

God Lives Under the Bed

From Shobi and Anonymous

This is a story that came to me anonymously. I could not find an author on the Internet. After reading this story, it is hard for me to say *Disabled*. *Challenged* or *Handicapped*. Most of us adults feel mentally challenged every day!

God lives under the Bed

I envy Kevin. My brother Kevin thinks God lives under his bed. At least that's what I heard him say one night.

He was praying out loud in his dark bedroom, and I stopped to listen, "Are you there, God?" he said. "Where are you? Oh, I see. Under the bed..."

I giggled softly and tiptoed off to my own room. Kevin's unique perspectives are often a source of amusement. But that night something else lingered long after the humor. I realized for the first time the very different world Kevin lives in.

He was born 30 years ago, mentally disabled as a result of difficulties during labor. Apart from his size (he's 6-foot-2), there are few ways in which he is an adult. He reasons and communicates with the capabilities of a 7-year-old, and he always will. He will probably always believe that God lives under his bed, that Santa Claus is the one who fills the space under our tree every Christmas and that airplanes stay up in the sky because angels carry them.

I remember wondering if Kevin realizes he is different. Is he ever dissatisfied with his monotonous life? Up before dawn each day, off to work at a workshop for the disabled, home to walk our cocker spaniel, return to eat his favorite macaroni-and-cheese for dinner, and later to bed. The only variation in the entire scheme is laundry, when he hovers excitedly over the washing machine like a mother with her newborn child. He does not seem dissatisfied.

He lopes out to the bus every morning at 7:05, eager for a day of simple work. He wrings his hands excitedly while the water boils on the stove before dinner, and he stays up late twice a week to gather our dirty laundry for his next day's laundry chores.

And Saturdays-oh, the bliss of Saturdays! That's the day my Dad takes Kevin to the airport to have a soft drink, watch the planes land, and speculate loudly on the destination of each passenger inside. "That one's goin' to Chi-car-go!" Kevin shouts as he claps his hands. His anticipation is so great he can hardly sleep on Friday nights.

And so goes his world of daily rituals and weekend field trips. He doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple. He will never know the entanglements of wealth or power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears or what kind of food he eats. His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they may not be.

His hands are diligent. Kevin is never so happy as when he is working. When he unloads the dishwasher or vacuums the carpet, his heart is completely in it. He does not shrink from a job when it is begun, and he does not leave a job until it is finished. But when his tasks are done, Kevin knows how to relax. He is not obsessed with his work or the work of others. His heart is pure.

He still believes everyone tells the truth, promises must be kept, and when you are wrong, you apologize instead of argue. Free from pride and unconcerned with appearances, Kevin is not afraid to cry when he is hurt, angry or sorry. He is always transparent, always sincere. And he trusts God.

Not confined by intellectual reasoning, when he comes to Christ, he comes as a child. Kevin seems to know God - to really be friends with Him in a way that is difficult for an "educated" person to grasp. God seems like his closest companion.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations with my Christianity I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then that I am most willing to admit that he has some divine knowledge that rises above my mortal questions. It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap. I am. My obligations, my fear, my pride, my circumstances - they all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care.

Who knows if Kevin comprehends things I can never learn? After all, he has spent his whole life in that kind of innocence, praying after dark and soaking up the goodness and love of God.

And one day, when the mysteries of heaven are opened, and we are all amazed at how close God really is to our hearts, I'll realize that God heard the simple prayers of a boy who believed that God lived under his bed.

Kevin won't be surprised at all!

Christina Lewis of the San Francisco Clown School is employed by the San Francisco Board of Education to run an after school program for Developmentally Disabled young adults. She teaches them clowning as a way to understand and socially adjust to everyday life.

Sometimes other clowns will come into Christina's class and improvise with her students. She would say "Just imitate them:" I answered, "But won't they think I am making fun of them?" She answered, "They don't go there. What you are doing is communicating with them." So I learned that it is a matter of keeping it simple and keeping out of the head and in the heart.

These young adults and children are so full of love, it is overwhelming. Some of them will never stop hugging you for just being present with them - by being in their world. This is what we do as caring clowns - with most adults we bring them into our playful world, with children we play in their world. For these children and adults, we need to just enjoy their world with them! They are gleeful over the simplest things. As clowns we can go there and enjoy that glee with them.

From Christina: "Working with the developmentally disabled is the same as working with the dying or sick. It comes from the heart. You need to drop your judgment, let go of your mind, just be with them wherever they are. They will give you back so much more than you ever expected -- you get acceptance and love and the complete lack of judgment."

