected me for almost ten more years. I couldn't stop crying. It was the worst time of my life.

My mother recently asked me why I failed calculus and physics again and again. She wondered if I did all the homework.

I really went to all the classes and I did all the homework. I thought for a while that I understood it but I didn't. I should have gotten a tutor but I didn't.

The second time I took physics and calculus, I was overconfident. I thought it would be easier the second time. It wasn't.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I don't think it was a reading problem. Even with a third-grade reading level, I think I understood all the questions. I'm just glad that my parents let me keep trying.

That summer at UMass, Tony took Physics, Calculus, and a Philosophy class. Somehow, he managed to pass the Philosophy class. He failed calculus and physics.

I couldn't believe that I kept failing. I knew I was as smart as the other students. I thought it had to be something about dyslexia.

For some reason, none of us realized that a major reason I went to all my classes, did all my homework, and still failed was because

the breakup left me so depressed. The depression I felt repeated the loneliness and fear I felt most of my life.

Looking back, in 2020, things seem more clear. In January, I started taking anti-anxiety medication. Now, I see how depressed I was then, how much of the time, I just gave up. I stopped trying. I kept failing math and physics because I was deeply depressed.

At this point, we suggested that he try Curry College, just south of Boston. They had a four-year program for dyslexic students. Tony agreed to go there as long as they had a physics major. They did.

I should have gone to Curry College to begin with. All of the students were dyslexic. All of the teachers were willing to help us. I was able to relax and enjoy my classes.

At Curry College, Tony was doing well. He passed Calculus and Physics and all his other classes. Now, however, Curry College decided to drop their physics major. What a terrible shock.

Thank goodness, just for Tony, their only physics major, they continued classes until he graduated. This was wonderful. It meant many of his classes included only Tony and his teacher. Tony graduated with his degree in physics.

Chapter 13.

Grad School is harder than College



A Masters in Education, is recommended or required to teach in the public schools. Curry had a graduate program in education but there was no help for dyslexic students at this level. It took Tony a little longer.

Getting Tony through college wasn't easy. Getting him through grad school was even harder. Tony tried to avoid assistance from

Growing Up Dyslexic

others. Thank goodness, he was willing to accept my help.

As my mother said, college was hard enough but grad school was even worse. First, it was hard not having the same support system that was there for me as an undergraduate. Next, my classes were only about education and not about science.

Grad school was more of an obstacle course than an opportunity for growth and enrichment. Without my parents' support, I probably would have given up.

Tony had to write an endless number of research papers. There was no way he could do these alone with a third-grade reading level.

He came home nearly every weekend so we could work on them together. We spent a lot of time at the library, copying journal articles for his papers.

I read most of them aloud. Tony told me to circle sections he wanted in his paper.

Next, Tony came up with several topics and possible outlines. He cut out quotes he wanted to use and organized them.

I sat at the computer while Tony dictated his paper, just as he had done when he was in high school. We added quotes in appropriate places.

An important step was revision. I read what I had typed and Tony told me what to change. Notice that I worked hard to be sure Tony did

Growing Up Dyslexic

his own work. I never told him what to write. I was only his secretary his secretary and cheerleader.

For his Master's Thesis, Tony used much of what he had learned at the workshop with me on Brain-based Learning and Teaching.

He then wrote his thesis: *Brain-based Teaching and Learning in the Physics class.*

Finally, Tony graduated.

Parents and children: Looking back, I see that the worst mistake we made was not understanding that Tony was depressed.

Facing college with a third-grade reading level had to be terrifying. We should have insisted that he see a therapist or a doctor. He would have

felt better. He would not have felt that he was a failure. He would have done better in his classes.

The other thing we should have done was to encourage him to hire a tutor as soon as He knew a course was difficult. He would have done better in his classes and been able to relax.

Growing Up Dyslexic

The first part of the book discusses the early signs of dyslexia, such as difficulty with rhyming words and letter recognition. It also covers the impact of dyslexia on a child's self-esteem and social interactions. The author shares personal experiences and offers practical advice for parents and educators on how to support a child with dyslexia. The text is written in a clear, accessible style, making it easy to read and understand.

