

# A Struggle, then Relief, to Graduate

Dayne Guest is a tall, popular, athletic 18-year-old with model good looks. He graduated on June 6 with hundreds of other seniors from Western School of Technology after enjoying the typical high school experiences of proms, activities with friends and even a stand-out season on the football team.

But academically, high school was a struggle beyond the usual pursuit of good grades and a college education. Dayne struggled with a learning disability that his mom, Pamela Guest, believes is undiagnosed dyslexia. Her determination to move her son past the lack of understanding and resources necessary to address his dyslexia required her to spend hours of one-on-one time with him at home after working a full-time job as a data analyst with a nonprofit.

"I struggled with reading comprehension. I'd forget the info I just read," says Dayne. "I started acting up a lot. I didn't get the support in school. My mom was my support out of the classroom."

Dayne was happy to cross the stage, equating graduation to getting out of jail. He is working a construction apprenticeship, but feels college is "a missed opportunity." He says, "I feel I missed out on an opportunity to go to college." He believes he was making some headway with the research-based Wilson Reading System that he began in February. The program is designed for students with reading and spelling difficulties in grades 2 through adulthood, but Dayne didn't begin taking Wilson until his senior year.

The disability continues to hinder his reading and math comprehension, kept him from getting on the varsity football team after earning MVP on the junior varsity team in his sophomore year, and getting into Western Tech's work study plumbing program after doing well in the practical part.

As an auditory learner who comprehends from hearing words read aloud, Dayne made excuses when teachers asked him to read along. They decided that he just wasn't working to his potential and many times would grade him with low marks.

As early as kindergarten, Guest noticed subtle signs that maybe Dayne's learning was delayed. But it was comparisons most moms made with their children, such as when some students could write what they had for lunch on the blackboard and Dayne could not. Teachers told her that boys were less advanced learners and that sounded reasonable. The school system told her that students must be two years behind before they could receive certain resources and that did not make sense to her.

Gifted at playing the piano, Dayne also recalls when he could repeat a song his grandmother



**Dayne Guest and his mom, Pamela Guest, share a light moment on graduation day after a long struggle with a learning disability and his studies from Western Technical High School in Catonsville.**

played, but could not read sheet music. His mom remembers in ninth grade when he came home and announced, "I think I'm dyslexic."

Forseeing the challenges ahead, Guest, a resident of Lochearn, opted to send Dyane to a magnet school instead of his zoned Milford Mill. Western Tech had a plumbing program and she knew he was good with his hands. "I wanted to help him get into a trade that offered sustainable, high-paying work. I knew mechanical construction or plumbing would be good."

Dayne was a high performer in plumbing. He could measure pipes and do the practical math associated with plumbing. But he couldn't get work study because he couldn't do the spelling and basic fractions and math.

A talented athlete, could not make the team in his senior year because he did not earn the required 2.0 grade point average to play. "We would study for five hours and the next day he would not know what I was talking about," Guest says. "He worked so hard but it wasn't clicking and so he couldn't play. That's when I knew he had a problem, because he wanted it so bad but couldn't do the work."

Still, she had to depend on teachers to intervene, for example to nudge him to focus and to make sure they left her notes about his assignments and upcoming tests. She wanted them to allow some flexibility when he forgot to turn in the homework he worked hours on but forgot to bring in to class. She says she constantly had to email teachers to ask "Have you read Dayne's individual education plan? Do you understand his needs? Are you willing to

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—PAMELA GUEST

help me help him?" It was hit and miss. A few were helpful, many were not consistently supportive or helpful at all.

Not every student has the finances to attend private schools like the \$31,000-per-year Odyssey School in Stevenson and the \$33,000-per-year Jemicy School in Owings Mills, which educate students with dyslexia with a student-to-teacher ratio of less than 4-to-1. They must depend on teachers, accountability from the school system, and parents who can work with them at home, navigate any available services and resources, and be an effective and consistent advocate on their student's behalf.

"It should be his right to have an appropriate education," Guest says.

Fortunately, she serves on advocacy groups, such as Special Education Citizens' Advisory Committee and Decoding Dylexia Maryland, Special Education State Advisory Council and is a parent education support counselor. She is able to navigate the system better than many parents who have students with disabilities.

What is needed? "We need to have something in place to identify the problem and then evaluate to see if it is working," Guest says. She shared her views with the Board of Education recently, testifying that the school system must be more proactive and supportive of kids with dyslexia. They can't allow kids to fall between the cracks, and they cannot be ashamed to use the word dyslexia instead of identified learning disability.

Guest and her husband have five children, and another son is "differently-able." Her 22-year-old autistic son Dylan, a gifted artist whose professional-level paintings and drawings since middle school decorate the family's home, graduated last month from Maryland Institute College of Art.

Guest has also authored a book about Dylan, "Artistic: The Art of Redefining a Label." She recently launched a quarterly online magazine called [IEP Magazine, Individualized Education Perspective](#). The goal, she says, is to bridge existing information gaps and assist parents and educators in navigating the educational challenges and obstacles faced by differently-abled students.

Dayne's goal is to eventually attend a community college with the support of Wilson. But for now, he is doing work he enjoys as an apprentice putting up drywall, repairing concrete and doing other home renovation tasks.

His advice is this: Advocate for yourself and be ready to speak up."