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Love and Adventure: A Calvin and Hobbes Story

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Love and Adventure: A Calvin and Hobbes Story

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Please see the Editors' Foreword - [A Christian Response to Art and Literature: A Very Short Guide to Images and Texts](#)

Description (Optional)

When your brother is mentally and physically disabled, it's sometimes hard to know how to love him well. When it's your twin brother you don't really have much time to adjust, you just have to learn as you go. This essay tells the story of one of my greatest lessons in being a better brother, and surprising enough, the answer was found in perhaps the greatest gift I've ever received: my first copy of Calvin and Hobbes.

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About the Contributor (Optional)

Nathan Robertson is a Junior Broadcasting and Digital Media major from Louisville, KY. He is a student at Cedarville University. He loves all things film and hopes to one day be a screenwriter. He's had multiple opportunities to write and create various short films. His goal for his writing is that it would ask good questions. He wants to leave the answers up to the audience, giving them an opportunity to think about issues in ways that they never have.

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Nonfiction by Nathan Robertson

LOVE AND ADVENTURE— A CALVIN AND HOBBS STORY

I walked into the bathroom where my mom was giving my twin brother Nicholas a bath. The question I wanted to ask burned in my stomach the way it does when you're eight years old and you're about to ask your parents a question that will probably make them upset. However, the question needed to be asked, and I was going to be the one to do it. The redness slowly filled my cheeks as I stood guiltily, even though no words had escaped my mouth yet. Head down, I could see from my peripheral vision the mirror through which I saw my mom glance up at me with a puzzled look on her face.

“What’s wrong Nathan?” she asked.

After a brief silence, I forced the words out of my mouth as fast as I could.

“Why do you love Nicholas more than me?”

Nicholas has a rare genetic disorder called Angelman Syndrome. It is a deletion in the fifteenth chromosome that eliminates his ability to speak, to think critically, and to even walk on his own. He will be fully dependent for the rest of his life. Everyday someone has to change him, bathe him, dress him, and feed him. We did not find out this information until Nicholas and I were about three months old. That was hard, to say the least. I wish I could write a whole story about my parents and their unrelenting strength, their constant love, and their

unending displays of grace, but that would be much too long. I think it may be wiser to simply tell the story of how I lacked those traits, and how I finally found them in an unexpected place—between the covers of my first copy of Calvin and Hobbes.

Calvin and Hobbes, written and illustrated by Bill Watterson, is about the many adventures of a rambunctious boy named Calvin and his stuffed tiger Hobbes. The comics are all fueled by Calvin's imagination. To him Hobbes is a full-grown tiger that he talks to and plays with every single day. Now I'm going to be open and honest here. It was years before I realized that Hobbes was actually a stuffed tiger and not real like Calvin thought he was. I'll never forget making that realization and running downstairs to my dad and yelling frustratingly, "Wait! Is Hobbes not real?" He laughed and said, "Yeah you didn't know that? He's just a stuffed tiger." Those were such profound words to me. "He's just a stuffed tiger." To me he wasn't though, and he wasn't to Calvin either. I decided that though I knew he wasn't real, I would imagine he was a full-grown tiger who sometimes acted as if he was a stuffed animal.

Every new book of comics I got was like a completely new adventure to me. I can still see Calvin as the renowned Spaceman Spiff, flying through space with me sitting next to him as his co-pilot. I can see Hobbes and him playing Calvinball as I came running out of the house to join them. But maybe most of all I could so clearly feel myself laying in the grass with them as they discussed the meaning of life and other philosophical questions. Everyone may have told Calvin that Hobbes couldn't talk to him, couldn't go on walks with him, couldn't understand his intellectual mind, because "he was just a stuffed tiger." Calvin never saw it that way though. Hobbes was his partner in crime, the one he told all his secrets to, the one he tested all of his jokes on because he knew Hobbes would always laugh. Who had a right to say Hobbes couldn't do those things?

