I Am Me!

"Louise Baker" (with Margaret B. Rawson)

"Scott isn't stupid. But it took a smart teacher to recognize it." Louise could not read the advertisement widely published by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in the interests of children with learning disabilities, but a friend said, "Hey, Lou! This sounds like you!"

Louise sent a letter to the company. Part of her letter looked like Fig. 1. She sent also the friend's translation of her letter in typed, correctly spelled form, saying, "knowing my penmanship, mirror imaging and spelling are hard to read." The words are her own, characteristically well-used.

Dear Sirs,

I was showed the advertisement in the National Geographic about Learning Disabilities...

I am so empathetic this problem is thing being brought to the public attention....

The patient is a little one who has... dyslexia......

I have had a program trained in the... dyslexia.

I have not been reading... I have been... dyslexia...

I have been reading... dyslexia... dyslexia... dyslexia... dyslexia...

Fig. 1. Part of Louise Baker's first letter to Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, January 12, 1973. Note 2, reversed, appears to be 6; line 7 is written from right to left. See text for "translation."
Dear Sirs: Like Scott, I have a learning disability which has been given the fancy name of dyslexia.

I am so glad that this problem is finally being brought to the public's attention. This problem can be found in every school and every class and yet it goes unnoticed in a lot of cases. If a child has been diagnosed as dyslexic he will be extremely lucky if his school has a program for dyslexics. I went through 12 years of school not being able to read the simplest sentence and understand anything I had read. I couldn't write like the other kids, nor could I sit still for one minute. Last year when I graduated from high school I still couldn't read, tell time, say the alphabet, or tell left from right. . . .

I was lucky: someone [the next summer] took time to find out what was wrong. Too many children go undiagnosed and the school doesn't provide them with the proper attention.

I have written a report about myself and how I managed to go through school. . . . The report is in the process of being typed up. . . . I would be glad to send you a copy and would be pleased if you would be interested in reading it. . . .

Just as she was finishing high school, she had been discovered by a knowledgeable "specialist" who helped her to gain acceptance by a state university with exceptional understanding. She reported, "... They work with each student individually at the level at which he is. They provide tutors. These tutors are your friends; you can talk to them. These people are somebody who cares what happens to you and are interested in what you do, feel or say. . . . Take for example my writing. You remember what my penmanship was like before? They work you hard but the results are rewarding."* (Fig. 2.)

It was suggested that her paper be published, to which she replied:

I received your letter and it held some joyful news. I had thought of publication after so many people have read my report and suggested that such action be taken. [The paper had been circulated in the psychology class, at the teacher's request.] The types of magazines I prefer it to be published in are magazines concerning learning disabilities . . . or a maga-

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*We have tried, directly and indirectly, to learn more about this program. Perhaps the people at the university fear an unmanageable inundation of applications. Of course, we must decline to identify the university unless they give permission.