

A MOTHER'S POINT OF VIEW- Breda Jovanović

MY NAME IS BREDA. MY DAUGHTER BRINA ANA IS FOURTEEN AND A DYSLEXIC.

LET ME START WITH A FEW FACTS ABOUT MY DAUGHTER. BRINA WAS BORN ONE MONTH PREMATURE, AS A BABY SHE HAD MOTOR SKILLS DIFFICULTIES, SHE COULDN' SIT, CRAWL OR CLIMB. WITH THE HELP OF PHYSIOTHERAPY IN THE REHABILITATION CENTRE SOCA IN LJUBLJANA, SHE OVERCAME THESE DIFFICULTIES AND EVENTUALLY TOOK HER FIRST STEPS AT 15 MONTHS.

WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH DYSLEXIA WAS IN THE FIRST GRADE. BRINA WAS ILL AND HAD NOT ATTENDED SCHOOL FOR TWO WEEKS. AT THAT TIME NUMERALS 7,8 AND 9 WERE INTRODUCED. DESPITE MUCH PRACTICE SHE HAD NOT FULLY MASTERED THEM UNTIL THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND GRADE. WHEN READING, SHE WAS LOSING OR NOT RECOGNIZING LETTERS BUT SINCE I WAS ASSURED BY HER TEACHER, THAT SHE WAS A CAPABLE AND DISCIPLINED PUPIL, I HAD NO IDEA OF WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN FURTHER ON.

BRINA TOLD ME THAT SHE FOUND SCHOOL TO BE NO TROUBLE, BECAUSE SHE ALWAYS DID HER BEST, BUT THEN SHE STARTED HAVING HEADACHES AND SHE SEID SHE FELT COLD AND THIRSTY.

IN THE THIRD GRADE ( in 2008 ) WE BOTH ATTENDED A READING WORKSHOP AT THIS SCHOOL. I POINTED OUT MY DAUGHTER' S DIFFICULTIES REGARDING HER READING, TO THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR AND ALSO HER MENTOR AT THIS WORKSHOP. SHE ALSO NOTICED THE SAME PROBLEMS BUT TOOK NO FURTHER STEPS TOWARDS FINDING A SOLUTION. I WAS HOWEVER LENT SOME JOURNALS AT THE BRAVO ASSOCIATION ( Dyslexic Association of Slovenia ) WHERE I READ ABOUT DYSLEXIA AND RELATED PROBLEMS. I COULDN'T BELIEVE THIS WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE ( FALLS, BUMPS, ORIENTATION PROBLEMS ( LEFT- RIGHT, AUTUMN - SPRING ), KNOWING THE TIME, SWAPPING OR NOT RECOGNIZING LETTERS OR NUMBERS, READING AND NOT UNDERSTANDING WRITTEN TESTS.

DUE TO HER CLUMSINESS SHE FELL OFF HER BIKE AT THE AGE OF NINE AND PERMANENTLY INJURED HER ANKLE. SHE WILL NEED AN OPERATION ONCE SHE STOPS GROWING.

GRADE FOUR WAS EVEN MORE CHALLENGING AND IT WAS VITAL TO FIND A WAY FOR BRINA TO MEMORIZE WHAT SHE HAD LEARNT IN SCHOOL. SINCE I WAS AWARE OF THE FACT THAT COLOURS WERE HER STRONG POINT, I BEGAN CREATING THINKING MIND MAPS. SHE THEN MARKED THEM IN DIFFERENT COLOURS. IT WAS EASIER BUT STILL VERY TIRING.

THE DIFFICULT TIME FOR BRINA BEGAN IN THE HIGHER GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL. IT WAS TOUGH FOR HER TO UNDERSTAND, THAT DESPITE ALL THE HARD WORK AND THE EFFORT SHE PUT IN TO WHAT SHE DID, SHE STILL COULDN'T DO HER WRITTEN TESTS PROPERLY. ORAL EXAMS, OF COURSE, WERE NO TROUBLE AT ALL. IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT SOME TEACHERS, ALTHOUGH ONLY A SMALL NUMBER, RECOGNIZED HER DISABILITY. I HAVE PERSONALLY SPOKEN TO MANY OF THEM ON TEACHER- PARENT MEETINGS, BUT THE SITUATION FOR BRINA REMAINED MORE OR LESS THE SAME. SHE HAD EXTENDED TIME IN HER WRITTEN TESTS. I WASN'T VERY SATISFIED WITH THE ATTITUDE OF SOME TEACHERS. SADLY SOME OF THEM EVEN MADE HARSH REMARKS.

IT WAS DURING THIS PERIOD THAT HER IMMUNE SYSTEM BECAME FRAIL, SHE HAD CONSTANT HEADACHES, WAS ALWAYS TIRED AND SLEEPY AND HER SELF ESTEEM BEGAN TO CRUMBLE. ON THE OTHER HAND HER TEACHERS ASSURED, THAT BRINA WAS A MODEL STUDENT, DILLIGENT, WELL MANNERED AND IN NO WAY A PROBLEM. OF COURSE IT WAS EXPECTED OF HER TO HAVE INFORMED THEM ABOUT EXTENDED TIME FOR WRITTEN TESTS.