The second part of the book focuses on the challenges of dyslexia in the workplace. It discusses how dyslexia can affect job performance, communication, and career advancement. The author provides strategies for identifying and addressing these challenges, as well as tips for finding a supportive work environment. This section is particularly helpful for individuals who are currently in the workforce and are looking for ways to overcome their difficulties.

The final part of the book explores the long-term effects of dyslexia and offers advice on how to manage these effects. It discusses the importance of self-awareness and self-acceptance, and provides resources for further support and information. The author concludes with a message of hope and encouragement, emphasizing that dyslexia is not a barrier to success and that individuals with dyslexia can achieve their goals and live fulfilling lives.

Chapter 14

An Amazing Summer



Now, Tony needed to get a job. I suggested that he do what I always did when looking for a job. I'd print 100 copies of my resume and go from one school to the next, always leaving a copy.

Tony printed one resume. He got one interview and they hired him. He was a physics teacher and they are hard to find.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Now his summer was free. He could have gotten a job but Tony had another idea. He had a book he really wanted to read.

He didn't have taped books anymore. He was on his own. As he explained it to us, he studied the first word and tried to guess what it was. Then he studied the next word. and then the next word.

When he finished, he tried to read it again. With his third-grade reading skills, he recognized some words and tried to sound out others.

One by one, he guessed at the unfamiliar words. If it didn't make sense, he changed some of his guesses. Then he did the same thing for the next sentence.

One sentence at a time, he made his way through the book. Then, he went back to the beginning and started over. Each time he read the book it was easier.

My mother's brother, uncle Richard, gave me a book for Christmas, that would transform my life, my understanding of the universe and myself.

It was *The River out of Eden* by Richard Dawkins. It was easy to read because he wrote it for children, or at least young adults. It's about Evolution. I was instantly hooked.

Having read this book, I found the strength and the audacity to read Dawkins' other

Growing Up Dyslexic

books, *The Selfish Gene* and *The Blind Watchmaker*.

It took me a long time to read each of these books four times but I needed to know what was in those books and just reading each book once wasn't enough.

I cared so much about learning things that matter to me that something seemed to push my anxieties and self-doubt to the side.

Each book I read made it easier to read the next. I went on to other books including *Guns, Germs and Steel* and *Collapse* by Jared Diamond.

Another person might not find these books interesting. You need to find books you are really determined to read.

Tony didn't tell us what he was doing. The next time we saw Tony, he was reading a *Scientific American*. We were shocked. "Can you read that?" we asked. "Sure," he said. "I taught myself to read."

I tested Tony and we were delighted to see that Tony scored above a twelfth-grade reading level. It was true. He really taught himself to read.

While it worked for Tony, it certainly doesn't mean it would work for others. But give it a try. It might work for you.

Growing Up Dyslexic

My mother asked if I could only read science books. That's mostly true. Every time I worked hard to read a book it was a science book. Those were the books I really wanted to read. You might say I was desperate to read them.

I was never interested in history so I don't know their vocabulary and therefore would find history books hard to read.

I should say that even if I taught myself to read, that didn't help me improve handwriting or spelling. I improved slowly in both, mainly with words I use frequently, but I'll never write as well as I'd like.

I still enjoy my work teaching high school physics. I always let the principal and teachers know I'm dyslexic. I tell students too, explaining that they write and spell better than I can and that I welcome corrections.

Growing Up Dyslexic

The first part of the book is a collection of letters and essays written by dyslexics. The letters are addressed to the author, and the essays are written for a general audience. The letters are written by people who are struggling with dyslexia and are looking for help and support. The essays are written by people who have grown up with dyslexia and are sharing their experiences and insights with others.

The second part of the book is a collection of letters and essays written by the author. The letters are addressed to the author, and the essays are written for a general audience. The letters are written by people who are struggling with dyslexia and are looking for help and support. The essays are written by the author, who is a dyslexic himself, and is sharing his experiences and insights with others.

The third part of the book is a collection of letters and essays written by the author. The letters are addressed to the author, and the essays are written for a general audience. The letters are written by people who are struggling with dyslexia and are looking for help and support. The essays are written by the author, who is a dyslexic himself, and is sharing his experiences and insights with others.

