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## Siblings spread message of love and acceptance

[Louis Power](#)

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### Presenting 'Two Pet Rats' book at St. Michael's School, Janeway today

By the time Tommy Glatzmayer was in Grade 1, he was fed up with people teasing his sister and asking him questions about her.



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Tommy and Melanie Glatzmayer pose with their pet rats, Subbi and Chad. The siblings are in St. John's to present the book "Tommy and Melanie Have Two Pet Rats and One Syndrome" at St. Michael's and the Janeway Children's Health and Rehabilitation Centre. Tommy wrote the book to help his friends understand his sister, who has Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, and has continued to spread his message of being kind to people who are considered different.

Melanie Glatzmayer, three years older than her brother, was born with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome — a rare developmental disorder with only 100 known cases in Canada.

It has affected, among other things, her vision, her hearing and her ability to communicate and eat. Now 15, she has already undergone 14 surgeries.

Tommy, whose family lives in Manotick, Ont., didn't think that should stop people from being kind to her. To educate his friends, he wrote a book called "Tommy and Melanie Have Two Pet Rats and One Syndrome."

The book ended up changing her life. With it, Tommy encouraged a lot of people to smile and say hi to her — and to anyone who's considered different — instead of staring.

"I find if someone smiles at me it makes me feel pretty good, it makes my day, and if you just look at somebody with a straight face, or look at someone like they're different or something, it's kind of not very nice, and makes them down a little bit," said Tommy, 12.

Their mother, Nathalie Wendling, said the community's reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. She said now, when they go to a hockey game, dozens of people will stop and greet Melanie, and at school, students say hello in the hallway.

*"If she could say 'hi' to 20 people in a day, this is like her favourite thing. She loves that people take the time to say hi to her," Wendling said.*

*After the book was self-published by his family, Tommy began giving presentations at schools to spread his message.*

*He has presented to children across the country, and is now in Newfoundland with his family — including the rats — to give presentations at St. Matthew's and the Janeway Children's Health and Rehabilitation Centre today.*

*Wendling said both her children have displayed incredible strength and courage in their own ways throughout their lives, and they taught her a lot about love and acceptance.*

*"I always thought I was going to have kids because I was wanting to teach them how to swim, and how to ski, and how to do this and how to do that. What I didn't realize about having children was how much they were going to teach me," she said.*

*Tommy taught her how to accept Melanie's disability.*

*"The thing he taught us most about Melanie was how to accept her and not try and change her to be like everybody else. He's always like, just accept her the way she is and let's make this work."*

*Tommy's will to help hasn't faded since he wrote the book. He has written a second book, which features kids in his neighbourhood, and he started a drum circle for people with and without disabilities.*

*"We created that because my sister was sitting at home staring at her iPad, and that's all she'd do all day, so we decided to make a drum circle so she could make more friends and meet new people, and her social life got bigger and better," he said.*

*"People with special needs come, and people that look different come, and they feel good because they have friends and people can hang out in the neighbourhood."*

*He plans to start a drum circle at his sister's high school, where he will be a student next year.*

*Tommy will make a presentation this morning to students at St. Matthew's School in St. John's, and to the public at 3 p.m. at the Janeway.*

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