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9/26/2011  
NTSAD-Gottlieb Sibling Scholarship

Following is my essay for the NTSAD-Gottlieb Sibling Scholarship. I am a graduate student at Wayne State University studying Art Therapy and Counseling. I chose this course of study to combine my love of art and pursue my desire to help others. I have experienced much adversity throughout my life however, I was always fortunate to have been guided by some very special people.

I was two and a half years old when my brother Hershy was born. Finally, I would have someone to wave at on the school playground and a constant tag mate at home. Best of all, I was no longer the baby. I was now promoted to "middle child". I enjoyed having a little brother, he was actually kind of cute and fun to dress up. We spent lots of time together, and I got to know my brother for who he really is, not the image that people think he is. It is because of Hershy that I chose a career in Art Therapy.

As Hershy grew, his skills did not. I remember my mom going to doctors, therapy and the hours she spent researching and looking for answers. At eighteen months Hershy was diagnosed with a horrible disease called Canavan. The doctors told us he wouldn't live to see his second birthday. Suddenly, all my hopes and dreams of a tag-along brother -- were shattered. Hershy would never chase me, he would only move if pushed in his wheelchair. He was never going to speak with his mouth. As each day passed I was learning the reality of what my little brother could and couldn't do. I wouldn't be able to push him on the swings at the park, run around the house or just color. Finding activities to do my with my little brother was becoming increasingly more challenging with each passing day.

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Mom was great at thinking of inclusive activities for us to do. Mom prompted us to make projects. At first it was challenging, I worked hard at making projects with a three year old - that had no purposeful movement.

With endless supplies and an overactive imagination I was, within time, able to create many projects for us to do. One of the first projects was finger painting. Through trial and error, I found that my baby brother, who had no motor control and was unable to hold a paintbrush, loved the feeling of his fingers in the cold wet paint. Mom wasn't exactly thrilled about the mess but beyond happy to see Hershy having so much fun. Over the years we made collages, play dough, and constructed gingerbread houses. On a cold day in December, when Hershy couldn't go out to play in the snow, I brought the snow to him. We dyed it blue and made a fabulous snow person. We made many fun projects together.

As I got older I was faced with more adversity. At age thirteen, my sister and I were in a horrendous auto accident. While both seriously injured, mine were primarily to my face and mouth. Over the course of the next seven years I endured numerous painful surgeries, one after another. I was frustrated and angry at how I looked and felt. I went to therapists to "talk about it"; however I could never find the words to express my pain. Eventually, I discovered art as my self expression. I could describe my feelings through color and define my pain through textures. I began taking art classes to strengthen my skills. The classes frustrated me. Teachers would tell me my art was wrong. I was bewildered by the idea that my self expression was being called wrong. I knew there had to be something out there that would accommodate my love of art and self expression. I discovered art therapy and new immediately I had found my calling.

In 2005 I had the opportunity to tour Eastern Europe. I can only describe it as yet another life altering experience for me. I visited places of mass murder and a haunting past. While

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traveling, I kept a journal of the places I visited and their historical significance. I tried to journal my deepest feelings at each place but again, similar to after the car accident, I found myself at a loss for words. There were thoughts and feelings I could not express through words and found myself sketching the images that appeared before me. These sketches were able to encompass all the emotions I felt within. As the journey continued I found myself standing in a museum with pictures surrounding me on all sides. The pictures were drawings, sketches and paintings done by the children of Terzen Concentration Camp, all completed under the guidance of Freidyl Dicker-Brendies, as an art teacher who was also a prisoner in the camp. I was mesmerized by her ability to assist these youngsters in expressing how they felt. It was at that moment the path of studying art therapy became solidified.

After returning from my trip abroad I looked for a school where I would be able to study art therapy at an undergraduate level. I applied and was accepted into Marygrove College and have since graduated with honors.

My brother Hershy taught me that communication is not always expressed verbally. This realization helped me realize my own inner strength. I believe I have a real creative talent as well as the ability to understand individuals who aren't always able to express themselves in typical verbal ways. As a graduate student studying art therapy and counseling, I have perfected my ability to communicate through art. From my baby brother, who is today twenty three years old, I have learned to live each day and celebrate all of our gifts, no matter how hidden they may be to the untrained eye.