

An ordinary moment

My name's Tori and I'm a university student studying arts in Western Australia. My fourteen year old brother has low-functioning autism and dyspraxia. This is my story.

When I was four my brother, Lawrence, was born. My mother always likes to tell me how excited I was to have a new brother and how my sister and I tried our hands at naming him after our favourite television personalities (namely Jeff from the Wiggles). Being my only brother he never seemed that abnormal to me. I can only compare him to other peoples' brothers and even then it's impossible to make the comparison, they're so different.

My brother attended the same mainstream primary school as my sister and I. The few children in his year that attached themselves to him (even if he refused to talk or play with them) would often come to me in the breaks. They would tell me what he was doing and drag me off to rescue him from some exploit gone wrong. Of course, when teachers expected me to mind him for mixed sport classes, frustration would often set in. Other kids got to make friends and have fun. My brother and I stood in a corner, with me coaxing him over a skipping rope and him ignoring me and making a fuss.

When I left to go to high school, he was transferred to a school with a special education unit. There, no more complaints came forth from the principal about the amount of support he needed. However, he picked up bad habits from the other children that made home life just that little bit more unpleasant.

I was 14 when a friend introduced me to the young carers program. I signed up for my first camp and met friends that I've kept even now. It was shocking how sad I was leaving the camp. I hadn't realised how much I'd been putting up with at home and how much I needed a break.

Life is better now I know there are others out there who are like me and who support me in what I do. Sometimes I'm even happy my brother is disabled because it means I have opportunities to help out others in this situation. Normality will never be something I can experience in my family (my brother will always need me) but there are moments when it makes me so proud to have been a part of his journey.

One time, when Lawrence was about ten, I walked in on him playing with a little Peter Pan doll. He was making a Captain Hook doll push it off of his bed and as it fell he would squeal "Help me!" I'd never seen him doing anything so normal before. I stood there watching him for about ten minutes and he'd make the doll fall over and over again. His neat rows of dinosaurs were forgotten in the corner and the basket of things that he'd tipped over in a rage hours earlier was untouched. I hardly dared to breath in case it frightened him and he stopped.

To this day, I still look to that moment as a source of inspiration, that someone so different can have such moments as to remind us they're human too, they are normal too.

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