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Alliance
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Gold Key

TO
Hailey S kye T ulio

FOR EXCELLENCE IN WRITING



Patrick



Hailey

Patrick

Feb 2014

I have a special family setup – a mom, a dad and three older brothers. Two of my brothers are in medical school, but Patrick, the youngest, goes to Bayes Achievement Center in Huntsville, TX for school and behavioral therapy. Unlike typical family setups, he is diagnosed with autism which causes him to have problems expressing himself and acting right socially. With this condition, a person can never in his life act normally, either physically or mentally.

There are many different kinds of autism, and each person diagnosed will have his own unique actions and expressions. Some act and express like they are babies while others can live their life without anyone knowing that they have autism in the first place. In Patrick's case, he's in the middle, not too oblivious to the world, but not that aware of it either. If you ask him if he is "happy or sad," he will always say that he is "happy" even though he feels differently.

People who do not have siblings or relatives with autism cannot really understand what it is like for me. I find the next best thing to do is to tell you, the reader, feelings of someone who has relations to people with autism to understand what it is really like.

Where do I start? The basics are simple and self-explanatory. Autism is a condition, with many scientific explanations and complicated meanings. The basics . . . there is no scientific stuff to it, just raw emotions and feelings. Let's be honest. Most people would be resentful if their sibling did something wrong and got away with it while they always had to take the blame for what they did. That's how I felt when I was younger. Patrick occasionally got away with doing things in public and at home.

Growing up as the youngest in the family around Patrick, I often resented how he was the center of everyone's attention and got the most understanding. It seemed everything revolved around putting up with his strange behaviors and taking care of him. Over the years, I have developed many different feelings. At times, he is a distraction. When he's home, I can't get my homework done because of all the weird noises he makes. He plays his favorite song, "If You're Happy and You Know It" a thousand times, which drives me crazy. I feel frustrated with Patrick's strange habits, like flushing the toilet just because he likes the sound and spiraling of water. In addition, his insistence that everyone goes to bed when he does is indeed annoying.

Sometimes his behaviors are embarrassing, such as the time during church mass when he "passed gas" then ran up to the altar where the priest was giving a sermon. He started saying "sorry" over and over again while thumping his chest with a closed fist as in sign language. Secretly, I was laughing inside and so were others who know him and understand his actions. Now that I am older, I understand what can be controlled and what we have to learn to live with.

Before, I would feel embarrassed every time we go out in public since Patrick would sometimes act out, which causes other people to stare at him and us. He would suddenly run away or flop down in the ground. Over the years, I've learned to accept it and am no longer bothered by what other people think when Patrick acts out. He does not mean it. That's just the way God made him. I now see the many benefits of having a brother like Patrick. Whenever he comes home, my family usually goes out to eat and buy treats to celebrate his "homecoming." This happens every other weekend when he comes home from his private boarding school.

Life with Patrick is never dull I have to admit. I remember one Thanksgiving we were going to the parade. It was 7:00 a.m., too early to wake up on a Saturday. "Hey! Wake up!" hollered my mom. "Ugh... it's Thanksgiving . . . I feel lazy on Saturdays...I'll just pretend to still be asleep." "One...two...I am going to pour water on you if you do not wake up," Mom teased. When I heard Patrick's footsteps, I got out of bed. I knew it was his mission to wake me up. Whenever Patrick hears my parents want me to do something and I refuse, he will always make sure that I comply. We went to the parade and as soon as the floats started appearing, Patrick was quiet and focused initially then he started running off a couple of times, and my brothers would take turns catching him. We know when we are with Patrick, especially in public places, we have to be always ready for him to do

something out of the ordinary. As we walked by Discovery Green Park on our way back to the car, Patrick went for the water sprinklers and got himself all wet, including our older brothers, Mikey and Phil. Mom, Dad and I all thought it was hilarious!

However, at home that weekend I couldn't say the same. We would always hide the toilet paper from Patrick but that weekend he found it. He found it amusing to put the whole roll in the toilet and flush it. Even though the toilet clogged up, he just kept on flushing. Soon the toilet overflowed, and the bathroom floor started getting flooded. Dad really freaked out since we live on the second floor of our condominium. Our neighbors down below weren't too happy when it started "raining" from their bathroom ceiling.

Another incident happened when Mikey took Patrick along with his friends from Duke University to Sea World in San Antonio. He did not tell his friends that Patrick has autism. One of his friends, Ben, went to the restroom and before he knew it, he was sharing a urinal with Patrick. Ben was shocked, but everybody just had a good laugh. While they were staying in a hotel room on the River Walk with a balcony, Patrick threw a folding chair over the balcony. Luckily, it landed on the awning, and the people below did not notice. I bet the lawn chair is still there on the awning.

Mikey and Phil enjoy wrestling with Patrick and interacting in a more physical way, but we have a different relationship. In the past year, Patrick has become more affectionate towards me. He has learned to reach out, and so have I. Nowadays, I explain things to Patrick in a different way he can understand. At home, I try my best to cater to his schedule and routine. Sometimes when I am playing a video game, Patrick likes to just sit next to me and watch quietly. I try my best to include him by showing and teaching him how to play it.

Even though Patrick acts that way, we have grown to love him. I believe that Patrick does not mean anybody any harm. It is just the autism. He does not like it when somebody is mad or upset with him. He will do anything he can to keep someone from staying mad at him. If you stay mad, he will start crying. We will always protect him since he cannot do it for himself. I have gotten to the point that when people do not understand his behavior even though we tell them that he has autism, I get mad at them.

I am grateful my family makes sure to include him in all outings and vacations. I feel proud when my brothers defend Patrick's actions against rude comments. Having a brother who has autism lets me see the world in a whole new different perspective. In my own way, I feel I can help society see people with autism in their true light.

That's what family life with autism is all about. ~ *Hailey Skye Panganiban Tulio, 12*