

Maxine's story

From an early age, there was a sense something might not be quite right with me. I was an exceptionally premature baby and needed several life-saving operations. At primary school, although I was an avid reader, children who hadn't spoken to me thought I was stupid. At 11, my language skills were four years ahead of my age but my non-verbal skills four years behind.

By sixth-form, I was building websites and writing my first pieces of journalism - unpaid - but I couldn't learn to drive or hold down a simple Saturday job. Interviews turned my body and brain to jelly, and I left a job in a supermarket because I couldn't learn the till. I was predicted top grades at A Level but told not to apply to Oxbridge because of my bad GCSE Math's and Science grades. I chose Durham instead, after interviewing a glamorous older alumna for a profile.



It was through my early journalism that I began to really sense something was wrong. Interviewing people about their lives brought home to me how things others found easy or fun weren't for me, and vice versa. I became most attracted to people who had things I thought I lacked, and who found it hard to warm to me because of my insecurity. At 19 I had a breakdown and was treated for anxiety. Two years later, while studying at Durham, I was diagnosed with dyspraxia, and suddenly the unnamed "it" I'd been struggling with had a name.

After rashly taking a graduate job which didn't suit me because of my dyspraxia I became a freelance writer. Writing and speaking publicly about my experiences in the workplace also led me into dyspraxia awareness training. I've grown from a teenager who failed an interview for a weekend job stamping books at a village library for being "too nervous", to giving presentations to multinational companies, and appearing on television. Life still isn't plain sailing, but I've met some remarkable people and had some extraordinary experiences which I wouldn't swap for anything.