The fourth part of the book is a collection of letters and essays written by the author. The letters are addressed to the author, and the essays are written for a general audience. The letters are written by people who are struggling with dyslexia and are looking for help and support. The essays are written by the author, who is a dyslexic himself, and is sharing his experiences and insights with others.

Chapter 15.

Reflections 25 years later



When I started taking anti-anxiety medication. I understood how depressed I was in college.

Most of the time, I felt anxious and worried. I kept thinking I was a failure. I failed at sports, failed with girls, failed at reading, and I'd even failed at living my life. Sometimes I am surprised I managed to get through it.

Growing Up Dyslexic

I was filled with fear, fear of failure and fear of being alone.

Sometimes I think I'm still getting through it now.

A Summary of my Life

I might have forgotten the dream I had in the Marshalls the terrible camp if nothing else had made me keep thinking about them.

First and second grade wouldn't have been that bad if I'd learned to read like the other kids.

But then, I was aware that I was different. I was aware that other students seemed to think I was stupid. I was aware that I had

no friends in school. My anxiety began to grow worse and worse.

When I began going to the special class for kids with dyslexia, I felt hopeful at first but, when it didn't get any better, when I still couldn't read, my feeling that I was a failure at everything, kept growing.

When the best teacher for dyslexic students in all of Brockton couldn't teach me how to read, I thought that neurologist might have been right. I might never learn to read or write.

When we moved to Rhode Island, when I could do well in classes without needing to read or write,

Growing Up Dyslexic

I felt great. I had friends, not a lot of friends, but enough.

I was really proud of my science fair projects and teaching my mother's classes. Nobody seemed to think I was stupid but the feeling I was a failure stuck with me.

I wasn't as rich as the others. I couldn't read as well as they did. And I was terribly afraid that, in the future, I'd still be a failure.

In high school and then in college, there were some great experiences but I still knew a third-grade reading level wasn't enough.

I wanted to be a physics teacher, but I kept wondering if you can teach physics if you can't read the physics book?

I knew I'd never make it through high school or college without my mother. My parents were proud of me for not giving up. I'm just glad that my parents didn't give up, that they let me keep trying.

Now, it might sound silly, but my biggest problem is spelling. When I began teaching, I would call parents when there were problems with my students. It was easy to talk to parents on the phone.

Now, at school, I'm expected to email parents when their child has a problem.

Growing Up Dyslexic

Writing an email takes me at least 4-5 times as long as calling a parent and I always feel anxious about spelling and even grammar.

I'm careful to spell-check what I write, but sometimes I still end up with the right spelling for the wrong word.

Sometimes I feel an enormous pressure to get it all done fast, to write that email in the same amount of time that others take. Then I get anxious. Finally, I just block it out and stop thinking about it.

I'm good at that, at blocking out what I can't take, what hurts too much.

My mother keeps asking me difficult questions. This time she asked me two questions. First, she wanted my reflections on what it was like, writing a book together.

Second, she asked why, until now, I had never told her or anyone how I really felt.

I tried to pretend I was back in first or second grade. She'd ask me how school was. I always said OK, or maybe Good. It wasn't OK and it sure wasn't good, but I didn't know what else to say.

Perhaps, just thinking about how I felt would hurt so much that I tried not to think about it. Talking about it would hurt even worse.

In college, I did talk to my parents when my girlfriend and best friend left. I had to talk to someone. I was seriously depressed and should have talked to a therapist. After that, I went back to saying everything was fine even when it really wasn't.

Now, about writing this book. I thought writing together would be fun. I had interesting stories to tell and, like my mother, I had images of a simple happy story. But I couldn't start writing.

Finally, Mom cornered me while I washed dishes. She asked questions and took notes. When she printed up the notes, I read them

and sometimes made changes or a few additions.

I built up my courage a little at a time. She wouldn't complain about my spelling. That wasn't the problem. I was slowly beginning to realize that writing about growing up dyslexic isn't easy.

It really is hard. I'd spent all those years hiding my feelings from them and from myself. Writing my story was painful.

