

For Siblings Only

Winter, 2008

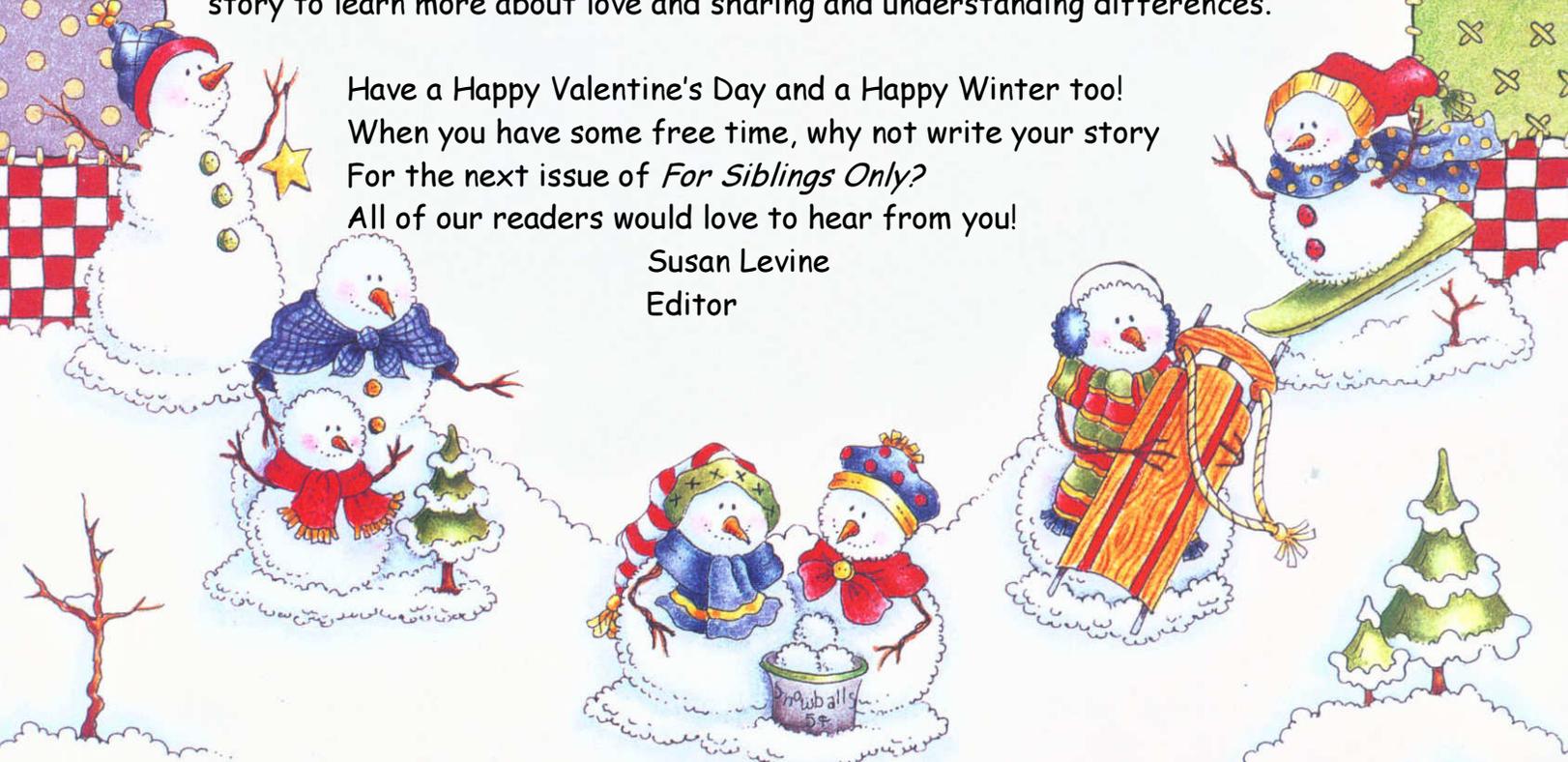
FROM THE EDITOR:

In New Jersey, we're having a winter without very much snow, but the weather has been cold! You are probably spending a lot of time indoors to keep warm. Maybe you're playing games or doing school work on the computer. Did you know that brothers and sisters who need extra help to learn can use the computer too? So can teens and adults with disabilities or learning differences. They might use special tools to help them, but they can do all kinds of things on the computer. Can you guess what some of those special tools are? Read all about computers in **Special Definitions** inside!

And for a really interesting adventure, read the story called **Callie and Me**. This story was written by one of our *For Siblings Only* readers, Megan VanWallendael. Megan wrote this story 8 years ago when she was 8 years old! The story was such a good one, so we're printing it again! Megan has an interesting family because she and her sister, Callie, are twins! Read Megan's story to learn more about love and sharing and understanding differences.

