

My Dyslexia

Philip Schultz

W. W. Norton (September 2011)

Hardcover \$21.95 (128pp)

978-0-393-07964-7

For those of us in love with, or at least drawn to, the written word—be it in fiction or nonfiction—try to imagine looking at a page of words and being unable to make any sense of them. Imagine further somehow overcoming this condition and going on to become a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. That's the foundation of Philip Schultz's moving memoir, *My Dyslexia*.

These days, dyslexia is fairly easy to diagnose. Schultz, a boy of the 1950s growing up in Rochester, New York, endured a tortured childhood filled with street brawls, inexplicable behavioral problems, and an inability to follow the simplest directions. He didn't learn to read until he was eleven. Many decades would pass before the true nature of his disorder became clear—and that was only when his son was diagnosed with dyslexia in the second grade. By then, Schultz was fifty-eight years old.

My Dyslexia is most compelling when Schultz recounts the visceral misery of his early years and the strategies he eventually concocted to cope with the written word: "I often read a sentence two or three times before I truly understand it; must restructure its syntax and sound out its syllables before I can begin to absorb its meaning and move on to the next sentence." Even then, there are minefields along the way: "When I make the mistake of becoming aware that I am reading, and behaving in a way that enables this mysterious, electrically charged process to take place, my mind balks and goes blank and I become anxious and stop."

The raw human drama of the book's early chapters gives way, in some sections, to lengthy considerations of dyslexia and creativity, dyslexia and Judaism, and so on. Schultz's abstract musings are in sharp contrast to the visceral sense of dislocation and alienation he renders when writing about his youth and young adulthood. The best parts of this short memoir describe the "touch" and "feel" of the disorder itself, as well as his slowly growing awareness of his love of words and eventual commitment to expressing himself in poems.

Rendered in clear, personal, and often lyrical language, *My Dyslexia* should be of interest to many readers who struggle with the written word, as well as those interested in the story of a man willing himself to overcome a frightening and undiagnosed affliction.

LEE POLEVOI (Winter 2012)

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