Then, to her surprise and to my surprise, I began writing more and more. I was able to write about the pain I had felt but could never talk or even think about.

Sure, I have bad days days when I still feel like I'm a failure at everything. A lot of people have bad days. But I also have my good days even some really great days.

So, what if I was a failure at sports? So was my sister, and my mother and father. But that's not true. None of us were failures.

I tried more sports that the rest of my family put together. I was even on the rugby team at Boston.

University until I had a terribly bad leg break and the doctor said no more rugby and no more skiing.

Very few people are great at sports. Most sports are meant for fun, not for winning. You cannot be a failure in sports.

I complain about being a failure at writing. Most people with dyslexia have problems with writing. I'm amazed at how much my writing has improved. I have no reason to be embarrassed.

I really wasn't a failure at girls. Actually, I did pretty well. One year I went to three different high school proms. In college, I had plenty of girlfriends.

I had that one unexpected terrible breakup, but I'm not the only person to have a terrible break-up. In fact, some people go through

Growing Up Dyslexic

many terrible break-ups. They may even go through several divorces. Now, I have a wonderful wife and two great sons. I'd have to say I really am a winner. Was I a failure at college? It wasn't easy for me. Then, with the breakup it was hard to concentrate. It took me several extra years to finish but I did finish.

I think of the many students who drop out of college even out of high school. I refused to give up. I finished high school. I graduated from college with a degree in physics, and a Master's degree in education.

What a fool I am to call that a failure. Anyone else would say that's a success.

Then, there were all those other successes along the way. Teaching my mother's classes about dyslexia, winning awards at the Science Fairs, getting my Eagle in Scouts, teaching at College Academy, and so much more.

And reading? Sure, it took me longer to learn but there are so many people, with or without dyslexia, who can't read nearly as well as I do now. I am NOT a failure at reading.

The reason we are writing this book is because I managed, against all odds, to become a **SUCCESS** in reading.

I say all this, not to brag but because I know other people with dyslexia continue to believe

they are failures. It's hard, after years of being the only kid in your class who can't read to stop thinking of yourself as a failure.

I think the first time I really felt like a success was in seventh grade when I taught my mother's classes about dyslexia. Those kids told their friends about me.

They. looked forward to when I'd be there the next time. Some said their problems weren't as bad as mine, that if I could go to college, they could too. I had no idea I could inspire students like this.

Then, in that physics class at Landmark, when they said I couldn't take the class because I couldn't read well enough, and then

I was selected as one of the two students to take a physics class at Harvard. What a success that was.

Now, as I'm working with my mother to share my story, I have another chance to be a success.

Perhaps this book will help other dyslexic students understand they also can be a success. I hope that, as some of you experience the downs and ups of growing up dyslexic, that you can know you are not a failure. You never have been.

The educational system failed us. We who are dyslexic, whether we learned to read or

not, can still find our own pathways to success.

So, what do I think about writing a book about my life, alone or with my mother? Either way, it isn't easy. If you are honest, it is painful but, in the end, it feels good, very good. I'd say it's great to finally be able to understand myself.

And about writing the book with my mother, I don't think I could have done it alone. She pushed me a little at a time to write, to write more, and to think about how I felt all those years ago

The most important parts of the book came when she asked me all those questions,

painful questions, questions that made me think, that forced me to get past the fences I had put up so I didn't need to think about it anymore.

Thanks Mom, I couldn't have done any of this without you.

As I reflect on writing together, I know I have learned things about Tony I never would have discovered. Now I know why he couldn't share his feelings. They were too painful. As I read what he wrote, I was in tears.

I didn't realize this at first, but I feel sure that another reason Tony didn't tell me how he felt was to protect me. He didn't want to make me to cry.

Growing Up Dyslexic

This has been a painful journey for all of us but it was an important journey. It has helped us both to know ourselves better as well as knowing each other better.

Tony, we began thinking we were writing about only one battle, learning to read. Now I see that there were three battles.

