
I have a brother with autism!

My name is Kim. I have a brother who has autism and his name is Michael. Michael has something wrong with his brain; that is why he is autistic and it is not his fault.

Michael has never said a word in his life and he does not understand when we speak to him, he watches what we do and tries to do the right thing. Also, Michael cannot read or write. Michael has always gone to a special school for children with autism. When Michael was younger he went to a day school then when he was 11 he became a weekly border. I missed my brother a lot, but I had to admit that I was glad that I did have some time without him at home. My parents had more time for me when he was away and we did not always have to do certain things or not do certain things because of Michael. We became more of a "normal" family when Michael was away at school. It was also easier for me when my friends came to visit, as I did feel embarrassed sometimes when Michael did strange things in front of my friends.

At home, my brother has his own room, with lots of toys. The strange thing is that he does not really play with all these toys, except for his noisy toys, but he does not like you to touch or move his toys! Also when Michael does play with his toys it is not the same way you and I would play with them. He doesn't know how to make up games with his cars or plastic animals and people etc. The toys my brother likes are Lego, puzzles, colouring books and talking teddies! Michael enjoys watching T.V and his favourite programme is Mr Bean!

Michael is not very good at playing by himself so my parents and I have to spend a lot of time playing with him, so that he does not get bored. Sometimes I get really jealous of all the attention he gets and I feel cross if I leave my parents alone to play with Michael, but then sometimes when I ask for a turn, they say they are now too tired.

Michael goes to bed at about 9 pm and wakes up at about 5 o'clock in the morning. When Michael was a teenager, there quite a few nights that Michael would not sleep all night. My parents were exhausted and sometimes I would be woken up during the night and then I felt so tired the next day when I had to go school and do my homework in the afternoons.

If we change something in the house, Michael often does not like this and he will re-arrange it all back again! This can be very funny except when he comes into my room and breaks my very special things. Sometimes I understand and other times I get very cross.

Because Michael cannot talk, nor understand what we are saying, for him I think it must be like living in a foreign country where you do not know the language. Although Michael does not actually talk, he does make noises and sometimes these noises sound like words and I think he has said something, but he really is just babbling in his own language. Some children with autism can talk and I feel sad that my brother is not one of those, because then I could

chat to him and hear what he is thinking and feeling. It must be so lonely for Michael, as he sits and watches our family talk and play games and he does not really know how to join in.

I have told my friends what is wrong with Michael and they are used to him now, but when a new friend comes to our house, I feel embarrassed. So my parents explain Michael's problem to my new friends and then they eventually get used to him!

I do not know what it is like to have a normal brother or sister, because my brother and I are the only children in our family. The one thing I really hate is when people stare at Michael if he is behaving strangely. I get SO embarrassed. So when you see a child or even an adult behaving oddly, or he/she looks strange, please do not stare; they may be autistic and they have feelings too.

Recently, Michael left school and he now stays on a wonderful farm called Shalom Respite Care Centre, where the people love him so much. Michael spends the days on the farm helping with all the jobs and running around with the animals. He is so happy there with his new friends, but he also gets very excited when he comes home every other weekend. Because we have had time at home for 10 days being a normal family, we really look forward to seeing him and giving him lots of love and attention.

Sometimes I feel guilty that Michael is not home like I am and I am not sure whether it is right or wrong for a child with autism not to live at home all the time. But I think Michael is happier when there is a routine and at home we cannot always make sure this happens for him.

In a way, it is interesting to know what it is like to have an autistic brother or sister, but it is also VERY difficult at times. Sometimes I cry and shout and I have to admit that sometimes I get really angry that he has changed my life forever. My parents say I must not feel guilty about these thoughts, so you must also not feel guilty when you get cross or jealous sometimes, we all feel that way from time to time.

My parents are trying to save enough money that there will always be money to pay people to take good care of Michael when they cannot. They have said that they never want Michael to be my "problem", but I know "Minnie-Mon", my beautiful brother, I will always be there for you.

If you have a brother or sister with autism, I hope you will love him as much as I love mine.

GOOD LUCK!

Written by Kim Stacey

YOU'RE LARGER THAN LIFE!

Poem written to Michael; my very special brother.

"It's amazing how you can speak right to my heart. Without saying a word you can light up the dark. Try as I may, I can never explain what I hear when you don't say a thing. That smile on your face, that's when I know that you need me. There's a truth in your eyes that says you'll never leave me. The touch of your hand says you'll love me no matter what. You say it best when you say nothing at all". *(Excerpt from "When you say nothing at all")*

Lately I've been wondering who will be there to take my hand and say, "Don't worry sis, everything will be alright." Could it be any harder to watch you and think what could have been? I wish you could have just one day of being normal but I know I don't have the power.

I've been thinking about you, my brother, and all the crazy things you've put me through. But if I give up on you I give up on me. So I take you as you are and love you even more.

Your handicap made me a fighter. Made me learn a little bit faster, made my skin a little bit thicker and it makes me that much stronger. So thanks for making me a fighter.

It takes a lot to learn about life and it's not the big things but the small things that mean so much. There is never a day that passes by that I don't think of you. You've shown me everything I need to know and I'm your biggest fan.

"They say the name of your problem is autism. Of 67 words you caught none. But how can you be strange when to you you're in a strange man's land. It's a broken road, no miracle cure. I can change your coffee, I can change your tea but I can't change you".
(Excerpt taken from the song "Mindblind (a song for autism)
Written by Jim Thornton).

You light the shadows on my face and to me you're larger than life.

Written by Kim Stacey.

AUTISM

My brother was, is and will forever be Autistic.
His mind is somewhat of a separate entity
To his body; a tool only called upon to rationalise
With the truth.

If you tell me to jump, I say, "how high?"
If you tell him to jump, he does it and asks why.

A simple command like this is critically analysed
By the complex system of crossed wires in his head,
Maybe that's the problem? His wires are crossed!
No, there's no cure because there's no problem to be found.
It's true, "the research shows no chemical imbalance...
No head injuries...
No ...
...Problems."

Richard is also Autistic, like my brother.
He is in his class; 'The Senior Autistic Class'
"Rich, look at me when I speak to you"

I wonder what it must be like in his head.
Vaults of information, variations of every detail
That he records when he studies your face
And not your words.
Alas, of all these vaults he has lost most keys.

Some say if you treat them normal,
They will become normal.
If you treat a bonsai normal;
Give it all the water a real tree needs,
And plant it out in a field
It would die,
As would a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Stuart has a mind like you and me
Except he acts out all the memories,
Visions, dreams and imitations
That lie dormant for future reference,
In a library of confusion
That he is too scared to enter at most times.
You try it; act out everything that you think,
Every thought and image that you conjure.
Then you are one step closer to becoming
Autistic.

Written by Kyle Pratt.

Further information may be obtained from Autism South Africa.

P.O. Box 84209. Greenside. 2034

Tel: (011) 484 9909 Fax: (011) 484 3171

Email: info@autismsouthafrica.org

Web Page: www.autismsouthafrica.org

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A couple of Web Pages:-

www.autistik.co.uk/childsupport.htm

www.isn.net/~jypsy/siblings.htm

<http://members.tripod.com/~transmil/H.htm>

www.autism-pdd.net