

10 Things I Discovered Because of My Brother With Special Needs

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My middle brother, Gabe, is almost 27. He has a syndrome called **Cornelia deLange Syndrome** (<http://www.cdlsusa.org/>) (CdLS). He can't use the bathroom on his own and does not really speak. Growing up with a special needs sibling taught me a lot of lessons and helped shape me into the person I am today.

1. Music is a universal language. Gabe is a talented piano player and is completely self-taught. His music speaks from his soul, since he composes the songs himself. His music is his way of expressing his feelings to us and of finding his voice for the world to hear.

2. Perfection is overrated. When most people look at Gabe, they notice the things that make him different — his teeth that don't quite fit together or his bushy, combined eyebrows. What they don't see is the amazing, sweet person inside. He may not be perfect to others, but he is perfect to me and I wouldn't change a thing about him. Perfection means being able to see the good inside yourself.

3. A little silliness goes a long way. I'll be the first to admit that Gabe and I have some very silly moments together — from the times I danced upon our basement table to children's music videos to entertain Gabe to the times when I swung around the columns in our house to Gabe's piano playing. Gabe taught me not to take life too seriously and to embrace my silly side.



(<http://themighty.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Shira-Kipnees-the-mighty-05122015-1.jpg>)

4. **A smile goes a long way, too.** When Gabe smiles, the whole world just seems to light up and everyone melts. Gabe taught me that smiles are powerful things and that when you smile, people like to smile back and be happy.
5. **It's OK to share the attention.** I was used to Gabe being the center of my parents' attention due to his disabilities. While sometimes I did want more of the limelight, the times when I did have the focus on me became all the sweeter.
6. **Find things that make you happy — and do them!** Gabe taught me that there's no reason to make yourself sad and miserable when you can do things that you actually enjoy. The last time we celebrated Gabe's birthday, he didn't enjoy all the fanfare and instead just wanted to go for a car ride, something that makes him incredibly happy. Sometimes you shouldn't have to do things for other people and should just do what makes you happy.
7. **Food=happiness.** While it's not a good idea to overeat, sometimes just enjoying your favorite foods can make your day a bit better. Gabe always is content when we get him french fries, white rice or bagels to eat on a car ride. Some of the best moments Gabe and I had when we were younger happened while we were having dinner together.
8. **Being smart is not the same as being educated.** Gabe is incredibly smart — he has made it clear he understands everything we tell him and taught himself how to play the same notes on the piano over and over again. Gabe might not be able to discuss a novel with me, but he has figured out how to get his way and make his needs known in a clever way.
9. **It's OK to ask for help.** Gabe will often ask for help when he can't do something or feels too lazy to do something, usually making someone else do his work for him. However, when times would get tough with Gabe, my family and I would look for ways to get help to make Gabe's life better.
10. **Love is all you need.** Gabe isn't one to show a lot of affection. But when he does show affection, like giving me a kiss on the cheek, it makes my heart just burst in happiness and love. Just seeing my family's love and support for Gabe and for each other has shown me that love can handle anything.

The Mighty is asking its readers the following: What's one secret about you or your loved one's disability and/or disease that no one talks about? If you'd like to participate, please send a blog post to community@themighty.com. Please include a photo for the piece, a photo of yourself and 1-2 sentence bio.

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