

A special bond



Proud sister reveals brother's gift

Emily Pruitt
staff photographer

Two twins play outside in their backyard. They are 15 months old. One is a little girl with chocolate brown eyes and curly, strawberry blonde hair. She giggles as she stumbles to the ground, running to the call of her mom.

The other twin is a little blond-headed boy with bright blue eyes, fascinated by the sand within the sandbox. The mom calls his name, but he does not reply. She calls again. Still no response.

His parents become worried. They think he might be deaf. They take him to the doctor to get him tested, but the results come back negative. He is not deaf.

Flash forward a few months down the road. It is March of 1999. The family of four is headed off to Disney World for the first time with their 22-month-old twins. The little girl awes at the fireworks with bright eyes. She laughs and smiles so big on the rides it could light up a whole room. It is all truly magical to her. Her twin brother stares at a book. He does not care to look up at the fireworks. The rides don't really entertain him. To him, there is no magic.

The family arrives back home after a week at the happiest place on Earth.

The mom takes the little boy to the doctor. "You have to help me," she says. "Something is not right."

The mom was right. Something was wrong.

Smith has Autism. Smith is my twin brother.

Growing up with a brother who has Autism is anything but easy. I never had a buddy to play with, and often I was lonely. I never had

the typical sibling fights, never cried because my brother hit me or called me a mean name. My mom never had to separate us because we were bickering too much.

I never had to share a birthday party as most twins do. I never had one of my friends have a crush on my brother, and then find out and be totally grossed out. We never went to the same school. We were never in the same classes. We never had those twin telepathy moments.

When Smith didn't get his way, he would have a full on tantrum. Screaming, biting, crying, all within the aisle of a store. People stared and whispered about how poorly behaved he was. As I got older, I would walk away when this happened. I pretended I didn't know my brother.

Yes, my brother is different.

But, I wouldn't change a thing about him.

He's my buddy. He's my best friend. We understand each other in a way like no one else does. Even though we don't really talk to one another, we have this special bond. He knows I love him, and I know he loves me. Even without the words, we both know.

In Smith's eyes, everything seems so beautiful. Simplicity is key. He isn't caught up in all the gossip or the latest iPhone. He's entertained by riding over the

bridge on a rainy day, or riding bikes through the neighborhood with my dad. Sometimes I wish I saw things the way he did. The world is such a beautiful place. He doesn't know of war or of heartbreak. He doesn't know of death.

Smith has taught me to see the beauty within the small things. The beauty within life.

Sometimes I think about how things would be if Smith was normal.

Sometimes I think maybe Smith is normal, and all of us are just the weird ones.

But then I think about my purpose and who I am today.

I know I am here because of Smith, and I know I have the heart I do because of Smith. He makes me me. I am proud to call myself Smith's sister and I am proud to have a brother like him.

He's amazing in his own special way.



Autism Awareness Month

The month of October is a time to give recognition those affected by autism and the families whose daily lives are affected.