

JENNIFER COUËLLE • PHIL POULIN

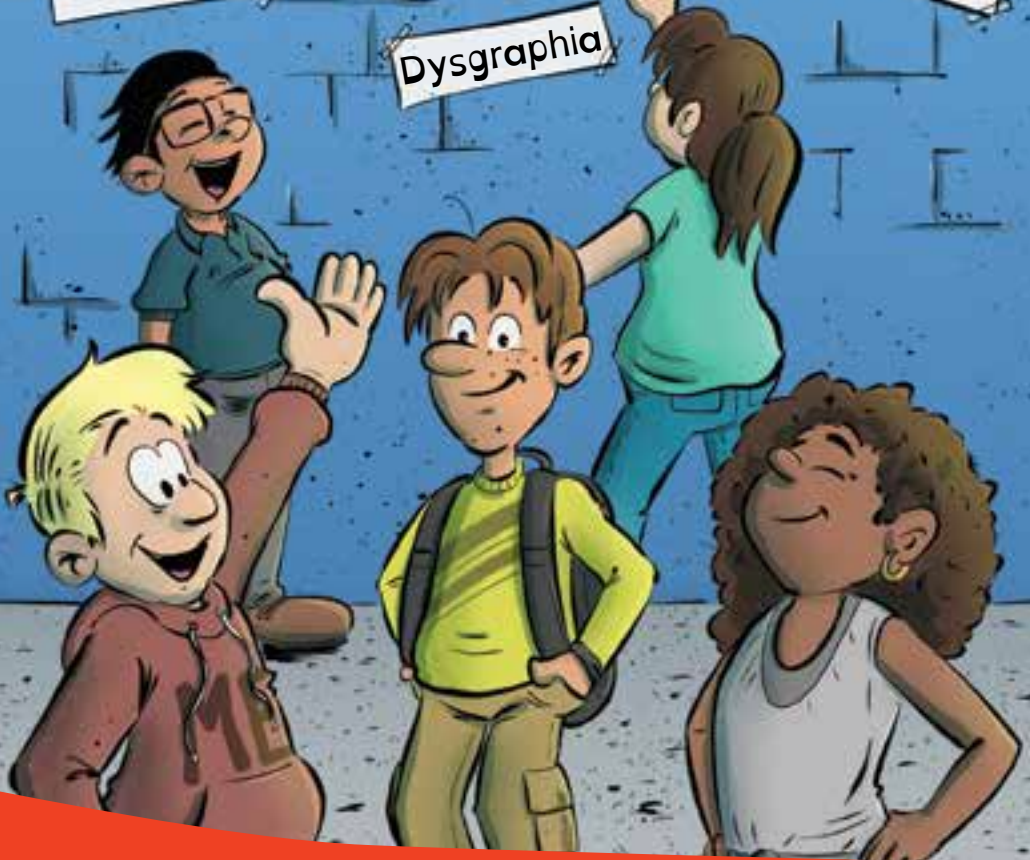
BORN TO BE **ME!**

15 portraits of perseverance
with learning disabilities

Dyslexia

Dysgraphia

Dyscalculia



Dominique & Friends

JENNIFER COUËLLE
PHIL POULIN

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with learning disabilities

With our compliments
Colette Charest
and Roger Casgrain

Dominique & Friends

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

When we were young parents, we dreamed of being able to open a special book, one that would show kids with learning disabilities that everything is possible!

True stories of amazing people fill the book that you are holding. They overcame many challenges to accomplish their dreams. Some may mention difficult moments, but you will see that each path is filled with hope.

Come discover their unique stories of bravery. They have faced obstacles that made them stumble, but each time they pulled themselves up, stronger for the effort. They faced adversity, yet they all found their own way. And they are proud of who they have become.

So never forget that you can achieve your goals and flourish in unsuspected ways! We hope these stories will inspire you to keep on going the way they have inspired us.



Colette Charest and Roger Casgrain

Current and Past Board Members

Learning Disabilities Institute

and

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

15 portraits of perseverance with learning disabilities

Yukon

Northwest Territories

Nunavut

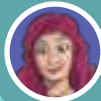
British Columbia

Alberta

Manitoba



p. 86



p. 64



p. 96



p. 20



p. 102



Ontario

Québec

Newfoundland and Labrador

New Brunswick

Prince Edward Island

Nova Scotia



p. 108



p. 52



p. 80



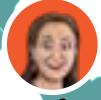
p. 58



p. 14



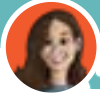
p. 74



p. 8



p. 36



p. 30



p. 42

TABLE OF CONTENTS



AMANDA DAVIS 8



CHARLINE LEBLANC14



MICHAEL KARRAS..... 20



ELISA BLASI 30



MICHAEL NEARY 36



EMYLIE BONNEVILLE..... 42



DESIREE CHAKER52



JEAN JURDANT 58



KATE SHERIDAN 64



MICHAEL SIMA74



MYLÈNE PAQUETTE 80



OWEN CAISSIE 86



SARAH FAIRBAIRN 96



SKY BRIDGES 102



WAQAS BAGGIA 108



FIND YOUR PASSION 26



THE BRIGHT SIDE 48



TIPS TO TRY (PART ONE) 70



TIPS TO TRY (PART TWO) 92



NEVER GIVE UP 114



GLOSSARY 118



ABOUT THE LEARNING
DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION
OF CANADA (LDAC) 126



AMANDA DAVIS

Occupation: Full-time nursing school student.

