

Ken and Kim Walker: A Sibling Relationship Transformed



When we were growing up I knew my brother, Ken, was different. I always felt like I had to protect and take care of him. As a child it was difficult to see my little brother being picked on by others. My heart would hurt so much for him. I would have traded places with him in a minute to make his pain go away.

I remember him being very energetic and getting into things. For example, Ken would routinely display his creative talents by drawing up and down the hallway of our childhood home. One day, when I was about six years old, I found my Mom crying because a doctor had told her Ken would never live a “normal” life. This is when I truly knew that Ken was indeed different.

From the beginning, my parents had completely opposite opinions on how to raise Ken. My Dad wanted to teach Ken to be as independent as possible, while my Mom wanted to keep him in a protective environment. My Mother’s unwillingness to allow Ken to make choices, decisions, and establish friendships left him unable to develop fully as an individual.

Throughout the years, my taking over Ken’s care was never talked about but always assumed. The assumption became a reality in 2007 when our Mother passed away. Our family had great hopes that Ken could finally learn the life skills he needed to be the independent man we all knew he could be. However, Ken had different ideas.

As a result of Ken’s dependency on my Mother, he saw no benefit in doing things for himself. He would bristle at my requests for him to do everyday tasks such as shower, brush his teeth, or put fresh clothes on. Ken knew “Mama” had passed away and he wasn’t about to let me tell him what to do. Looking back, I realize he wasn’t emotionally equipped to deal with our Mother’s death. Due to my work obligations, I wasn’t at home enough to be able to teach Ken all of the things I would have liked. In turn, this led to frustrations and a power struggle between Ken and me.

As time has progressed, I am pleased to say our relationship is now in a much better place. Ken has moved to Annandale Village where he is able to enjoy life to its fullest. Today, Ken has developed a level of independence in his life skills that I never imagined possible. He has numerous friends, including a girlfriend, and his life is filled with many meaningful opportunities that fill his social calendar.

Another major change is that I no longer serve as his legal guardian. As a consequence, this has enabled our relationship to blossom as brother and sister. It wasn’t an easy road, but with some therapy sessions, Ken and I are more equipped to understand and relate to one another, and are closer than ever. As I look toward the future, I can now rest assured that Ken is living a happy and fulfilling life.

The Ken Walker that we know today is almost unrecognizable from the Ken that arrived at Annandale in May of 2010. Ken was timid, nervous, unwilling to step even a toe out of his comfort zone. He often refused to participate in program activities and outings, and spent much of his time with his head down, barely speaking unless spoken to. We don't know the exact moment of transformation, but Ken began to raise that head, interact and socialize with peers and staff, start a relationship with a girlfriend, and participate fully in all that the Village has to offer. It's very common at this point to expect Ken to sign up for every Special Olympic sport, smile and approach staff and peers with happy, positive comments (even laughing at his own hilarious remarks), and reassure all around him that things are going to be fine. Not surprisingly, Ken's vocational skills qualified him to work in the community – with support he gained a job at McDonald's and has received glowing reports from his employers. We have all enjoyed Ken's transformation and, at this point, cannot imagine our Village without his enthusiastic spirit.