Have a Happy Valentine's Day and a Happy Winter too!
When you have some free time, why not write your story
For the next issue of *For Siblings Only*?
All of our readers would love to hear from you!

Susan Levine
Editor



CALLIE AND ME

By Megan VanWallendael and Susan Levine



Hi everyone! My name is Megan. I am 8 years old and in second grade. My sister, Callie, is exactly the same age as me, but I am two minutes older! Callie and I were supposed to be triplets and not twins. You see, we were born much earlier than we were supposed to, so we were all pretty sick at first. Briana was the sickest and she died when she was only 3 weeks old because she had a problem with her blood and her heart. I miss Briana and still think of her. I still like to call us triplets even though it's just Callie and me. Callie was pretty sick too. She had problems with her eyes and needed surgery on them when she was just a few months old. Today she wears a contact lens in one eye to help her see better. Callie also has cerebral palsy, which means her muscles don't work right. She can't move as smoothly and quickly as me. She also needs extra help to learn, especially when it comes to reading and math.

Callie goes to my school and she is in the second grade too. We both take the bus together. Callie is in a regular second grade class like me for most of the day and then she goes out to a special teacher for extra help. Callie gets easier homework than I do because she learns more slowly than me. Sometimes I even help her with her homework! We have the same lunch period and the same recess. Sometimes I play with her and sometimes I play with my own friends. My friends like Callie too and Callie's friends like me!



Outside of school, Callie goes to physical therapy to help her with her walking and running. Sometimes she gets to school early for extra help. Callie also goes to special horseback riding lessons. All this extra attention really helps her! Outside of school, I get to go to meetings called "Sibling Groups" for kids like you and me who have brothers and sisters who need extra help to learn. I really like those meetings. I also go to soccer camp.



Callie and I get along very well most of the time. Sometimes she annoys me, like when she makes noise when I am doing my homework or when she cries at night. But sometimes I know I annoy her too! Callie and I do lots of things together and we share some of the same friends. Some kids make fun of her because she runs slowly and then she gets upset. But that doesn't happen too often.

I think Callie gets frustrated because she can't always do the things that I can do. Last week, we were drawing on our chalkboard and she tried to copy what I was drawing. She said, "I can't draw like you. You're an artist and I'm not." That made me feel bad. I told her to keep on trying and she did for a little while. Callie also gets frustrated when we are playing tag with other kids in the neighborhood. When she is "IT" she can't catch anyone unless they slow down. They usually do, but when she gets close by, they speed up. Then she gets mad and leaves the game. Some of the time, I let her catch me, but sometimes I don't. I don't mind helping her out some of the time but I can't always help her win!



Being a twin is fun, but I am glad we don't look exactly alike. Because we are twins, I always have someone to play with. Callie hugs and kisses me a lot - sometimes too much! We share the same birthday of course, and have the same party too. This year, we're having a pajama party with a few of our friends.

I love having Callie for a sister but I wish she didn't have cerebral palsy. Then she would be able to run faster. I worry that kids who are nice to Callie now will tease her when she gets older and I would feel very sad about that. If I ever heard them doing that, I would tell them to stop because she's my sister and it hurts my feelings. I would also tell the teacher or a playground aide.



Callie and I will always have things that are different about each other and things that are the same. I know there will always be things I can do better than Callie. But there will always be things she can do better than me! Right now Callie is much better at wrestling than I am. In fact, she can be really rough. I feel happy about Callie most of the time and I love her exactly



the way she is. She is a nice sister and I am happy that we will always have each other.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- 1.) Callie and Megan have lots of fun together. What do they like about being twins?
- 2.) What makes Callie feel frustrated?
- 3.) What does Megan worry about with Callie?
- 4.) If you were Megan and Callie, would you say you were triplets or twins?



FOCUS ON FEELINGS:

What an interesting story Megan shared with us! Not too many of us are lucky enough to be a triplet or a twin so it was fun to hear about the things that Megan and Callie do together. It must be nice to always have a sister or brother in your class in school and at your birthday parties. Even though Callie has cerebral palsy and is different in some ways, the girls are able to play well together and share many special times.

Callie will always have cerebral palsy so running may never be easy for her. She will probably always need to sit close to the TV to see it well also because of the problems with her eyes. She might always need some help with her homework too. Megan doesn't mind that Callie gets extra help to learn. She knows it's important. And she knows that Callie will always keep trying and will keep on learning. Megan told me that both she and Callie want to be teachers when they grow up. With a lot of hard work, both girls may one day reach that goal! I know Megan would be very proud of that!



