Damaris Anderson

A Compassionate Ear

Like most older siblings, I too cherish my siblings with my entire being. My brother and sister provide air so I can breathe and without them I would be lifeless. Having a brother with autism has never affected the way I viewed my brother or determined the depth of my love, but the way external forces view and approach autism has altered my perspective on the world. The harmful misconceptions and stereotypes placed on people with autism have motivated me to strive to create a world where my brother, and others like him, can navigate the world with the respect and understanding they deserve.

All I’ve ever wanted is to protect my siblings from the horrors of the world that I have seen and experienced. However, this didn’t become a challenge until I was about ten years old, making my brother about 7 and a half. It was the start of middle school when I had become conscious of how cruel and insensitive the world could be. Terms like the r word and other nasty vocabulary were thrown around like they weren’t emotionally damaging to so many individuals. I was disgusted, these people spoke such hateful and derogatory words and it repulsed me, because all I could think about was the innocence of my little brother being stripped away from him, for he too one day would realize that people weren’t always nice. These words with such deep meaning, were played out to be some kind of joke, but I found nothing amusing about the struggles of autism. Although autism did not define my brother, it had impacted my family’s life from the way we ate, to the way we communicated, and that was overlooked by the humor people had found in such hateful words. People seem to neglect the fact that everyone has feelings, and words hold deep meaning.

I have struggled with my own mental health since I was nine years old, but it wasn’t until my Junior year of high school that I was sent to an outpatient to seek the help I was desperately in need of. While I was there I met different people with different experiences and struggles. While there not only did I gain knowledge and insight to my own mind and struggles, but of others. I had realized that so many other people feel ignored and neglected, especially people with autism because their struggles are so undermined. Reflecting on my own history of having my struggles minimized since childhood, I developed a deep sense of empathy for those who experienced something similar. By learning more about autism, it honestly saved me, my brother saved me. My brother, sharing his own hardships with me, became a pivotal figure in my journey. His openness not only strengthened our bond but also played a crucial role in saving me from the depths of my own struggles, for my brother had taught me my purpose in life-- to help others. My passion in life is to be that compassionate ear who will listen when no one else will, for I have felt that indescribable pain of neglect.