

Being Susie's Brother

By: Joe Jolles, brother of JFGH resident Susie

Growing up with four siblings can be challenging for anyone, but for our family, it is and was our normal. Even though Susie has lived away from home since an early age, we still grew up together. Our parents never spoke down to Susie, so we didn't either. Our parents never favored her, so we never felt left out. Our parents treated us all the same, which we value as adults. Because of how our parents raised us and the supports they provided, I have never felt overwhelmed by taking responsibility for Susie or jealous of any extra attention she may have received. In fact, Susie herself would give you all the attention you needed, if you took the time to talk to or play with her.



Joe and Susie Jolles

I have many fond memories of our childhood, and what I admire most is Susie's ability to stand up for herself. There were times when people made fun of her, but I always considered that their problem-not Susie's or mine. I remember one time Susie and I went to the neighborhood pool and a lifeguard was standing on the diving board, making fun of her. Without batting an eyelash, Susie approached her and asked, "Oh, are you making fun of me?" The lifeguard looked ashamed of herself, and one could only feel sorry for her-not for Susie.

At a different time we were at the Montgomery Mall and Susie threw a rare tantrum because she wanted a diet soda, and I wouldn't buy it for her. There, 10 people circled around us, wondering what was going on. I simply said, "Susie, you can scream as loud as you want but I'm not buying that diet soda because it's bad for you. You can get this other drink instead," pointing to a better option. She got very quiet and asked "Are you mad at me?" I said, "I think you are too grown up to throw tantrums," and she said she was sorry and never did it again.

When I was a teenager, I saw Ernest Angley on TV and he promised he could "heal" anybody if they come to his large-scale prayer meeting at Constitution Hall. Given my young age, I thought nothing ventured nothing gained, and maybe he really could heal Susie's brain damage from meningitis as an infant. We went, but they wouldn't let us in. Some very sincere people offered to pray for her outside the Hall, and before Susie and I knew, it a crowd of about eight very sincere and enthusiastic people were praying and rubbing Susie's head, yelling, "Lord! Recreate the Brain! Lord recreate the brain! Lord recreate the brain!" It happened so fast I was a bit shocked, but when I looked at Susie she was grinning from ear to ear, just basking in the attention and sensation of having her head rubbed.



Charlie, Hope, Susie, Joe and cousin Jody

Needless to say, growing up with Susie was always fun and still is. And what an adventure! Lastly, I know it will be an adjustment for me and my siblings to take on more responsibility in the future, but perhaps because there are a bunch of us and perhaps because we love her so much, I can't envision it as burdensome. My mom has already written a book on Susie's care, which is a great start! I honestly can only envision the future with Susie as a joyful responsibility shared with me and her other lucky siblings! We love you Susie!!

If you have a sibling story you'd like to share, please email bshapiro@jfg.org.



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