Megan worries about Callie being made fun of when they both get older. She hopes that won't happen. She wants kids to be understanding of Callie's differences and be nice to her. But if that ever happens, Megan knows just what to do. She will tell them to cut it out because it hurts her feelings. And then she will tell the teacher! Those are good ideas, don't you think?

Megan likes to help Callie out some of the time, but it's okay if she doesn't want to help her out all the time! After all, they are sisters. Sisters sometimes fight and get annoyed with each other and don't always want to be nice to each other. And that's okay! It's normal for that to happen. Every child in every family wants to be the one to win sometimes so it's fine if Megan doesn't always let Callie catch her when playing tag or let her win when playing a board game. It wouldn't be fair to Callie to make things too easy for her all the time and it wouldn't be fair to Megan if she always had to give in so Callie would never feel bad. Megan knows that, and we hope that all of our readers do too.



Because Callie has cerebral palsy, she gets frustrated some of the time when she can't do things as well as Megan. You can imagine what that would feel like. But both Callie and Megan know that they are each very special children with very special things that they can do best! Callie might be a better wrestler and Megan might be a better artist, but they are both very good at being sisters! As Megan told me, "No matter what, I love her because she is a very nice sister!"

Thank you, Megan, for sharing your wonderful story with the readers of *For Siblings Only*! And thank you too Callie!



BROTHER/SISTER THINGS TO DO:

The cold, rainy or snowy days of winter are great days to have some indoor fun with your brother or sister who needs extra help to learn. Listed below are some ideas for indoor wintry fun. Choose an activity and ask mom or dad for any help you need setting things up and making the activity work better for you and your sibling. Then you can get to work having fun! And while you are both playing, you'll be helping your brother or sister learn something too!

- 1.) **Make a life-sized drawing of yourself!** For an arts and crafts idea, draw life-sized pictures of each other! Use very large paper taped together, the plain side of a roll of wrapping paper or other large paper. Have your brother or sister lay down on the paper



and outline his body using a dark crayon or magic marker. Talk about what you are doing ("Now I'm drawing around your arm and your fingers. Can you feel it?") When you are done, your sibling can get up. Using markers or crayons, help him draw his eyes, nose, mouth, hair, clothes and shoes. Let him do as much as he can by himself. Maybe he can scribble-color his shirt if he's not too good at drawing details. Talk about the colors, the clothes and body parts. You can play a body part game by asking "Can you find your _____ (nose, elbow, shoe, eyebrow, etc.)?" When you're both done with the drawing, hang it up and admire it! Then ask your mom or dad to help your sibling trace you. Color that drawing together too! If your brother or sister cannot do much by himself, you can color his life-sized picture in very bright colors and hang it where he can look at it and enjoy it.

- 2.) **Play Ball!** Ball play is another idea for indoor fun in the winter. Collect as many balls as you can find that are safe for indoor use (golf balls or baseballs are not allowed!) Gather up blow-up balls, Nerf balls, Koosh balls, tennis balls and therapy balls, but not very small balls if your sibling might put them in her mouth. Choose a small area if possible such as your bedroom, or a section of the playroom, kitchen or family room. Then invent a ball play activity! You can kick at the balls, roll them back and forth all at once, throw smaller balls into a large pot or bin, or roll the balls to each other one at a time. Help your sibling kick, catch and throw if she needs help. You can play a "find the ball" game if your sister or brother is a bit older. Ask questions like "Get me the green ball (or red, big or little ball)." Talk about the difference between big balls and little balls. Put all the little ones together and the big ones together. Think of some more ball games to play. Look how many things you can do with a room full of balls! Ask mom or dad for other ball play ideas that might be fun for both of you.



Playing indoors is fun for everyone! But if you do like outdoor and if you are lucky enough to get some snow, try playing ball in the snow or make snow angels and add eyes, a nose and a mouth!



LET'S VISIT THE LIBRARY:

If you are looking for something to do on a cold wintery day, why not make a trip to the library to find a good book? The library has lots of good books about brothers and sisters and disabilities. Here are a couple you might want to look for.....

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PLAYING BY THE RULES: A STORY ABOUT AUTISM, by Dena Fox Luchsinger, Woodbine House, 2007.

This is a story about a girl named Jody and her brother, Josh. Josh has a very good memory, and he loves playing games that have anything to do with animals. But because Josh also has autism, he isn't always comfortable with new people, and he gets very upset when things don't happen according to his rules. Josh has his own made-up rules about many different things, and Jody, being his sister, understands his rules better than just about anybody. When Aunt Tilda comes for a visit, things get pretty interesting. Aunt Tilda doesn't know the rules, and it's up to Jody to set her straight!

