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# My Brother,



### FAMILY LOVE

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

# 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

**W**hen 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, we enjoy spending time together in other ways.

## 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

We watch videos on YouTube, 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—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 people often see only the ways he's different. They don't see that in 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.

As a result, Evan has cerebral palsy, a medical disorder that can cause problems with moving and speaking.

Evan's cerebral palsy may make him appear 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, so it can be difficult 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 monopolize the conversation. Usually he's just really excited and doesn't want to lose people's attention.

## Getting Stronger

The way Evan looks and acts can sometimes surprise people or make them uncomfortable. I get it. It's normal to be afraid or uncertain when you encounter something unfamiliar.



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But consider this: When Evan was born, doctors said he might never walk, talk, or swallow. He has worked incredibly 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, which helps improve his speech and movement. Now he's even able to help with chores. As his sister, I'm really proud of all that Evan has achieved.

## Family Bond

Don't get me wrong—Evan is still my little brother, and he can annoy me as much as any little brother annoys his sister! I often get

### 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.

frustrated when 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. It's also a valuable reminder that Evan 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 excluded.

But I'm 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.

Teens like me are constantly hearing messages about treating people equally, and I know how easy it can be to start tuning them out or thinking they don't apply to you.

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

It starts with the simplest thing: Just say hi. •