

My Brother,

My Hero

Olivia, 15, knows how amazing her younger brother, Evan, is. That's why she wishes more people would get to know kids with special needs. BY OLIVIA SEKER, AS TOLD TO JESSICA PRESS

When my brother, Evan, and I were little, we loved playing pretend. Sometimes we'd put the armchair covers over our heads and make believe they were our long hair. Other times we'd strap on our backpacks and imagine we were secret agents.

Now that Evan is 12 and I'm 15, there are different things we like to do together.

We watch videos on YouTube. We go swimming or run around outside. Evan makes me laugh really hard. He's so much smarter than any other seventh graders I know.

But most kids never find out how funny, kind, and wise Evan is. That's because most kids don't get to know Evan at all. He doesn't get invited to birthday parties. He doesn't get picked first in gym class.

Evan has a **disability**. And too many people see only the ways Evan is different. They don't see that in so many ways, he's just like anyone else. He loves video games, reading, and being outdoors.

Evan's disability is just one small part of who he is.

Daily Challenges

Evan has faced challenges his entire life. He was born

15 weeks early and suffered bleeding in his brain. Because of this, Evan has something called cerebral palsy. It's a medical disorder that can cause problems with moving and speaking.

Evan's cerebral palsy may make him seem different when you first meet him. He walks with braces on his legs. And sometimes he makes sudden sounds called tics.

Evan also doesn't have as much *social awareness* as other kids his age. That means it can be hard for him to understand what other people are thinking and feeling.

Sometimes that causes Evan to talk too much. But he doesn't mean to take over the conversation. Usually he's just really excited and doesn't want to lose people's attention.

FAMILY LOVE

Olivia and Evan walk their dog, Kipper. Evan has a medical condition called cerebral palsy.

VOCABULARY

disability: a condition that limits a person's mental or physical abilities

progress: getting better over time; improvement

therapy: treatment for an illness, injury, or disability

resent: feel hurt or angry about something

empathy: ability to feel someone else's feelings

CHRISTOPHER LANE/STUDIO AT GETTY IMAGES FOR SCHOLASTIC

Getting Stronger

The way Evan looks and acts can sometimes surprise people or make them uncomfortable. I get it. It's normal to be scared of something that's unfamiliar.

But think about this:

When Evan was born, doctors said he might never walk, talk, or swallow. He has worked so hard to be able to do these things. So what if he looks and sounds a little different when he does them?

None of Evan's **progress** has come easy. From the time he was a baby, he has had many surgeries. Now he goes to about nine different appointments each week.

He does stretches every day before he puts on his braces. He works on his speech and breathing with an expert. And he visits doctors to help him strengthen his muscles.

He also does a really cool **therapy** with horses. It helps improve his speech and movement. Now he's even able to help with chores. As his sister, I am so proud of all that Evan has achieved.

Family Bond

Don't get me wrong. Evan is still my little brother. He can annoy me as much as any little brother annoys his sister! I often get frustrated when

BEST FRIENDS

1. Riding horses has made Evan stronger.
2. Olivia and Evan love to go swimming together.
3. "Evan makes me laugh really hard," says Olivia.

my parents are easier on him. Sometimes I even **resent** Evan—and then I feel guilty for feeling that way.

But mainly I want to protect Evan. I just want people to treat him normally. I hate when they stare at him, avoid him, or talk to him in a baby voice—as if he's dumb.

When this happens, he'll reply: "I can hear you just fine. How are you today?" It always makes me laugh. And it reminds me that he doesn't need me to protect him. He's independent in his own way.

Your Power

Some days I wish Evan didn't have cerebral palsy. That way he wouldn't have to work so hard or feel left out.

But I am also grateful for all that Evan's challenges have taught our family. We always support each other and have learned to have **empathy** for others.

I know teens like me hear so many lessons about treating people equally. I know that it's easy to start to tune them out or think they don't apply to you.

But please understand that every kid deserves to be included. You have the power to make that happen.

It starts with the most simple thing: Just say hi. •

COURTESY OF SEKER FAMILY (HORSE, SWIMMING); CHRISTOPHER LANE/STUDIO AT GETTY IMAGES FOR SCHOLASTIC (LAUGHING)

Action Activity

GO FURTHER!
FIND ACTIVITIES ONLINE

PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

You've just read

"My Brother, My Hero." Now it's time to do this activity.

WHAT TO DO: In this story, Olivia talks about a **problem** that she sees her brother face. You also learn about how you can become part of the **solution** to that problem.

In the chart below, fill in the blanks. First, identify the solution. Then, write in the details from the story that help you understand the problem and solution.

The Problem: Many people treat Evan differently because he has cerebral palsy.

Detail 1:

Some kids never even get to know Evan.

Detail 2:

Hint: What sorts of things is Evan left out of?

Detail 3:

Hint: What do people do to Evan that Olivia hates?

The Solution:

Detail 1:

Getting to know someone can help you see the ways that they are similar to you.

Detail 2:

Hint: What lesson does Olivia want you to pay attention to?

Detail 3:

Hint: What's one easy way to make someone feel included?



MY SISTER, MY HERO "Olivia has taught me to be independent, to never give up, and to stay positive," says Evan.

