

## My Brother, Andy by Rachel Feinberg

“A smooth sea never made a skilled mariner;” this Old English proverb truly epitomizes the trials and tribulations I went through while being raised along side my older brother, a child diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, Andy. Witnessing the hardships he had to endure in order to simply get by in a world not suited to him made me acknowledge and appreciate the sometimes overlooked aspects of a regular lifestyle. In addition, I learned a lot about myself as a person and how to approach every situation with a light heart and a significant amount of compassion.

Growing up with Andy was a challenge. In elementary school, he was a grade above me. On the playground, his classmates used to torment me for being his sister – calling both of us names, laughing and even physically hurting me. I could tell a handful of stories but none would ever illustrate the actual amount of pain I felt, even as a little girl. The worst part was watching how awful they treated him; kids have the potential to be so cruel, especially when they don’t understand. To make things even more difficult, I loved Andy but we didn’t always see eye to eye. As those whose lives have been affected by the disability know, children with Asperger’s can be very immature and difficult at times. Out of school, we would fight and I wasn’t always as nice to him as I should have been. This devastated me because I saw the abuse he was receiving in school and I didn’t want to contribute to it. It was frustrating though – we couldn’t do many normal family things. Vacations, outings, holidays and even simple family dinners all had to be adjusted to his needs. I was embarrassed by his public tantrums and didn’t want to have friends over in case he had a bathroom issue. However, these difficulties in reality contributed to my future character.

Upon entering college, my day-to-day interactions with Andy changed drastically; fortunately, throughout my first semester I realized how much of him I took with me, and how it has truly benefited me. Having the experience of Andy as a brother has given me a unique perspective on life. Through him I learned compassion, a quality easily distinguishable from my personality. My friends know that using insulting words like “retard” around me is completely unacceptable since I understand how hurtful it can be to people who have personal experiences and how immature it is to say. Also, I have made many mistakes in handling Andy, but those mishaps are where I have grown to be a patient person. I find dealing with people much easier and am very comfortable when dealing with others’ special needs. I have found that everyone learns and acts at their own pace in their own way, and that uniqueness should be not only accepted but respected. These lessons have helped *me* to accept Andy’s disabilities and allow them to effect my life in a more positive way. I now laugh at myself and make the best of the situation, rather than hide my embarrassment and resent the limits his disability has sometimes had on my life.

Although it’s been hard, I would not change my brother for the world; he has helped shape me into the young woman that I am more than any other aspect of my life. Andy and I will always share a special relationship, and for this I am eternally grateful.