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In one of my first editor's notes, I made a passing reference to overcoming dyslexia when I was a child. The quick hit I did on the topic was intentional, as I had shared this secret with only a handful of people over the years. I wanted to get it off my chest, and I also felt it was important as a nod to full disclosure regarding who's editing *American Way*. To announce it in such a public forum was a nerve-racking prospect

for me, especially from this chair, because editors are supposed to be wordsmiths and grammarians. I am both — by degree, anyway — but no matter how many years have passed since all the words on a page did somersaults, some remnants of this former condition still linger.

For one, I have a hard time spelling. My brain naturally wants to flip the letters around. I've disciplined my mind to know — or at least recognize — when I'm spelling something wrong, but I'm never more than a few feet away from a dictionary. I have two in my office, two at home, and I keep one in the trunk of my car, just in case. For another, when I'm on a marathon reading session, my eyes will move words around and sometimes turn them backward. Not too long ago, I was on a seven-hour flight, and by the time I got to South America, I thought the second half

of my Lincoln biography had been written in Polish. But that doesn't bother me so much. Like many dyslexics before me, once we are able to put our burden in check, we become voracious readers. We're so proud to be able to read that we'll read for hours on end. Being able to suffer eyestrain from all those reading hours is a small victory for us. A badge of honor, as it were.

As I grew and matured, and after I chose writing as my life's work — both because I loved it and because it was a full-on frontal assault on all those people who told me I'd never make it — I became more comfortable in my journalist skin. And the more comfortable I became, the more I entertained my childhood dream of not just reading but actually writing a book. To a dyslexic, writing a 270-page tome is the Mount Everest of erudition. It took the coaching and tough love of Sam Freedman, my book-writing professor at Columbia University, to not only teach me the skills involved but to convince me that I had the raw ability to carry a

reader on a 270-page journey. "You're a fine reporter," he told me one winter day after class, "but your writing needs work. Practice reading aloud what you wrote and you'll be able to gauge the cadence of your prose, and you'll also catch some of the errors that make their way into your writing." I'd told him about my dyslexia: He was the first mentor I ever told. I knew exactly what he meant when he instructed me to read my work aloud.

The end result was *Standing Eight*, a book about former lightweight boxing champion Jesus "El Matador" Chavez. Because Professor Freedman was right in the sense that I was a better reporter than a writer, I used the story of El Matador as a vehicle to tell the larger story of the Mexican diaspora. I must have read that book aloud 100 times. When I read it these days, I feel like I could have done a better job. Many writers, dyslexic or not, feel the same way after their first book.

But what about a storied writer like Lawrence Grobel? He's

written 10 nonfiction books, teaches four seminars at UCLA, and is regarded as one of the best biographers out there. His lifelong dream, however, was to publish the great American novel. And after 50-some years, that great American novel was finally published ... in Poland. In Polish. That's right, *Zmartwychwstanie Laytona Crossa* was penned in English, but the only publisher that wanted it was in Warsaw. So, although his dream was finally realized, Grobel can't read page one of his own book (see his story on page 22).

I've read many of Grobel's nonfiction books. For this one, I'm going to make an attempt and see if the remnants of my dyslexia turn the Polish words into English. At the very least, I think a star writer and professor like Grobel now better understands what guys like me go through when we write.

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