



I read my FIRST NOVEL AT 39'

The confession by one of Britain's richest tycoons that he is dyslexic and cannot read made headlines recently, yet there are over two million undiagnosed dyslexic adults in this country. Until recently, Judith Campbell, 43, from Folkestone, was one of them...

As I sit on the sofa with Elizabeth Gilbert's smash hit novel, *Eat Pray Love*, the words on the page are jumping around and I have to force myself to concentrate. While reading may be a simple pleasure for most women, it's a nightmare for me. And it was only when I went on holiday to France four years ago that I was able to read a book from start to finish for the first time.

This was a major achievement for me, as I'm dyslexic. The condition is a specific learning difficulty that affects skills linked to language and the way my brain processes information, such as words and sequences, numbers or days of the week. Words are jumbled and jump around. It's easy to lose

focus and then forget what I've just read.

School was traumatic for me. I was terrified of reading out loud – I would skip letters, so words came out muddled. When I was 10, I remember struggling with my homework in tears. We were asked to copy out a poem but it took 10 attempts before it was in any sort of state that I could hand in. It was frustrating and demoralising.

My teachers assumed I was scatty and accused me of being lazy. And as my classmates were always giggling at me, I became the class clown. It was easier to fool around than knuckle down to tortuous class work.

'Judith needs to write more neatly' was a constant comment on my report cards. The criticisms hurt and I took them very



Judith found ways to avoid reading in her everyday life

personally. Although I could read, it took a huge effort, and getting through a piece of writing took me much longer than any of my classmates.

Dyslexia doesn't just affect reading. The condition also makes it difficult to cope with everyday tasks, and affects my memory and organisational abilities. It meant I couldn't follow recipes, as I'd miss out ingredients, and I lost a job working as a receptionist because I just couldn't cope.

I learnt lots of ways to avoid reading unless it was absolutely necessary. I'd call up telephone helplines if I needed train times, rather than looking up printed schedules, and watched the news on TV instead of picking up a newspaper. But as

I had never known anything different, I was determined not to let it beat me. I love children, so I became a teaching assistant. The kids were young – in the reception class – and as there wasn't much information to digest, I managed.

Diagnosis at last

I married in 1989 and became a mum at 26. When my son was old enough, I longed to put him to bed with the promise of a story. But stress makes it harder for me to cope with reading, and putting myself under pressure would make it impossible.

Sadly, my marriage didn't survive, but it was my divorce that proved to be the trigger for me to seek help for my problem.

My solicitors persuaded me to go to The Dyscovery Centre in Newport, an organisation that helps children and adults with development disorders. They had realised the struggle I was experiencing, and thought that getting help with reading would help me to cope with going to court and the paperwork involved in my divorce.

At the centre, I had several reading and comprehension tests, and the experts there confirmed I was dyslexic. The diagnosis came as a great relief. Finally, I knew I wasn't odd – I was struggling with a recognised condition. And at last I could get help for it!

Ways of coping

A new world opened up to me. Following suggestions and help from the experts in Newport, I discovered dyslexia-friendly books with bigger fonts and different coloured backgrounds. Apparently, a white background often makes things more difficult for dyslexics to read the text. Some people will find it easier reading words on a blue or pink background, while yellow is good for me.

The experts at the centre also explained how I could use my imagination, and rhyming, to help with reading and writing. I can never spell 'yacht,' so I've made up a rhyme – 'You Always Catch High Tide' – to help myself.

Technology has also been a big help to me in dealing with my dyslexia. I have voice software installed on my computer that reads emails I've written, or reads from pages on websites. And I'm now planning to buy a Kindle e-book that

“My teachers assumed I was scatty and accused me of being lazy...”

I could pay a support teacher to assist me. She helped me to organise my files and keep on top of all the paperwork from my course, so I could concentrate on the content of the lectures.

I now teach children, normally aged around seven and eight, but also some teenagers and adults with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and autistic spectrum conditions such as Asperger's syndrome. But if I'm suddenly given a lot of papers to read in two hours, I can still panic, as I know I will struggle.

I don't read for enjoyment very often, and when I do I have to be in a relaxed environment where I can really concentrate. So, reading – and enjoying – *Eat Pray Love* was a real personal milestone.

We're everywhere!

People can make the assumption that if you're dyslexic, you're not intelligent, but sufferers are often quite smart. We come from all walks of life and work in all sorts of jobs, and how each individual manages depends on what help and support they have along the way.

Everybody can succeed in learning to read and write, if they're taught the way that's right for them. ☺

We're dyslexic – not stupid!



Kara Tointon Former *EastEnders* actress Kara, 27, admits that having dyslexia meant she sometimes struggled to learn her lines before going on camera – but it hasn't stopped her subsequent stage and screen success!



Jamie Oliver Celebrity chef Jamie, 36, says having dyslexia as a child meant 'people just thought I was thick.' Last year, he set up a school for disadvantaged and dyslexic students as part of his reality TV show, *Jamie's Dream School*.



Keira Knightley *Pirates Of The Caribbean* actress and international screen star Keira, 26, was first diagnosed with dyslexia when she was six years old. 'I can read and write – badly – but I'm fine reading scripts,' she says.

also gives you a voice option, so I can really enjoy the latest novels.

It's very common for people who have been diagnosed with dyslexia to go on to teach others with learning difficulties, as we have strategies and ways of coping with the condition. And that's what I'm doing now. It took several years – and lots of determination – to cover the courses I needed to train as a dyslexia teacher, but it was worth it.

A student disability allowance meant

Could you – or your child – be dyslexic?

You might be if...

- * You take longer than is typical to read a page of a book, find it difficult to remember the sense of what you've read, have poor spelling or dislike reading aloud.
- * You get confused when you speak in public, and tend to mix up dates, times and appointments.
- * You find it difficult to punch the numbers on a phone, or get the numbers of your bus mixed up.

Your child might be if...

- * They have problems remembering their times tables and the alphabet, and have difficulty with tying shoelaces or dressing themselves.
- * They show poor concentration or an inability to remember the name of simple objects such as 'table' or 'chair'.

For support, information and a detailed adult dyslexia checklist, visit beingdyslexic.co.uk