



Heart to Heart

A Newsletter for Parents of Children with Disabilities

"...that their hearts may be encouraged..." Colossians 2:2

Special Sibling Edition:

"The siblings of special needs children are quite special. Absolutely accepting and totally loving, from birth, someone who is different mentally, and has a different way of seeing the world, is a wonderful trait. It's a trait I wish there was another way of getting, but there isn't. And it does involve a degree of not having it fantastically easy." —Sally Phillips

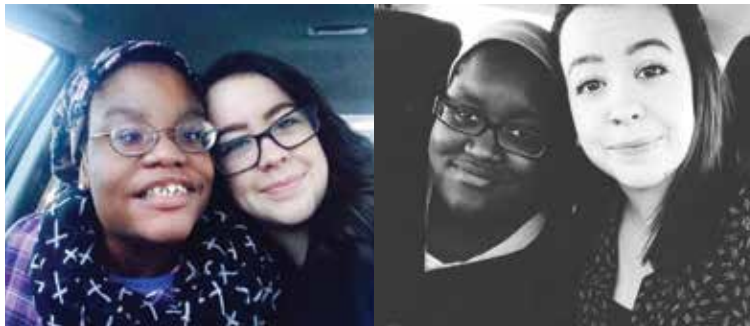
Fall 2017

A Sibling Perspective *by Jessica Robinson*

When I think back on my life, it is hard for me to remember a time before my sisters were my sisters. I guess this is understandable because my sisters came to live with our family when I was only 10 and were officially adopted when I was 13. I did the majority of my growing up and "finding myself years" with them by my side. I think this is also the case because the transition was fairly natural. You may be asking, how could the transition of two African American sisters with special needs into a white middle class family be natural?

My brother and I were raised going to and participating in Handi*Camp—a summer camping ministry for people with disabilities. We were raised with a desire and willingness for inclusivity for everyone. I am grateful to my parents for these views being integrated into our "normal" so early in life. Also, my parents had discussed foster care and adoption as a possibility with my brother and me for a while. We knew it was happening. We knew God laid this desire on their hearts to reach out to the children who were less likely to have a family. Children with special needs, especially older children with special, are much less likely to be adopted than younger, "typical" children. There were several children who came to our house for visits over several months. Several children who didn't make the full transition into our home for one reason or another. By the time we visited Alicia and Kisha for the first time, the whole process felt real. I knew I wanted another sibling, and now I was getting two?! I remember being excited. Alicia and Kisha officially moved into our home in March, we moved to Lancaster in May and I started my first year of middle school in August. It was a year full of transition, but I got two new sisters out of it, so I was happy.

This is not to say that this whole transition was sunshine and roses; it would be rare for the situation that we were in to be completely perfect. Being a sibling of two sisters with special needs was different than working at a summer camp for six



Jessica with Kisha (left) and Alicia (right).

weeks. They were a constant in my life, whether that was hard or easy. There were times that I, as the biologically youngest child, was jealous of the newly youngest siblings in my family, because they now required so much of my parents' attention. There were times that I didn't understand the amount of care they

needed or the way they responded to certain situations, but one thing I never faltered on was that they were my family. They are my sisters: the ones that I cry with, laugh with, would defend or die for and I love them with all my heart, exactly as I love the other members of my family.

Fast forward to present life. We just celebrated Alicia and Kisha's 13th adoption anniversary in August, and it's been 15 years since they came into our family for the first time. Since that first day, 15 years ago, we have experienced both joy and heartache, both laughter and tears, both fear and understanding. When people ask me what it's like to have siblings with special needs, and make the comment, "That must be hard," I always agree; but I can't begin to imagine how different my life would be without my sisters. Through the heartache, tears and difficult situations, I learned how to trust deeply in God and realize that true joy does not come from fading circumstances. Through the joy and laughter, I learned firsthand that God truly works things out for good for those who love Him. Without realizing the needs of my sisters, I would have not realized God's purpose for my life—to become a nurse for children with disabilities, which I truly love and can't imagine not doing. I could go on and on about the countless lessons that having siblings with disabilities has taught me, but they all come back to the faithfulness of God. So, I'll end with lyrics from a treasured song: "Season by season, I watch Him, amazed, in awe of the mystery of His perfect ways. All I have need of, His hand will provide. He's always been faithful to me."

Special Sibling Resources:

God has blessed so many families with special needs children. There can be just as many blessings, and challenges, for those who are siblings. For parents, it's important to recognize these challenges and make sure the needs of siblings are being met as well. Here are some resources:

- **Sibling Leadership Network** @ siblingleadership.org
The mission of the Sibling Leadership Network is to provide siblings of individuals with disabilities the information, support and tools to advocate with their brothers and sisters and to promote the issues important to them and their entire families."
- **Sibling Support Project** @ siblingsupport.org
Founded in 1990, the Sibling Support Project is the first national program dedicated to the life-long and ever-changing concerns of millions of brothers and sisters of people with special health, developmental, and mental health concerns.

Two good articles on Siblings of people with Disabilities:

- From the *Washington Post*: [washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2016/12/20/8-things-siblings-of-children-with-special-needs-struggle-with/?utm_term=.83959bde5be2](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2016/12/20/8-things-siblings-of-children-with-special-needs-struggle-with/?utm_term=.83959bde5be2)
- From the *New York Times*: parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/10/growing-up-with-a-disabled-sibling

Upcoming H*VMI Events

November 17, 2017 **ExtraOrdinary Give Event**, Extragive.org (see enclosed flyer)
March 22, 2018 **NJ Banquet Fundraiser**, Voorhees NJ

Exciting News:

Praise God and **Thank You!** H*VMI is now a property owner!

"We give all the glory and honor to the God who provides exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" -Ephesians 3:20

As you know, we have been pursuing this property since 2015. Since that time, so many of you have given generously to the project. We are thrilled to announce that God provided again; and, through your giving the \$100,000 matching goal was met and exceeded! As a result of all this, H*VMI was able to purchase the property debt-free. Praise the Lord!



Contact us at
717.859.4777
or visit
hvmi.org
for details.

Support Groups:

Join other parents of "children" (of any age) with disabilities for fellowship, sharing, prayer and encouragement from God's Word at our **PIP** (Parents in Progress) Support Group meetings:

South Jersey

Collingswood, NJ..... 3rd Thursday, 7:30 PM (Sept.-May)
(Bible Club program available during meeting time for children, teens and adults with a disability.)

Lancaster County

Akron, PA..... 2nd Monday, 7:30 PM (Sept-May)

Heart to Heart is produced
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Parents In Progress

is a group designed just for parents of children with disabilities, offering resources to help them as they raise and nurture their children; and providing a "safe" environment of support and encouragement where they can freely discuss the issues unique to their families.

"PIP is the one place I can truly express my frustrations because I know everyone there understands and cares."

Please feel free to contact **Heart to Heart** regarding articles, resources, or information contained in this publication. We also welcome your thoughts, personal testimonies, articles, and resources that would be helpful or encouraging to other parents!

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