

A Boy's Report to a 7th-Grade Health Class On His Brother and What It's Like at Home

By Karl Greenfeld

INTRODUCTION

I have a brain-damaged brother. His name is Noah. My brother is a 10-year-old boy who can't talk, read, write and can't do most things a boy his age can do, such as throw or catch a ball. He goes to a special school and a special day-care center in the afternoon. He has black hair and a charming smile. Noah stands about 54½ inches tall.

He has a disease for which there is no cure and there is no known cause.

These next few pages will tell you what it's like to live with a brain-damaged brother.

A DAY WITH NOAH

In the morning, Noah usually gets up early and chants a low humming noise. Then in about fifteen minutes, he will walk down the hall to the living room where he sits on a certain love seat which he has made his. He waits for somebody to come out and make breakfast. After breakfast my parents help him dress, brush his teeth, and take him to the bathroom.

If nobody teaches him he wanders from bedroom to bedroom, from living room to den. He knocks over pillows

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and blankets and chews on anything soft. Sometimes he takes off his shirt, sometimes his pants, sometimes his socks, sometimes everything. While doing this he is emitting the same noise as when he got up—or he is giggling or laughing or screaming. But sometimes he is saying things in his own gurgled way.

Since he can't talk my mother teaches him through sight. She has him sort and match colors and shapes. He can also associate certain Chinese characters with definite objects. For example, he can associate the Chinese character for car with an automobile model.

For lunch he eats a very nutritional meal. He always gets protein first, then vegetables, then starch. We rarely give him any sweets because no dentists can handle him.

After lunch he does the same thing he did before breakfast, which accomplishes nothing—unless he studies.

When dinner is served he usually waits until the family has started to eat before he comes to the table. Even then it is hard to keep him seated. During dinner he bounces up and down. He eats with his hands and eats quickly to get to the starch.

When dinner is over he wanders around for a while. To put him to bed you have to change him, brush his teeth and make him go to the bathroom. It seems he is always cutest right before he goes to bed.

THE PROBLEMS

The problems are naturally more than the advantages. Noah has temper tantrums quite frequently. In these tantrums, he runs through the house pushing things all over and messes up the house. All or most of these

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tantrums seems to start for no reason at all. I guess when you can't talk, tantrumming is one of the few ways to communicate. Sometimes while people are watching TV or reading, he will stick his hand in your face. He usually is giggling while doing this, so I guess he is just teasing. If he gets mad while eating he will stick his dirty hands on your shirt and get it all messy. To leave Noah alone is a great risk because if he swallows something he shouldn't or gets hurt he can't tell anybody. So that's why we never leave him alone.

ADVANTAGES AND HUMOROUS THINGS

To be honest I do tend to take advantage of the fact that my brother is brain-damaged. Like sometimes I get more attention than I deserve and I also get more things because he naturally doesn't buy anything.

Humorous things are not very common. But when they happen you almost cry because you know he tried so hard. Just recently he put his legs through his shirt sleeves, as if it were

a pair of pants when he was trying to dress himself.

And when he gets into bed at night he often stands up straight as a board and falls backward and then slips under the covers.

THOUGHTS ABOUT NOAH

I really don't know what my feelings about Noah are. Because I don't like thinking about the future for him. Once in a while I get mad at him for what he is because we can't take trips and do the things a normal family does. But I shouldn't get mad at him. It's not his fault that he is the way he is. Right now he is very cute and charming.

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