Age: 20.

Hometown: St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Was born there, grew up there, and is happily living there today.

Cool activity: Does presentations for kids with learning disabilities to help them stay motivated and persevere.

Amazing: Plays multiple musical instruments.



Something that motivates you to carry on

Connecting with animals. Pets really make a difference. They're there to listen and cheer you up and lick the tears off your face.



The best advice you've been given

Find out who you are, find out the way you learn and what your strengths are, and focus on that.



What are you most proud of?

Of my hard work and of where I am: in one of the hardest university programs to get into, and I got into it right out of high school. I'm on track to graduate, so I'll be 21 years old and a full-time nurse.

Amanda, how would you describe your learning disability?

I have more than one! I have specific learning disabilities in reading, writing, spelling, and math, and I've been diagnosed with ADHD.

I often say I'm a Bingo because I've got them all!

(Along with ADHD, Amanda was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.)

When I'm writing, what I want to say doesn't always come out the way I want it to, and when I see words that are similar, like "thought" and "though," I sometimes have trouble distinguishing between the two. I often need more time, because it takes me a little longer to understand when the teacher talks, or understand what people are saying when I'm in a conversation.

When did you know you were different?

I started knowing early on. When I was in elementary school, I was taken out of class quite a bit to do some reading and writing and take

my tests. I was also given a keyboard device to work with, and **I didn't understand why I was getting this keyboard when everyone else was writing with a pencil.**

My parents would take me to tutoring during the week, and I would go to the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador for tutoring during the school year, and sometimes during the summer as well, so I kind of knew I was different...

Elementary school wasn't so bad. **In junior high school it got a bit more challenging because people realized I was different.**

When I would be taken out of school to do my tests with the extra accommodation, I would have to walk across the class, right in front of everybody, and they would shout, "That's not fair, why is she going?" It took a big toll on me. People thought I was getting special treatment and were looking at me differently.

How did it make you feel?

I didn't have many friends growing up. I had some here and there in elementary school, but in junior high I struggled with friend groups. I never really had a solid person by my side, and I found that hard. I was trying to do so much to get people to like me, so maybe that pushed them away.

Perhaps me trying too hard to have friends was because I didn't want people to notice my differences. And that caused me to struggle. I had anxiety.

What are some of your current challenges? How do you overcome them?

I have good days and bad days, and sometimes I'm simply exhausted. I'm in nursing school right now and I study hours and hours a day just to

be able to pass my courses. When my girlfriends who are in nursing with me text and ask me to go out, I usually can't. They can do that, because they are able to leave their desks and take a break from studying and go and enjoy the night and socialize, but I can't. It takes me so long to process information... So, I just keep at it.

How did you find your passion?

It came from my challenges. Knowing what I went through, not only with my learning disabilities, but also with the difficulties in finding friends, gave me the motivation to help others. I want people to know they have a support system.

I think my number one goal will always be to make the world a more inclusive place.

Motto:

**Stay on the path
that makes you *YOU!***



CHARLINE LEBLANC

Occupation: As Chief Internal Auditor for a bigwig insurance company, Charline makes

sure that policies and laws are respected within the firm.

Age: 52.

Hometown: Born and grew up in Richibucto, attended university in Moncton, and now lives in Dieppe. What do these three cities have in common other than Charline? They're all in New Brunswick!

One of the best seats in town: Charline sits on the board of Atlantic Wellness, a not-for-profit organization that gives free access to youth and young adults struggling with mental health issues.



The best advice you've been given

Always forge ahead. If you fall, get back up and carry on.



The greatest qualities your friends attribute to you

Being friendly and helpful. I like to help, probably because I need so much help myself; I need to have things explained to me.



Your source of inspiration

My father had muscular dystrophy. He struggled all his life and was in a wheelchair, so I grew up never giving up, because he never gave up on life and he was always positive. So I've always persevered—it came naturally.

Charline, how would you describe your learning disability?

I struggle with dyslexia and dyscalculia. I have difficulties with certain letters, like B and D, and with small words, like certain conjunctions. I forget a lot of them. I have difficulty reading;

I need to read a sentence many times before I understand its meaning.

When I was young, I couldn't do addition or subtraction. Still today, I need to count on my hands or use a calculator, because I can't do it in my head. Having a hard time reading made problem solving in math class really difficult for me, and I didn't pass my grade 10 math. I had to go to summer school, which meant driving 45 minutes each way for 6 weeks to redo my math course in Moncton.

When did you know you were different? How did it make you feel?

