

The “Dance With Me” Story

By Linda Daugherty

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My brother, Jon Gary Martinsen, was born May 24th, one month and two days after my eighth birthday. The birth of my only sibling had been excitedly anticipated by me, and in expectation of the event I assumed the duty of pushing the shopping cart for my almost forty-year-old pregnant mother. At last the day came and my brother was born. While my mother recovered in the hospital for over a week, my Great Aunt Lena came to take care of me. During those long days I remember sensing a strange vibration in the air, my father’s sad brown eyes and the injustice of Aunt Lena’s decree that I was not to cross the street to visit my best friend Darlene, a freedom I’d enjoyed since I was seven. Without knowing the reason, I sensed that life had changed. It had changed for me and for my parents. Our lives were never as simple or carefree again.

It was months later when my mother explained to me that my little brother had Down Syndrome. Her disclosure resulted from my repeated begging to take my new, beautiful brother to school for “show and tell.” I can still see the tomato-red kitchen counter with my fingers spread and gripping for dear life as she told me that Jon had a problem, that he would never grow into the brother I pictured in my mind, that he had many physical problems and needed to be protected. She also told me that we would always love him and he would love us. She told me that Jon was special. She also told me that we would always love him and he would love us.

Now I am a playwright. My audience is young people and their families. I tell stories through the characters I create. Much of the story of Dance with Me is from my imagination, from the “what if” questions that playwrights always ask. Some of the play is structured to be dramatic, to lead the audience, step by step, on a journey. Some of Dance with Me is the truth. It is my truth, but may not be the truth of those who struggle in similar situations. I am not Cricket and Tom is not my brother, Jon. Dance with Me is a story with its own life.

For myself, watching the play in a darkened theater, I take pleasure in my own small creations: a brother for Cricket who can dance on and on without physical limitations; the celebration of a unique spirit, quick to laugh, love and forgive; and the memory of “Old MacDonald had a farm, ei, ei, o...” sung late at night to my sweet, special brother Jon.