AT THIS STAGE I SHOULD PERHAPS POINT OUT THAT MY DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL MATES HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF HER DYSLEXIA WHATSOEVER. SHE HAS NOT OR WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HER CONDITION IN ANY WAY.

AT HOME THINGS WERE BUSY. WE SAT, WE WROTE MIND MAPS...AND WE READ A LOT. MANY TIMES, MY HUSBAND, ARRIVING FROM WORK AT 7 PM, WOULD FIND ME IN BRINA'S ROOM. I WAS STILL IN THE SAME CLOTHES, NOT HAVING HAD TIME TO CHANGE. WE DEALT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AS BEST AS WE COULD KNEW.

THE MAIN REASON, WE TOOK THINGS A STEP FURTHER, AND SOUGHT COUNSELLING OUTSIDE SCHOOL WAS A SENIOR TEACHER. HER METHODS AND PRESENCE, HER UNFAIRNESS AND INCONSISTENCY, DERAILED BRINA TO SUCH EXTENT THAT SHE EXPERIENCED SEVERE HEADACHES BEFORE AND AFTER HER CLASS. MANY TIMES SHE WOULD LEAVE SCHOOL EARLY. WHEN LEAVING FOR SCHOOL IN THE MORNING SHE HAD EPISODES OF VOMITING AND DIARRHEA.

THE HELP CENTRE IN KOPER ASSISTED BRINA WITH AN EXPERIENCED SPECIAL NEEDS PEDAGOG. HER THERAPIES INCLUDED FAMILY AS A WHOLE AND BRINA IN PARTICULAR. HER CONFIDENCE BOOSTED WITH THE HELP OF PRACTICE TESTS AND CONVERSATION. BRINA FINALLY SPOKE OUT ABOUT HER PROBLEMS. THIS WAY WE GAINED AN EVALUATION AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT FURTHER WORK WITH BRINA. DURING THIS TIME SHE WENT THROUGH DIFFERENT FORMAL EVALUATIONS, TO DETERMINE THE STAGE OF DYSLEXIA AND OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZE HER ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES.

FOR US AS A FAMILY THE HARD WORK CONTINUES. WE STILL TRY NEW AND ALTERNATE LEARNING METHODS. WE FEEL LUCKY THAT OUR DAUGHTER IS SUCH AN EXTREMELY HARD WORKING AND MORAL GIRL, WITH SET LIFE GOALS.

BRINA NOW HAS A NEW THERAPIST IN LJUBLJANA . SHE IS SPECIALIZED IN TREATING DYSLEXICS OF ALL AGES. TOGETHER THEY DEVELOPED A DAILY, LIFE LONG THERAPY THAT INCLUDES MORNING STRETCHING EXERCISES, LOWER BACK MASSAGE AND EYE EXERCISES.. WE TAKE EXTRA CARE OF HER DIET AND SHE TAKES DAILY VITAMIN B , OMEGA 3 AND PROBIOTICS SUPPLEMENTS. FURTHERMORE SHE STUDIES WHILE SITTING ON A BALL, READS IN A ROCKING CHAIR AND TAKES DAILY HOUR LONG WALKS (GREEN COLOUR). WE INTRODUCED BRINA TO PLAYING TENNIS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE HER MOTOR SKILLS, BUT DUE TO HER ANKLE INJURY, SHE HAD TO QUIT.

HER LIFE OUTSIDE SCHOOL IS VERY WELL ORGANIZED.

BRINA'S FATHER, WHO IS ALSO A DYSLEXIC, HELPS HER WITH MATHS, HER UNCLE WITH PHYSICS, MATEJA HELPS WITH ENGLISH AND ITALIAN AND I TAKE CARE OF THE REST. THE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY ARE ENORMOUS. HER FATHER AND I ARE VERY PROUD THAT WE SUCCEEDED IN RAISING HER INTO A RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL. WE, AS A FAMILY, ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE FACT, THAT WE CANNOT JUST EXPECT OTHERS TO DEAL WITH US. LUCKILY WE ARE FINANCIALLY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING OUR CHILD WITH ALL THE HELP SHE NEEDS.

EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS SHOULD CONSIDER, THAT NOT ALL PARENTS CAN OR KNOW HOW TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN.

TEACHERS SHOULD ENJOY WORK WITH CHILDREN AND SEE IT AS A MISSION. THIS WAY THEY WOULD DETECT CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS MORE EASILY AND REFER THEM TO FURTHER COUNSELLING, IF NECESSARY.

SADLY THIS WAS NOT THE CASE WITH US.

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM AND THE MOST WORK FOR TEACHERS, IS WITH US PARENTS. MANY OF THEM WRONGLY ASSUME OR DEMAND OF SCHOOLS TO EDUCATE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THERE IS MUCH TALK ABOUT RIGHTS AND NONE ABOUT RESPONSIBILITIES.

I AM FULLY AWARE THAT TEACHERS AND TRAINED PROFESSIONALS ARE JUST PEOPLE, BUT THE FUTURE OF YOUNG LIVES DEPEND ON YOU.

BE ALERT AND LISTEN, ESPECIALLY TO THOSE SILENT CHILDREN AND PARENTS THAT COME TO YOU, JUST TO BE HEARD.