

On January 23, 2004, a very important event in my life took place. On that day, my little brother, Sean Patrick Michel, was born. Sean is a very special person to me because he not only brings me happiness but he gives me hope for the future as well.

I can still remember how excited I was when Sean was born. I couldn't wait to bring him home; I wanted to show Sean everything—I wanted to acquaint him with his new home. Sean was born with Down syndrome, a genetic disorder marked by physical and developmental delays, so Sean wouldn't be coming home right away. At only five months old, Sean had to undergo heart surgery; I was scared for my little brother.

After a Down syndrome child is born, he or she must face some painful challenges. When a Down syndrome baby comes into the world, the infant often has little holes in his heart which make breathing difficult. Later in life, many Down syndrome children become afflicted with leukemia.

The holes in Sean's heart had to be repaired. As Sean was going through surgery, I was in my bed crying. I thought, "Why is this happening to Sean? Why is this happening to me? I just got this new baby brother; I don't want to lose him." I hoped and prayed that the surgery would go well because if anything went wrong, Sean would most likely die.

Thankfully, Sean survived the procedure. I looked at the crucifix in my room and expressed my relief; at that moment, I realized that God had a plan for Sean. God wanted Sean to be the "heart" of my family.

Today, Sean is eleven years old. Sean is the glue that holds my family together. I look forward to seeing Sean every morning. My morning routine wouldn't be the same without Sean's cheerily waving goodbye to me as I leave for school.

I hesitate to think what my life would be without Sean. I do know that it would be much emptier. I now realize that God is repeatedly telling me, through Sean's survival, that every life matters, and that every life is worth living. Sean is a gift to my family because he has made us gentler and kinder people; I hope my little brother knows this!

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