

MY SPECIAL SIBLING

I can remember the day that we brought my new baby brother home. I was so excited! I remember how protective that my parents were every time I asked to hold him. I knew that I had to be careful while holding our new baby, but I could just sense the fear in their eyes each time that I would ask. A few months later my parents sat me down one afternoon for a little talk. I was only five years old at the time, so my parents were very cautious about how they told me that my baby brother was a little different. My parents told me that Brad had Down syndrome. Well, as you guessed it, I had no clue as to what that word meant and for that fact my parents were not very sure either. They told me that he would need a little extra help with things. They told me that he would be slower than other children his age but, that we were going to work with him as a family and help him when he needed that extra assistance. The doctors told my parents that it would be best to put him in an institution. They said that he would never function as a “normal” child would. As you can imagine those were not very encouraging words for my parents to hear. Placing my brother in an institution was not an option that they were willing to even consider. As a family, we spent lots of extra time working with him on sign language, talking, walking, and just being active. Through his life we continued to help him with those struggles that he faced. At our house “EVERYTHING” was a major accomplishment for him and we would always praise him for trying so hard until he got it! I can remember all of his achievements but a few seem to stick out in my mind the most. Like the day that he learned to tie his shoes, his first day of school, his first day of Special Olympics, his first girlfriend, his talent show with his classmates, his first high school dance and now that he is a senior in high school and will graduate this coming spring. All of those moments hold a very special place in my heart and my life but, the one that was the most meaningful to me was my wedding day. My brother once sang in the “Friends Choir”. This choir was formed by a special education teacher, for children with disabilities to sing in. I like to think of them as children and adults with “ABILITIES.” My fiancé and I talked several months in advance about how we wanted Brad and some of our special friends to be a part of our big day. We

decided to have the choir sing. They sang "Surely the Presence" just before my daddy gave me away and as you can imagine, there was not a dry eye in the church. It made our special day even more memorable. Several of the choir members were ones that Brad had grown up with so they seemed like family as well. I started volunteering with Special Olympics when I was eleven years old so as I was cheering Brad along on the sidelines, I was also there at the finish line to give hugs and high fives to them too. Brad has taught me so many lessons in my life. He has taught me thoughtfulness, patience, unconditional love, what really matters in life and of course what doesn't. To me he is an angel right here on earth. My family and I could not imagine life without him. We are better people because of him. Our family has truly been blessed!!! As a result of what an influence my brother, along with his classmates, has had on my life I am now pursuing my masters in special education. My encouragement to siblings of siblings with special needs is to encourage them, help them, get involved, and most importantly is to LOVE them and LEARN from them!! God bless YOU!

Sincerely,

Brad's loving sister

Lori Barefield