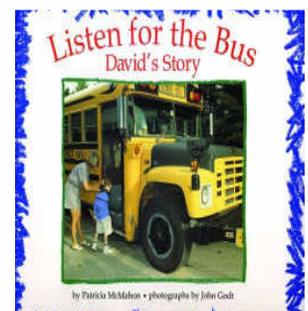


Before Josh started to talk, he learned to communicate with others by using PECS, or picture cards. While Josh talks well now, he doesn't always like to talk to people he doesn't know well. With Aunt Tilda, Josh brings out his old PECS cards to talk to her. The book shows how PECS works so you can see for yourself! Jody also shows us how frustrating it can be to have to do things her brother's way. But, Jody finds her own ways to get attention!

In this next book, you'll learn all about a boy named David who can't see or hear very well. He uses other ways to help him learn...

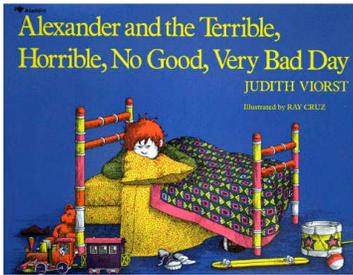
LISTEN FOR THE BUS: DAVID'S STORY by P. McMahon, Boyd's Mill Press, 1995.

This book follows David through his first days in kindergarten in a typical school. He rides the bus, finds his cubby, plays, and has circle time and story time. Since David is blind and has trouble with hearing too, he learns things by feel and he uses sign language to get help from his teachers and his friends. You'll be surprised to see what a great job David does!



The next book is an old favorite, so you might even have it in your own library at home! Alexander learns to deal with his angry feelings. Read the book to see how....

ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD VERY BAD DAY by Judith Viorst.



Alexander wakes up on the wrong side of his bed, and everything seems to go wrong all day long! Have you ever had a bad day like this? Read this book to see how Alexander handles his angry feelings and how he prepares to have a much better day tomorrow!

SPECIAL DEFINITIONS:

Everyone who reads this newsletter knows what a **Computer** is! You probably have computers right in your classrooms at school. You might even have classes that teach you how to use the computer for writing, math and drawing. Many of our readers have computers at home too. You might play games on the computer or you might use it to look up interesting information. You might even do homework on it too! Many students also have e-mail addresses for writing to your friends and family members who are away from home. Computers can do many things for us. But did you know that they can be especially wonderful for people who have disabilities or for children who need extra help to learn?



When you use your computer, you probably use a mouse and the keyboard to move things around, write things or make something happen. But, using a keyboard or a mouse can be hard for a child who has trouble learning. To make things easier, the child might use something called a **Touch Window**. A touch window is a clear plastic screen that goes on top of the screen on your computer. When the touch window is connected to the computer, it acts almost like a mouse.

When a child touches the touch window, it makes something happen on the computer. Just touching a screen is a lot easier than using a mouse, don't you think?

Another way to do things more easily with the computer is to use something called a **Track Ball**. This is a large yellow ball that is shaped like an upside down mouse. It allows the person to rest his whole hand on the ball to move the "mouse" more easily. This is also much easier to use than a mouse. What a fun way to play!





For children who are a little older, a special keyboard called **Intellikeys** can be used. This is an easier keyboard with larger squares to touch instead of the little keys on a regular keyboard. For kids who have trouble seeing or moving their hands smoothly, this is great too!

So, computers really are for everyone! If you want to see what these things really look like, you can visit an Alliance for Technology Access computer center, for people with disabilities that are in different places around the country. One of these centers is located at FRA, the agency in central New Jersey that produces this newsletter! To find an ATA center near you, call 415-455-4575 or visit their website at www.ataaccess.org.



CALLING ALL KIDS:

Would you like to be part of *For Siblings Only*? You can be! All you have to do is write to us on line at slevine@frainc.org, or mail your thoughts to: *For Siblings Only*, 35 Haddon Ave, Shrewsbury, NJ 07702. You can send in your own story about you and your brother or sister who needs extra help to learn, or you can send a drawing or picture of the two of you. And of course, you can answer the questions below and send us your answers! The readers of *For Siblings Only* would love to hear from YOU!

1.) Sometimes I get frustrated when _____

2.) Sometimes my brother or sister who needs extra help to learn gets frustrated when

3.) I would like my brother or sister learn how to _____

4.) When it snows, I like to _____

5.) When it snows, my sister or brother likes to _____

6.) Your name _____ Age _____
Your brother or sister's name _____ Age _____
Disability or learning problem _____
Your address _____

Thank you for reading *For Siblings Only!* Have a great Valentine's Day, and a happy winter too!

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For Siblings Only
Family Resource Assoc.
35 Haddon Ave.
Shrewsbury, NJ 07702