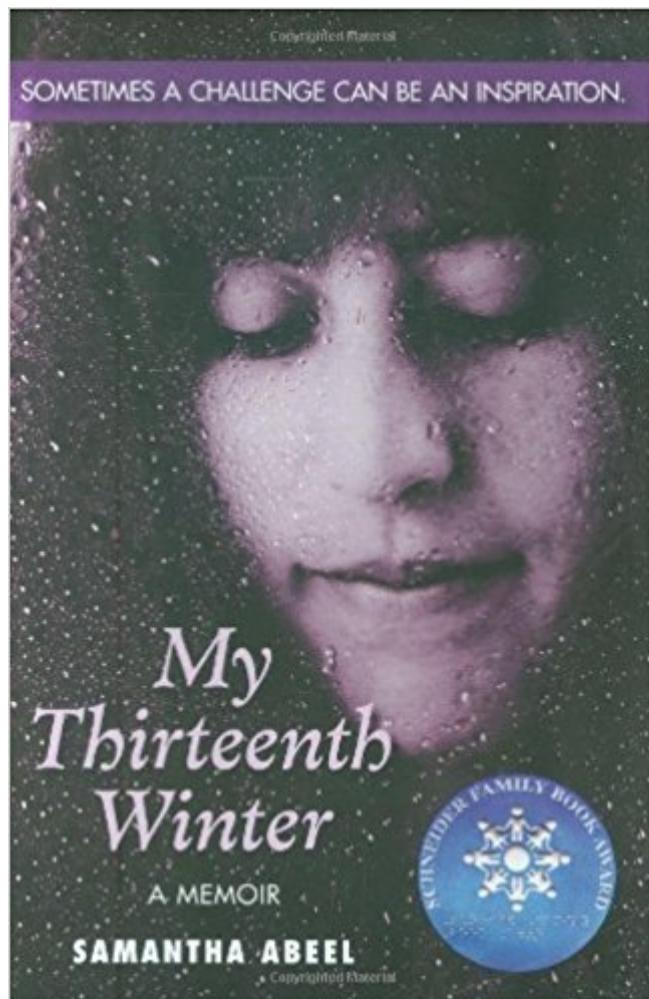


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# My Thirteenth Winter: A Memoir



## **Synopsis**

In this beautiful and chilling memoir, twenty-five-year-old Samantha Abeel describes her struggles with a math-related learning disability, and how it forced her to find inner strength and courage. Samantha Abeel couldn't tell time, remember her locker combination, or count out change at a checkout counter -- and she was in seventh grade. For a straight-A student like Samantha, problems like these made no sense. She dreaded school, and began having anxiety attacks. In her thirteenth winter, she found the courage to confront her problems -- and was diagnosed with a learning disability. Slowly, Samantha's life began to change again. She discovered that she was stronger than she'd ever thought possible -- and that sometimes, when things look bleakest, hope is closer than you think.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 9 Up--Abeel writes of her torturous year in seventh grade when she was diagnosed with a learning disability. Having been a gifted, creative preschooler, she was not prepared for the realization, in second grade, that she could not do many of the tasks that her classmates could accomplish with ease. By seventh grade, her feelings of insecurity had reached an all-time high, and she began to experience anxiety attacks over everything from having to remember her locker combination to managing her schoolwork to staying overnight at a friend's. When she was finally diagnosed with dyscalculia, she and her family felt relief. At least now there was a name for her difficulties and strategies she could employ. This account is an interesting mix of factual information and memories. Abeel relates her experiences with detached clarity, but each situation is followed by

the thoughts and feelings that finally forced her to face her differences. Occasionally, her well-phrased prose slips into clichÃ©, and when she lists the math skills that she could not perform she becomes rather pedantic. While this book is not likely to be of great interest to casual readers, those with similar learning issues will identify strongly with the author's trials and triumphs. Pair this title with Abeel's book of poetry, *Reach for the Moon* (Scholastic, 2001), to inspire young people with learning disabilities and to educate others.--Nancy Menaldi-Scanlan, LaSalle Academy, Providence, RI Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Gr. 7-12. In painstaking detail, Abeel recounts her life, from kindergarten through college, with a learning disability that compromises her ability to learn skills based on sequential processing--especially math, spelling, and grammar. She writes frankly about her mental and emotional struggles to cope; while she looked like a "normal" child, she was unable to tell time, count change, or remember her locker combination. Her narrative is interjected with first-person remembrances of painful incidents that left a vivid imprint on her self-worth. After her disability was diagnosed, halfway through her story when she was in seventh grade, the school system provided both special and gifted classes that helped her. But still aching over missed social opportunities and suffering from panic attacks, she turned to writing, which became her life preserver. Upon college graduation, Abeel finally accepted that being learning disabled wasn't her fault. Abeel's raw emotional anguish, though certainly understandable, overwhelms the story, making it difficult to pinpoint an audience. Perhaps readers who have their own intimate knowledge of how learning disabilities derail life will be the most appreciative audience. Julie CumminsCopyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

