

## **Manley to Testify on Illiteracy**

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### **Body**

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Washington Redskins defensive **end** Dexter Manley used to tiptoe through the back door of the Lab School of Washington, hunched over so he could be tutored to read. Had he instead ventured through the front entrance, a third-grader might have collared him, requested an autograph and blown his cover.

Today, Manley will testify before a Senate panel led by Paul **Simon** (D-Ill.) to discuss the pains of his learning disability, which eluded his childhood educators in Houston and his college professors at Oklahoma State University.

The subject of the hearing is **illiteracy**, as **Simon pushes** the **Illiteracy** Elimination Act of 1989. Although Manley said he was unable to read and write when he sought out the Lab School of Washington in 1986, tutors there diagnosed his problem as an inability to remember words or sound them out. To call him illiterate, teachers say, is not accurate.

Sessions with tutor Sarah Hines have led him to bookstores, where he locates novels and eventually wades through them. It is apparent now that he reads on an adult level, though his lessons every Tuesday at the Lab School, specializing in helping the learning disabled, are centered on the most simple phonics. In the past, he had memorized certain words, and when he saw them in a sentence, he'd guess at what the entire sentence meant. By now learning the sounds of words and letters, he can spell.

A mixture of events led him to the Lab School, one of which was the broken leg of former Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann. "When [Theismann] broke his leg," Manley said, "I mean, it was one play, and it was over for him. What if that happens to me? What happens then? I said, 'Dexter, stop running.' If that happened to me, what did I have?"

Since grammar school, Manley said, he had taken abuse from children who perceived him as "dumb." This, he said, fostered a severe insecurity for him. Elementary teachers had neither the background nor the resources to diagnose his learning disability, and Manley sifted through grades three to six in a special education class. His only memories of grammar school are of playing with building blocks.

In junior high and high school, there were no special education programs, and Manley was ushered into the mainstream of the curriculum, where he said he managed to pass. "I did [have problems]," he said, "I tell you, I did. But I'm the kind of kid . . . I'm smart. I also think that because I was always in class, showing my face, always in the classroom doing the best I could on a test, I'd get passed. I wasn't the kind of kid that didn't go to school. No. I went to school every day."

At Oklahoma State, he said, "I wasn't taking basket weaving or bows and arrows" and managed to stay eligible for football, except for a close call prior to his senior season. He took a correspondence course in religion that summer so he could have enough credits to stay on the team, and he said his college sweetheart -- Tammy Wilmore -- wrote the final take-home essay for him.

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"Did she do all my homework? No," he said. "She never took a [classroom] test for me. But I will say if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have been eligible [his senior year]."

Wilmore told the Houston Chronicle that Manley also struggled to write checks, such as misspelling the word "hundred."

"She's right on that," he said. "I couldn't even spell a hundred, and I was in college.

" . . . I used to be so ashamed. In my family, we had to go to Sunday school, and I used to skip just because you had to read. But today, I can read. It's a trip. And, you know, people read novels for their own benefit, and I read for information. That's the way you learn. That's the way you discover yourself."

## Graphic

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PHOTO, DEXTER MANLEY.

## Classification

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