

## Samantha Winzenread

My little brother, Gary, was born with Downs Syndrome and was diagnosed with Autism at the age of two or three. I was six at the time, so I do not remember everything in great detail. However I remember the first time I ever saw my new baby brother. He was still in the hospital, having been born at a very premature state, and was stationed in an intensive care unit, hooked up to what looked like hundreds of tubes and wires. I remember finally getting to hold him for the first time. I have always had a tremendous love for children, but this was an experience different than anything I had ever seen before. Gary was the smallest little baby I had ever seen in my life, only about the size of my small forearm. Holding him was amazing; words cannot describe the emotion I felt. All I knew was that there was something special about this little miracle, and I loved him more than I ever imagined I could.

Things have definitely changed since October of 2001. Some people may feel bad for me or my family for having a special needs child in our lives. I could never, nor have I ever pictured him as a burden or something unfortunate. I would give anything for Gary to be healthy, but part of me is glad he is the way he is. He has taught me more about love than most people get the privilege to enjoy in their entire lives. I am so incredibly lucky to have been given the opportunity to know and love Gary. He has opened my eyes to the world around me. Not only do I appreciate the little things that some take for granted, but I now possess the ability to look beyond the surface and see the people underneath a hazy exterior. Through Gary I have taken part in organizations and activities with kids who also have a disability. These experiences are among the happiest moments of my life, which brings me to share what I have done over this past summer.

During the summer of 2008 I volunteered to help educate and play with young children with Autism at the Fairfield Center for Autism, or what is now known as the Cincinnati Center for Autism. Every Monday through Thursday, for the extent of my summer, I would go with Gary to his summer camp and as soon as I walked in the door a rush of love and pure happiness would surge through me, brightening any day. These children were the highlight of my summer, and their love and blissful personalities had the power to make me feel like I was finally making a difference in the world around me. In no time at all I knew, without a doubt that this was my true calling in life, there is nothing else that I would rather do than help children with special needs. I can not begin to describe how it feels to know that you have found your place in the world and you know, deep in your heart, that you are helping the lives of children; I have never experienced anything like it.

Physically helping children is not the only way I feel I can make a difference. I also feel that I have the ability to share my story, Gary's story, and my immense passion with those around me. By educating others I can share the blessings I have been given, with the world and spread the never-ending supply of love I have received from the people in my life. I truly believe that if I continue to do this, with the support of those around me, I have the power to influence a great amount of lives. Through the blessings we are given and the love that surrounds us, we have the ability to change the world. For every bit of love that a single person gives, another person receives, and love is what makes the world go round.