Labeling Oneself: A Lesson in Love

On the first day of my life they labeled me a funny-looking kid
In the fifth year they labeled me hyperactive
In the 6th year they labeled me mentally retarded
In the 8th year they labeled me learning disabled
In the 9th year they labeled me tone deaf (sings off key)
In the 10th year they labeled me gifted and talented
In the 12th year they labeled me overachiever
In the 15th year they labeled me emotionally disturbed
In the 18th year they labeled me schizophrenic
In the 30th year they labeled me career-woman burnout
In the 40th year they labeled me over the hill
But today I gave it all up, and threw all the labels away.

I really was:
Brilliant and creative.
Sensitive and strong.
Smarter than the shrinks,
Social changer,
Freedom fighter,
Life-role explorer.

Natural musician,
Quite good looking,
Curious and inquisitive,
Joyous,
And an outstanding human being.

Author unknown
A cartoon from *Parade*.
LaughParade, February 29, 2004
Page 10.
The dog chastises his master, "'Bad dog'? Please don’t label me, Carl."

**Federal categories**
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Visually impairment
- Hearing impairment/Deaf
- Deafblindness
- Developmental Delay (DD)
- Emotional disturbance

**Federal categories (cont.)**
- Specific learning disability
- Mental retardation
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Speech and language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)

**Level of supports**
- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe
- Profound

**People will learn**
Abbey is my second oldest sister. She has played a large role in shaping my virtues, values, and integrity. She has brought many things to my life, things you can’t buy with money and things I will cherish, use, and remember all my life.

**I can hear**
The giggles
The jokes
The snickers
The whispers
I can see
The stares
The pointing fingers
The evil smiles

I can remember
The confusion Abbey felt
The way she laughed it off like a joke she was telling them,
Not understanding she was the joke

I can call back
The times she would cry about her Down Syndrome
The way she has recurrently been on the outside looking in
The never-ending persistence of my mother to include her

I can mirthlessly call back
The times I left her behind
The pride I often lacked, the pride she taught me

I can feel
The frustration my mother deals with everyday because of the public school system and their absence of an inclusive program

I know
Life is not fair
Lots of people don’t understand
I would never give anything not to have Abbey in my life
I and my family, will survive
People will learn.
Abbey was born with Down Syndrome. She has an extra chromosome that debilities her ability to learn, understand, and process. Abbey does, however, try her hardest and accomplishes a lot. She is human and not without flaw. She is like you and me; she feels, she has a personality, in fact, a very defined personality.

She’s stubborn, strong-willed, persistent, impatient, and compassionate. Abbey has taught me a lot about who I am and who I want to be. She has persevered through more than I can imagine going through myself. I am extremely proud to say she is my friend, but even more so to say she is my sister.

Heins (2001)

References