

Preface

I'm going to start this book by introducing myself, because having an understanding of the woman I have become today will help you to make sense of my story. My name is Onyinyewchukwu Jakirichi Ekpereamaka Chiatuogo Udokporo, MA – but you can call me Onyinye (pronounced: O-nin-yay). I'm from London and I'm of Nigerian (Igbo) heritage.

By the age of 22 I had completed two degrees. My undergraduate degree is in Religion, Politics and Society and my postgraduate degree is in Education, Policy and Society. Both degrees are from King's College London where I received the first ever Student of the Year award, and I was named as one of the top 10 Black Students in the UK by Rare Recruitment, sponsored by the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford.¹

Aged 12 I started a tutoring business, and have since built it into an online tuition platform and EdTech software distributor known as **Enrich Learning**.

I was inspired to start the business following my successful attempt, through studying really hard myself, at taking various 11+ exams, which granted me a place at the leading charitable school, Christ's Hospital.²

I'm an entrepreneur, education expert, factual TV presenter, writer and pioneer of social mobility. I'm deeply passionate about creating greater access to opportunity using education as a tool to level the playing field. As well as all the above, I'm a proud, black, dyslexic woman.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia aged 11. I have always found reading, writing and spelling challenging. I don't come from a background where neurodivergence and learning differences are openly discussed. My saving grace was the fact that my parents have always had an open mind.

I found my primary school years quite hard. While in many ways I did well academically, every school

report came with a “but” that was almost always linked to my inability to read, write and spell properly. I enjoyed studying, but it exhausted me in a way that my fellow peers could not relate to. It was especially obvious when I did homework with my three brothers.

Kachi, who is only 13 months younger than me, would fly through his homework tasks. The letters of the words for our weekly spelling tests effortlessly rolled off his tongue while I anxiously stood next to him, with beads of sweat trickling down the sides of my face as I tried to keep up. As the eldest child at home, I found homework both tiresome and embarrassing. At the time, academia for me was always accompanied with what felt like a permanent struggle. I am fortunate to have parents who did and who continue to do everything they can to support me, even if they’re not quite sure what the problem is.

Despite being members of a community that considers learning differences and neurodivergence to be taboo topics (which I say more about later in this book), my mum and dad strived to educate themselves on these matters, and in doing so,

empowered me to believe that dyslexia is one of my many gifts. I built courage from seeing my parents positively embrace my dyslexia diagnosis.

My mum is especially vocal about it. I recall hearing her on the phone to other mums using my dyslexia story to encourage and uplift them. My story became a beacon of hope for members of the community that I am from. This book is my attempt to inspire and educate readers about the beauty of neurodivergence. I will also tell you about the pitfalls I have experienced with dyslexia, and will share the tips I created and used to overcome them.

Before I go any further, it is important that you understand why I have written this book. Throughout my life I have been told, directly and indirectly, that dyslexia is found in particular people. At the beginning of my dyslexic journey, I was shown successful, middle-aged, white men who were so far removed from my world, but who happened to be dyslexic. I was expected to relate to them and to use them as a source of inspiration. The problem was that, at 11 years old, I simply could not see how Richard Branson, Jamie Oliver

and Albert Einstein were like me. Giving me such examples limited my mindset – at that time I had no interest in becoming a business magnate, a chef or a deceased scientist. I just wanted to be shown that dyslexia can be found in someone like me, and that it wasn't just “okay” but something to be proud of.

I wrote this book because I want people to know that dyslexia can be found in people of every colour, creed or circumstance. Dyslexia can be found in every community, culture and social class. Being dyslexic and, more generally, being neurodivergent, is not taboo. With dyslexia I have been able to achieve more than anyone could have ever predicted. In telling my story, I hope to inspire and encourage you. Dyslexia is something to be embraced. It is often seen as a burden when in actual fact it is something of a blessing that comes with so many gifts. You simply have to learn **how** to uncover those gifts, and it just so happens that this book is my attempt to teach you that.

Notes

1. www.kcl.ac.uk/news/kings-student-named-uks-top-ten-black-university-students
2. Christ's Hospital is a remarkable school; it is the UK's leading charitable school and largest bursary charity. The school was established in 1552 and provides free or substantially reduced cost places to over 630 of its 900 pupils each year – this is more than any other organization in the UK.

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