

Adult Essay
Second Place

Bingo

By Marilyn Millstone

One month ago, my older brother and I made the wrenching decision to move our developmentally disabled younger brother David into a long-term care facility. His ongoing difficulties with personal hygiene had finally caused an illness that nearly cost him his life. We felt we had to wrap him in a cocoon of constant care. This meant David had to give up the semi-independent life he loved—sharing an apartment with a roommate and working in an elementary school.

Now David would be in a world where most people were in wheelchairs. Instead of going to work each day—a routine that had given his life meaning for nearly 40 years—he would have to find joy in things like playing bingo. He would have to adapt, as he had so many times before.

On the morning of the day the staff and I moved David into his room—which I'd already decorated with his favorite Beatles posters—my normally kind, gentle baby brother shouted expletives I didn't even know he knew.

Shocked at his behavior, I asked everyone to leave the room. David lay down on his twin-size hospital bed and regarded me with his large, luminous blue eyes. "Sis," he said, "I think I just struck out."

I sank down on the bed, patted his arm, and tried to see the world through his eyes. He'd had to move six times since my mother passed away in 2003. A group house that closed due to embezzlement. An apartment where he was preyed upon by a bipolar neighbor.

Once, he was accused of streaking naked through the apartment complex where he lived; only when it was proven that David was at work at the time of the incident did police discover the true offender: David's roommate. For a time, the ugliness of the whole thing had David deeply depressed. Then one day, he called me. "Sis," he said, "I'm never living with anyone again. I'm a confirmed bachelor."

After I got through laughing, I thought: *David, you are the most resilient person on the planet.*

I reminded him of all this as I sat on his bed, but he was inconsolable. And for the next few weeks, reports from staff were dismal: he was sleeping too much; he kept complaining he was sick; he was mean.

Worst of all, when I called to talk to him, he was horrible to me. So I decided to let some time pass. Then, this morning, I called again.

A nurse answered his phone. "David Millstone's room," she said. I could hear by the lightness in her voice that just saying his name made her smile.

I asked where he was. "He's over at bingo," she said. "He loves him his bingo."

"You sound like you like him," I said.

"Like him?" she asked. "Everyone here LOVES him!"

"Thank you," I said. "Happy holidays."

And I hung up before she could hear my tears. Tears of gratitude. Tears of amazement. Tears of joy.