

Guest Post: Sibling Memories

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I have one older brother and one younger brother. I am the middle child and the only sibling with a disability. Recently I asked my brothers if they had any specific memories from our growing-up years that were related to my disability.

They both remember going to my physical therapy sessions. As a child and throughout elementary school, I had physical therapy on land and in the pool. We all loved getting Lorna Dunes or graham crackers at the therapy pool after each session. While I was doing land therapy, my brothers kept busy playing with toys they didn't have at home and loved it.

My older brother remembers me being the loudest fan of his community basketball team, the Bombers. Their team colors were black and white, and for every game I had my fingernails painted black and white and wore a specific black-and-white outfit. The team played together for about five years. At the last Bombers banquet, I was in the team picture, fully decked out, and like each team member, I got my picture taken surrounded by all their trophies. Most importantly, my older brother could always hear me cheering and appreciated it.

I remember chasing my brothers around the kitchen in my walker. My younger brother and I played computer games together. When we played catch, they had to do all the running to get the ball when I dropped it. Neither one will admit to playing with Barbies at the kitchen table with me.

I never felt disabled when playing with them. They figured out how to play with me according to my abilities.

My favorite Christmas memory is that they decided to come get me out of bed, before Mom and Dad were up, so we could open our stockings together. It was the one day a year that Mom or Dad didn't get me up, and it was so fun. They both have done other transfers with me when needed. And recently, when we were taking family photos on the beach in Texas, my older brother wheeled my wheelchair over the wet, packed-in sand.

I have written before about the importance of inclusion. I learned about inclusion at home because that was the norm. One way to foster a supportive home environment is by choosing family activities that everyone can participate in. For example, I only recently found out that my brothers went to amusement parks with friends. My brothers didn't make me feel like my physical limitations put constraints on family outings. Communicating kindly and respectfully to and about all family members, especially those with disabilities, is important. I expected to be included elsewhere because inclusion was taught and practiced in my home.

My memories with my two brothers have nothing to do with my disability. My older brother was quick to mention getting the chicken pox from me. We played board games together, watched television shows together, went to church together, and more. I feel that we were typical siblings, despite my disability. We learned to work around it. In our home there was always an atmosphere of inclusion and love.