I've read about 50 books written for children and teens with LD. There are two categories: informational and inspirational. Personally, I think that children should read more informational books--giving them a clear sense of their LD, their SPED services, and how to cope in and outside of school. Samantha's story is inspirational but it does not offer any coping strategies, aside from illustrating the importance of anxiety meds for some people with LD. Much of the book is written in italics, which is difficult to read. The vast majority of the book details Abeel's struggles, making it a bit depressing. I like LD books that contain autobiographical essays. They are concise, making them more powerful than memoirs in terms of the ups and downs of the person's life that are detailed. Also, their shorter length is more appealing to reluctant readers. These are the best books I've

found.Grades K-3It's Called Dyslexia, Jennifer MallinosK-5Knees: The Mixed Up World of a Kid with Dyslexia, Vanita Oelschlager2-5The Alphabet War: A Story About Dyslexia, Diane RobbHank Zipzer series (protagonist has dyslexia), Henry WinklerSusan Shreve- The Flunking of Joshua T. Bates, Joshua Bates Takes Charge, Joshua T. Bates in Trouble Again2-7That's Like Me, Jill Lauren (essays)3-8Many Ways to Learn: A Kid's Guide to LD (2011 edition), Judith SternEli, The Boy Who Hated to Write (2nd edition), Regina and Eli Richards - inspirational4-8My Name Is Brain Brian, Jeanne BetancourtSixth Grade Can Really Kill You, Barthe DeClements4-12Succeeding with LD (2nd edition), Jill Lauren - essays8-12Learning Disabilities and Life Stories, Pano Rodis - essays by college studentsLearning Outside the Lines, Jonathan Mooney and David ColeBrilliant Idiot: An Autobiography of a Dyslexic, Dr. Abraham SchmittReversals, Eileen Simpson - inspirational, first memoir about LDThe Human Side of Dyslexia, Shirley Kurnoff - essays by college students, inspirational and informative (very detailed about the wide range of accommodations used)Books About Learning DifficultiesKLeo the Late Bloomer, Robert KrausK-2The Pout-Pout Fish Goes to School, Deborah DiesenK-3Katie's Rose: A Tale of Two Late Bloomers, Karen BurnettJasmine Can (difficulty reading), Bena Hartman1-3Annie's Plan: Taking Charge of Schoolwork and Homework (attention, time management, organization), Jeanne Kraus2-5Thank You, Mr. Falker (difficulty reading), Patricia Polacco3-5Gifted Hands: The [Dr.] Ben Carson Story, Gregg and Deborah Lewis

This book has a very specific audience: young children and clueless teachers. Still, it's worth a read if you're older, have dyscalculia, a few bucks to throw around and an hour or two to sit down and read. Essentially, this book is written from a preteen with dyscalculia's view, her abuse by teachers and her experiences throughout her education into an adult. I cried a few times and have to admit, it was like reliving my younger self's struggles to be respected, listened to and accommodated. I was a little disappointed with how "easy" it was to read. The writer was not very descriptive even though it's supposed to be by an adult, but if you just want to learn what having dyscalculia is like for a child, preteen and young teen, please read it. It's a great start for anyone just learning that dyscalculia exists and wanting to empathize and help!

This is one of the best memoirs I have ever read. Although not formally diagnosed when in school, I believe that I, like the author, am both gifted and learning disabled. (The gap between my verbal and math SATs would convince anyone of this.) The descriptions of what it is like as a young

student who most people consider smart to "fake it" in one's problem areas are the most painfully accurate I have ever read. The narrator's disabilities extend far beyond what most of us think of as having "problems with math." Making change, following directions on a map, and telling time are all part of the narrator's disability. In this book, she shows how the inadequate research done on this disability, coupled with her impressive masking skills, and prejudice on her teachers' part as to what a "dumb" kid looks and behaves like, all made her school years more difficult than they should be for anyone. Luckily, parents who insisted on speaking up to the school system, as well as Sam's own gifts helped her graduate and complete college. Another thing that intrigued and angered me was a comment one admissions' officer made to Sam's (the narrator's) mother as they were researching colleges: "Our students are perfect in every way." i.e. we couldn't possibly consider your daughter. Really? I worry about a college that weeds out applicants in that manner, especially given that the narrator had already published a book. If you have ever seen a movie or TV program on adults who cannot read but who have managed to negotiate and even excel in daily life, you will have some idea of what life was like for the narrator during her youth. What makes the book so compelling is that it's not just written by someone who wants to talk about a disability, but also by a poet and gifted writer who can convey what it is like to have her particular disability perfectly.

Must read!!! Beautifully written. Would make a great teachers gift. Read this first then shared it with the resource (Special Education)teacher at my children's school. She was very impressed with the story and was happy to receive it. Most every day ordinary people have no idea of the struggles of one with learning disabilities. Great read, highly recommend!

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