There were also three books. In elementary school, you fought against the pain of not being able to read or write and of seeing yourself as the only kid in the bottom reading group who couldn't read. In middle school, you won that battle with the help of taped books and *The Lord of the Rings*. You fought that battle yourself and you won.

In high school and college, you realized that a third-grade reading level wasn't enough. You fought against the ever-present fear of failure. After grad school, you finally won that battle with another book, the *River out of Eden* by Richard Dawkins. You no longer needed to fear failure. You really could read.

Tony, that's where we thought the story would end but there was a third battle. You still had to deal with the pain you had kept to yourself all these years.

This time, the book is *How Tony Learned to Read*. It is the book you have written yourself. Writing this book had to be very difficult. It pushed you to realize that you have been hiding these feelings for all

these years and to explain why you couldn't talk about these things before.

It took a great deal of courage to recognize your feelings, your fears, and depression. It took courage to share them with your parents and now to share them with the world.

Finally, you can say you have won the battle. You changed this book from a simple feel-good book to a book that reveals what so many dyslexic students hide for the rest of their lives. Thank you, Tony.

Now, I am so pleased to read your final statement. This is the Tony who knew he could reach his goals, if he tried hard enough, the Tony who was strong and brave and who never gave up.

No longer do I think of giving up. I don't back down or walk away. I stand and fight.

I am no longer the boy in his underwear running in the woods at night from a monster that was only in my mind.

I am no longer paralyzed with anxiety. I feel free without boundaries and I will continue to fight this fight.

It means my survival.

The End

Growing Up Dyslexic

We are not experts in the field but if you would like to talk to either of us you can email us.

You can also join our Facebook Group

<https://www.Facebook.com/groups/GrowingUpDyslexic>

Book Clubs question available. Contact Judy

Email Judy at jjfishel@gmail.com

Email Tony at wolftree.fishel@gmail.com

If you enjoyed this book, if you found it helpful, please **tell your friends**.

The best way to share your opinions of the book is to write a review on Amazon. The more reviews we get, the more people will see the book.

It would also help if you leave a review on your **blog**, on **social media** and anywhere else that might reach families with dyslexic children.

Author Bios



TONY FISHEL

Tony was eight years old when a neurologist said he was extremely intelligent but also severely dyslexic and that he might never learn to read or write.

Tony was in fifth grade when he decided to be a physics teacher. In college, he failed physics and calculus several time but he didn't give up.

Growing Up Dyslexic

After graduate school, he taught himself to read and yes, he became a high school physics teacher. He taught in several Massachusetts schools.

He is married to the love of his life. They live in western Massachusetts with their twins, three cats and a dog.

Tony also enjoys gardening, not finishing projects, and playing records in the basement.



JUDY FISHEL

Judy focused on the needs of her students more than on the subjects. She mainly taught middle or high school math and science. She twice won Presidential Awards for teaching Math.

This is the fourth book she has published: Her first two books, *Straight A's Are NOT Enough* - first and second editions are about study skills mainly for college freshmen. They would be helpful for anyone interested in what it means to

Growing Up Dyslexic

really study. The second edition would be especially helpful for an easy-to-read book about what it means to study and how to use the most powerful learning strategies.

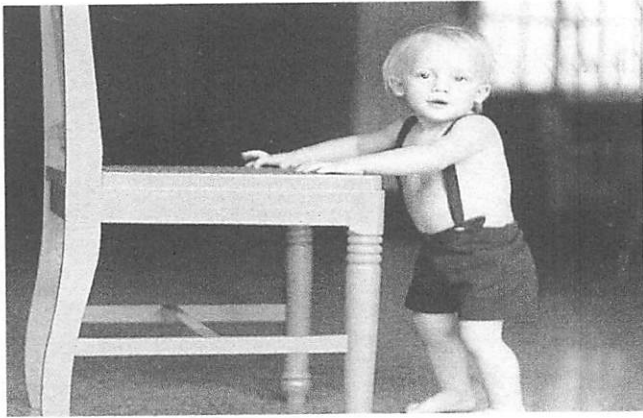
3. *Murder of the Obeah Man* is a mystery that takes place in Florida and features a Jamaican woman who is an herbalist, healer, spiritual advisor, and wants to help the detectives find the killer.



