

**Third Place**

**Alexandra Hildreth**

**11<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Garden City High School, Garden City, NY**

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*“Woke up, fell out of bed,  
Dragged a comb across my head  
Found my way downstairs and drank a cup,  
And looking up I noticed I was late.”*

The Beatles’ music always put me in a good mood and this day was no different...or so I thought. A sophomore in high school, I was working my way through my morning classes when the text landed on my phone. Or should I say *crash landed* on my phone! It was a text that disturbed me to the core; it was a screenshot of another student’s Instagram video and the person in the video was my sister, a junior at the same school. Two years older than me, my sister has nonverbal autism and she was having a difficult time in the nurse’s office. Another student, who was also at the nurse had videotaped my sister crying. The student who posted, had captioned the video by saying that my sister’s crying was making her migraine worse!

Why anyone would single out a special needs student and complain about how their own life was interrupted was difficult for me to comprehend. The post was upsetting and word got back to the student and she removed it from social media. I wasn’t hurt just stunned. My friend’s response stung further. “That’s ok; they make fun of my brother online all of

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the time.” Her brother, who has Tourette’s, also attends our school.

He’s a great kid who always has been overly kind to my sister at football games and clubs.

Kids like my sister and my friend’s brother are easy targets because they don’t understand when they are being bullied. We need to show the bully that you cannot ridicule special needs kids. We all walk the same path. We show respect. When you peer into a classroom and see students; you don’t see autism and you don’t see Tourette’s, you don’t see special needs. You see friends, neighbors, brothers, sisters. A bully sees a target and that’s the problem.

The Challenger Basketball league is great, we give high fives; we fist pump. I am a fan of volunteering with kids. I believe it can help reduce bullying. When I volunteer with special needs kids at dances, parades and clubs, I feel like I can show the girl to my right and the boy to my left, just how kids are all the same. A new volunteer will say to me, ‘I don’t know what to talk about.’ Ask about a favorite color. Ask about a favorite song. We all sing, dance and have feelings, too. They want to go to Ralph’s for ice cream. They want to laugh and watch tv with friends. And like all of us, we don’t want to be humiliated, teased or picked on.

***The more united we are, the more united we are.***