It would have been in grade 1. I almost didn't pass grade 1 because of my reading, so my mom did some tutoring with me every evening, and every evening I remember crying, asking why I couldn't go play with my friends. It took a whole lot of work. And I knew I was different because none of my friends had to do that.

It made me feel kind of sad that I had these difficulties compared to my friends.

At the time, everyone just told me that I was different and that I was going to have problems reading all my life. I'm 52 and still have those problems. But I never had an official diagnosis—it wasn't done then. I eventually figured out I was dyslexic and had dyscalculia because I read a lot about it. **And many years later, when my son was diagnosed with both dyslexia and dyscalculia, I read his evaluation and thought, "That's me!"**

What are some of your current challenges? How do you overcome them?

Since I'm aware of my limitations, I make sure I have all the tools I need to be successful in my work. I've learned to prepare myself ahead of time and ask lots of questions. If I'm writing something, I'll ask someone who is really good at writing to read what I wrote and correct it, and that's always helpful.

Even if I'm struggling, I'll try to learn

different ways of doing things.

I look for ways to get past

the problems and am always

receptive to feedback.

What are you most proud of?

I'm so glad I didn't give up. I'm proud of being open enough to ask for help. It took me a long time to accept that I could ask for it. When you're at a young age and you continually have to struggle and need help, it wears you out and brings your self-confidence down. I even was treated for depression a few years ago and I'm really better now, even if I still suffer from anxiety.

Motto:

**No matter what, don't
give up!**



MICHAEL KARRAS

Occupation: Vice-principal of Lord Asquith School, a pre-kindergarten to grade 12 public school, just west of Saskatoon.

Age: 47.

Hometown: Born in Moosomin, Saskatchewan; grew up on a farm in Rocanville, Sask.; moved to Regina, Sask.; to Calgary, Alberta, then back to Saskatchewan.

Current City: Saskatoon.

What he kept best: The goal! He was goalkeeper from age 14 to 20 for the Saskatchewan Provincial Soccer League.



The greatest qualities your friends attribute to you

Being a bit crazy. I'll do anything for fun.



The best advice you've been given

Not to quit. To keep trying, to keep getting up.



Why did you decide to become a teacher?

I think that having all the experiences I had as a child, going through different schools and troubles with teachers oriented me toward the education field. When I started university, I kind of edged toward educational psychology classes, trying to figure out what was wrong and how I could fix it. That's how I ended up becoming a special education teacher, which I was before becoming a vice-principal.

Michael, how would you describe your learning disability?

I have dyslexia and ADHD. I think that the most difficult thing for me is my spelling; for instance, when I can't remember how to spell simple words, especially 3- or 4-letter words like "was." I'll be writing an email, typing all kinds of stuff, and then I'll have to type the word "was," and I can't... I'm completely lost, I can't sound it out, I can't do anything to even figure out what the first letter of "was" is. I get so stumped and frustrated.

But there are also good parts to this. I laugh and joke and make fun of myself, and I can act quickly. **I'm generally jolly, friendly, and outgoing, and this is partially due to the ADHD and dyslexia; a coping skill I developed over the years.**

What are some of your current challenges? How do you overcome them?

Spelling, reading, constantly forgetting things... In my place of work, for example, when people ask me for help with something, I will tell them straight up that I have a learning disability and ADHD. I'll let them know that if I say yes to something, I'm agreeing that I will do it, but that by the time I get back to my office, I will have forgotten that I said yes... Then an old colleague of mine got an idea: I get parents, students, and teachers to write out their requests on a whiteboard in my office that hangs on the wall across from my desk.

I tell people,

"All I need is for you to do this, and

I'll help you do what you need to do."

What are you most proud of?

Of where I'm at. I never thought I'd be married to such a wonderful woman or have such wonderful kids and such a great job.

I had a terrible time in elementary and high school. The teachers made me read in front of the class, then mocked me. They used my work as examples of what not to do, posted it on the wall to share with other classes—just really humiliating stuff. I'd even get the ruler slapped across my hands. When I was in grade 3 or 4, we moved to Calgary. When we went to register for the school near our home, my parents informed them I had a learning disability and the school said they'd take my brother and my sister but that they didn't take "my kind." We ended up registering in another school, and I was put in a segregated program with kids on feeding tubes, kids who needed one-on-one care. **So, that's why I'm proud of where I'm at.**

How did you manage to persevere?

When I was 21, I was asked to discontinue at the University of Saskatchewan. I was pretty depressed, abusing substances, and causing a lot of problems, and my grades were down. Then my mom discovered a program run by the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan. It was a pilot project for adults with learning disabilities and/or ADHD, to help get them back to school or into the workforce. There was a teacher there who knew exactly what to do to get me back on track: **I learned how to read within 6 months!** I ended up going back to university to get a bachelor of education with special teaching qualifications.

Motto:

“I don’t have one, but the kids here call me Care Bear, because I walk around looking fierce, but they know I’m not angry and that I care about them.”