Shobi Dobi, my clown, can be many ages. She can be an adult and laugh with staff or be serious and talk to a child life worker, but what I love most about her is when she is more like Kevin. She is a child lost in the hospital like so many others. She can get away with backing up in her bewilderment and innocently walking past a

secretary into the Chief Surgeon's office. She then asks, "Is this the way to the airport?" He is usually half standing by this time. "Oh, I'm sorry," Shobi will go on, "I, I, ah didn't mean to bother such a big important person. I'm sorry, sorry" as she backs out of the office past his staff who is giggling and peeking into the office. She finds the elevators equally bewildering and confusing and a total delight to play with. She even laughs at her own jokes with glee. Of course, my "third eye" is always watching out for her and everyone and everything else in the hospital environment.

For more information please go to www.hospitalclown.com "Past Issues" Vol 2 No 2 "*Here's Charlie*" and "*This Little Heart of Mine, I'm Goin' a Let it Shine.*" by Christina Lewis and Arina Isaccson.

... they just play with a toy a little differently



Opening Up to Children With Disabilities

www.goodtogrowtoys.com

Some reports and studies show that the number of U.S. children with special needs ranks in the millions. These "special needs kids" don't necessarily require "special" toys, they just need to be directed to toys that will help them grow and learn.

Joan Machlis, owner of Wind Up Here in Olympia, Washington said "Every time I'd go down on the floor, there's someone who's buying for a child with special needs." To help find toys for children with disabilities, she founded the *Good to Grow Toy Program* which asks occupational therapists to test toys for children with disabilities. Their evaluations are then placed on www.GoodtoGrowToys.com for everyone to access. Retail stores are asked to check out the website when families with special-needs children come into their stores, but the information is there for anyone, including clowns!

"See these kids just as kids," Machlis continues. "Parents and their children want to access playthings in a completely normal environment. A great part of it is believing that children with disabilities like to play ... **they just play with a toy a little differently than a normal child would.**"

Kathy Proctor, therapy supervisor of the program says "Kids with disabilities oftentimes get clothes and stuffed teddy bears for Christmas. Grandparents go to Toys 'R' Us and Wal-Mart, but those toys are mass produced and don't always work for these kids. Kids don't learn unless they have good toys. Getting a good toy is about focusing on skill development - instead of focusing on diagnosis - because all children are achieving developmental milestones."

Proctor continues, "For example, if a child is disabled, the toys with which they play must be simpatico with their disability. For instance, a child with physical limitations may not be able to catch a solid ball, but might be able to catch the rubbery skeletal *O Ball* by *Rhino Toys*, which is easier to grasp. In contrast, children with mental disorders that cause social anxiety or overstimulation need toys that can calm and entertain. Therapists recommend the *Color Morph Bubble Ball* by *Play Visions*.

The *Good to Grow* program is sponsored by the Washington Elks Therapy Program for Children and funded through a grant sponsored by Patty Murray (D-Wash.) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Occupational therapists have tested several hundred toys with children with disabilities. Their observations provide in-depth information on the toy, including how open-ended and accessible it is, if it can be used in a variety of settings and from a range of positions (especially helpful for children with limited mobility), how the parents and kids liked it, and different ways it can be played with.

On this website. You can also look up toys you already have and see how they are used therapeutically. It also contains a way to search for toys by name, disability and age group.

Here is a sample, in part, from the website of a toy that has been tested by Occupational Therapists. It is a toy very familiar to caring clowns - the Bubble Bear available online at

www.TangentToys.stores.yahoo.net/pusubtoy

Bubble Animals - Pop up Bubble blowers

Description of the sensory characteristics of the toy, how it is activated, and why you choose it for therapeutic use



Bubble Animals are activated by squeezing the animal for the bubble wand to come up. While still squeezing, the child must blow on the wand and the bubbles come out. This is great therapeutically because the child needs to squeeze, using the strength in his/her hands and must also blow. The child has to learn how to do two skills at once. The squeezing and blowing really opens up the chest and makes the child use their muscles. Sensory characteristics include visual stimuli of the bubbles and following the bubbles (big and small, oval and circular, etc.). Tactilely, popping the wet and slimy bubbles is always fun for the child.

Skills being promoted or developed by this toy

- Fine Motor: Grasp and release, bilateral hand use, object manipulation, motor planning, hand-eye coordination.
- Gross Motor: Strength, postural stability
- Cognitive Skills: Size recognition, cause and effect
- Communication Skill/Speech and Language
- Oral motor exploration/play
- Expressive and receptive
- Sensory: Visual and tactile exploration
- Social and Emotional Skills: Eye contact and self/body awareness

Suggestions for grading the toy and ideas for play and social interaction and increasing the longevity of the play value

There is no limit to how many people can play because one person can blow and the others can pop the bubbles. Children can take turns blowing the bubbles. They seemed to enjoy playing with them for long periods of time. . . .

The WOW factor and emotional impact for the child

The children thought the activity was GREAT! They enjoyed seeing the wand pop out of the animal.

For a list of disabilities and definitions which may be helpful in determining how to clown with some individuals, please see: www.thehospitalclown.com - click on "workshop handouts."