Slowly as I worked my way through more and more of their stories, I began to glance up from the pages and see Nicholas sitting in the chair opposite me. I began to tell some of the jokes to Nicholas, to read them aloud and perform each little vignette of Calvin and Hobbes's life. Who was to say he couldn't enjoy these stories too? Just because he couldn't talk, or walk, or understand didn't mean that he should be ignored or viewed as nothing more than a fully dependent being. Then it hit me; Hobbes was a stuffed animal, and he couldn't walk on his own, or talk on his own, or understand people speaking to him, but that never stopped Calvin from trying to make him feel as though he could. Every time Calvin and Hobbes would climb up a tree, Calvin had to carry Hobbes up with him. Every time they rode down a huge hill in a wagon, Calvin had to hold Hobbes so he wouldn't fall out. Every time they had a conversation, Calvin had to speak for Hobbes. Every time Hobbes didn't understand the strange ways in which humans behave, Calvin had to explain it to him. If these stories were so important to me, then I should be willing to do the same.

As I think about the past twenty years that my brother and I have spent every day of together on this earth, I'm reminded of wonderful conversations and adventures that we've shared. Perhaps we've never been out West together, but we've been to old run down saloons with John Wayne and tested our quick draw with the greatest gunslingers. We've been to Camelot and sat around the table as King Arthur presented a rousing speech. We've talked together about the meanings of our existence and how the world could be a better place. At this point, I think he's far more on track to answering that question than I am. And yes, to some it may look odd that I'm talking to Nicholas and he's just staring back at me with a huge smile on his face. One thing I failed to mention is that one of the major symptoms of Angelman Syndrome is frequent smiling and laughter. Nicholas laughs all the time, but to me he's not laughing for no reason. He's laughing because he sees things in a way that I don't. He sees the world through eyes of joy, not eyes of frustration. To him everyday is

an adventure whether someone decides to join him or not. It simply took me a while to get in the wagon with him.

I think it's funny to realize that my major discovery through the stories of Calvin and Hobbes was something that my parents knew all along. Nicholas's dependency never meant their suffering, it meant their opportunity to join him on an adventure that few had travelled on and experienced. I wish I had seen that sooner, I think I could have loved him better, like my parents did.

—

“Why do you love Nicholas more than me?”

The question fell like a flat basketball on the pavement, it just sort of stuck there. I'll never forget how my mom looked at me, trying to channel her frustration at the question, but ultimately, it was her love for me that shined through.

“Nathan. We do not love Nicholas more than you. We love all of you the same. But Nicholas needs us more than you sometimes. One day you'll grow up and be on your own, and Nicholas will still be here, and I'll still be giving him a bath. But, Nicholas doesn't just need us, he needs you too. God didn't make you twins for no reason. Okay?”

It was such a short response, so simplistic, and yet so powerful that it shook me to my core. It might seem more realistic to say that even after her answer, I continued to struggle with the question, but I didn't. The question never again breached my mind. My mom's response really unlocked a door of understanding for me, and strangely enough, it was Calvin and Hobbes who opened it.

We're both twenty years old now. He's a good bit shorter than I am, his foot is five sizes smaller than mine is, and he has watched far more Jackie Chan movies than I will ever hope or want to watch. A particular Calvin and Hobbes strip comes to my mind when I think about Nicholas.

Calvin says to Hobbes, "You know what I pray for?"

"What?" asks Hobbes.

"The strength to change what I can, the inability to accept what I can't, and the incapacity to tell the difference."

"You should lead an interesting life," Hobbes responds.

"Oh, I already do!"

I'd like to say that I live my life that way, trudging through life with an innate ability to get through hardship, but the more I think about it, the more I think it's more true for Nicholas. His disorder makes him laugh all the time, so he uses it to bring joy to others. His disorder doesn't allow him to have complex conversations, so he simply smiles in response and accepts it. So, whether he understands what's going on or not, he is always looking for the joy in a situation, which certainly leads for an interesting life. I always looked at myself as Calvin, trying to be a life giving force for Nicholas and trying to allow him glimpses of a normal life. However, I think for a long time I was the stuffed tiger, and it was Nicholas who was trying to wake me up and go exploring.