The pictures of Tony in color are found on Amazon on Judy's Author Page

Pictures of Tony Growing Up

Tony teaching himself to walk



Tony and his sister in the Philippines



The Marshall Islands Majuro Atoll

ocean and reef beach houses - lagoon



Tony plays barefoot on the reef



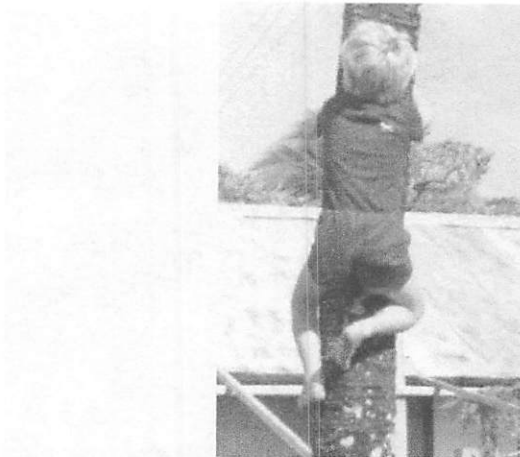
Tony with his playmates



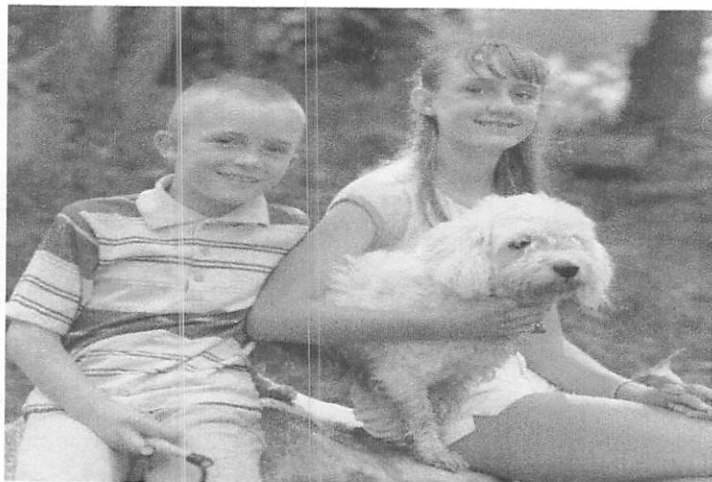
Graduating from preschool



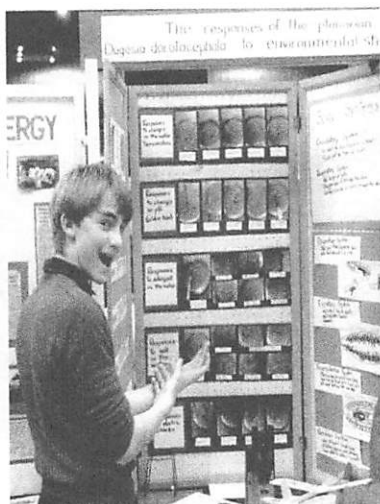
Climbing half-way up the coconut palm



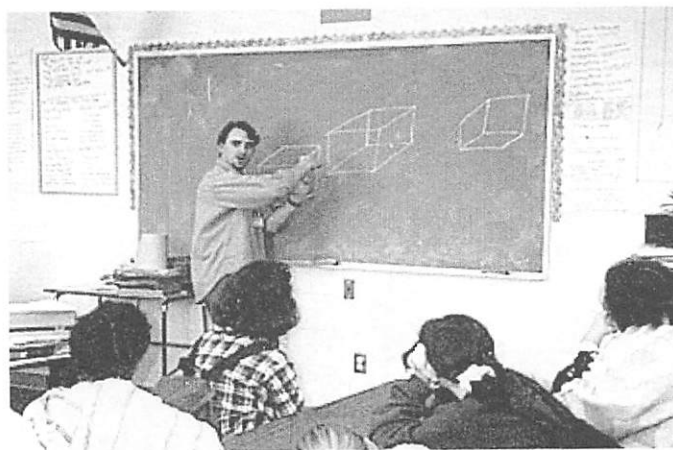
Tony in elementary school, sister & dog



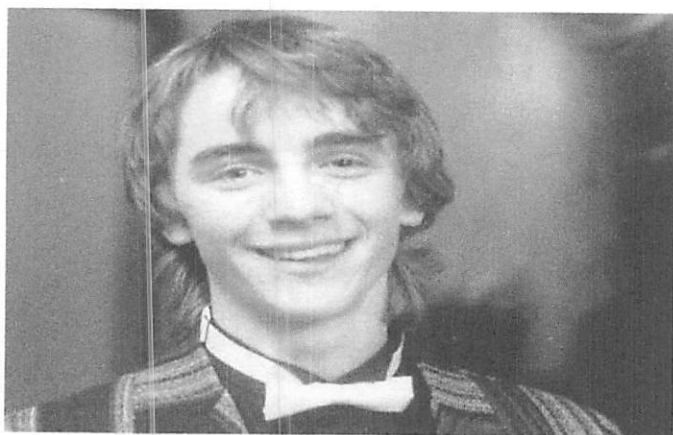
Tony with planaria science fair project



Tony teaching his mother's class



Tony in high school

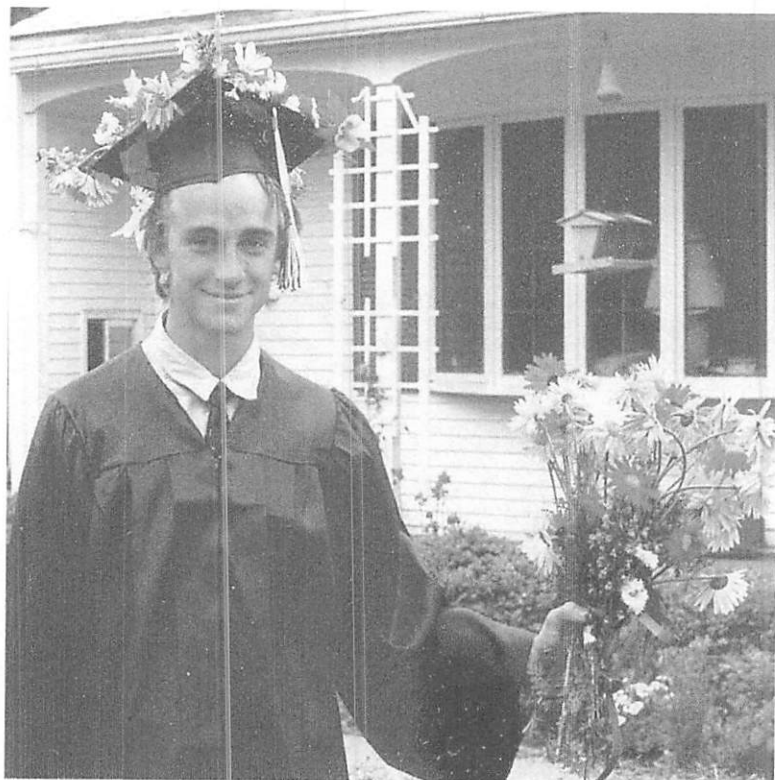


Tony's grandpa teaches him in the boat



Tony tenth grade science fair project





Tony Graduates from high school and celebrates with flowers from the garden.

Made in the USA
Monce, IL
12 May 2021



68359127R00125

HOW TONY LEARNED TO READ



When Tony graduated from preschool, the other children knew the letters of the alphabet. Tony didn't. When he finished 1st grade, he couldn't read or write. He still didn't know those letters. That's when he was first tested for dyslexia.

When Tony was in 3rd grade, still unable to read or write, he was tested by a neurologist who said: **"Tony you are very intelligent. You are also severely dyslexic. You might not ever learn to read or write."**

This is Tony's story. It's a story of failure and success, of courage, determination, and depression. It's a story of Inspiration. You will laugh and sometimes cry.

Tony tells his own story and his mother, who helped him all the way, tells his story from her viewpoint.

It is the story of how Tony learned to read. It is a story you will never forget.

ISBN 9780990611271



90000



9 780990 611271