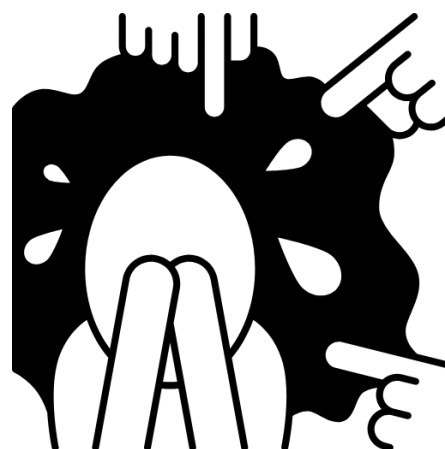


# My Learning Disability

*Tammy Roy*

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read the subheadings. What do you think the sequence of this story will be?
2. Share what you know about learning disabilities. What are some examples of learning disabilities and differences? What is your experience with them?



## As a Child: Pushed Around and Left Behind

I am learning disabled. All my life, it has been more than a long road.

When I was in school, kids treated me badly. They made fun of me and called me names. They also called me “teacher’s pet” because I had to have a lot of help. They pushed me around the playground and beat me up. When we did school projects in groups, no one wanted me. The teacher assigned me to a group, and all those kids would be mad to get me. They told the teacher they didn’t want me. They said I would slow them down.

When I got to high school, it was no better; it just got worse. I went to special classes, but I wasn’t learning anything. The class was for two hours a day, which wasn’t long enough to help me with my learning disability and all my schoolwork. The school kept moving me up, and I probably would have graduated, but by 10th grade, I couldn’t do it anymore. I was so behind. I was only at a 4th grade reading level.

## Paying Bills and Having Kids But Still Can’t Read

I was 18 years old, so I got a job and moved out of my foster home. I moved into my own apartment, but I could only work as a dishwasher. I had lots of bad times trying to pay the bills and the rent because I couldn’t write checks.

When I was 20 years old, I had my first baby. By the time I was 24, I had 3 kids. When my kids were babies, I had trouble learning how to take care of them. My mind was slower than everyone else’s. I couldn’t read about how to raise them. I struggled with all the paperwork for doctors’ and dentists’ appointments. I struggled to read important letters that came in the mail. I had to get on Social Security because I couldn’t keep a job.

## My Kids Had to Ask Others for Help

When my kids were in grade school, they were getting mad at me because I could not help them with their homework. They were smarter than me. I felt really bad. I cried myself to sleep most nights knowing that I couldn’t help them and made their life more difficult. They had to stay after school and ask classmates and teachers for help.

My kids did well in school, and they graduated. Thank goodness for other people who helped them. I wish I could say I helped them get there, but I did not.

## Finally Getting Help for Me

When I was 25 years old, I decided to go to Dover Adult Learning Center to continue my education, and I have been attending on and off for many years. I got tired of being so learning disabled and struggling so badly. I struggle with



memory and reading comprehension. I am now 58 years old, and I'm attending classes regularly. I need to keep my brain from losing what I've learned, and I want to try to learn more. I am moving up some grade levels, but I know because my learning is so bad that I will never get my high school diploma.

I'm thankful for being on Social Security because I would have been homeless with my kids long ago. I couldn't keep a job then or now. These days, it would be harder to get a job because you have to fill out job applications online, and I don't know how to work a computer. But I keep trying to learn. I am taking a class in computers for beginners.

I won't give up even though every day is still hard for me. I hope you don't give up either. You can get yourself out of bad stuff if you try. If I can do it, you can too. Just get help if you need it. It is better than living in misery.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to what the author says *and* what you can infer, what supports have been available to Tammy and what supports were missing?
2. What do you think about Tammy's advice at the end of the article?
3. Read and discuss the box on the right. What do you think of the two definitions of disability? What do you think of the phrase, "Nothing about us without us"?

Tammy Roy is a student at Dover Adult Learning Center in Dover, New Hampshire. She likes to take long walks and bike rides in the woods. She also enjoys camping and arts and crafts.



## What Is a Disability?

### Legal definition:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.

### Another definition:

Disability is a form of human diversity, but it is a type of diversity that is not valued by society. The impairment that a disabled person has may limit them in certain ways, but they are *more* limited by the barriers in the world that do not allow them full access to school, work, and community.

### Listen to people with disabilities!

"In education, a focus on inclusive spaces, high expectations for students with disabilities and training for all educators is essential. Listening to the perspectives of those with lived experience is key to understanding that disability is not a problem to solve but part of the human experience to embrace. 'Nothing about us without us' has real and consequential meaning."

– Keith Jones, disability activist

Source: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2022/confronting-ableism-on-the-way-to-justice>

