



# A REAL SMILE

By Kimberly Reid (Based on a true story)

*If you don't talk as most people do, some people talk and laugh at you, but I won't! I won't!*  
(*Children's Songbook*, 140–41).

Ethan saw a boy on the playground who walked differently than anyone else he'd seen. The boy shuffled his feet and twisted his hands together as he walked. Ethan thought the boy looked funny.

"Hey, guys, look at this!" One of Ethan's friends ran up behind the boy and began following him, copying everything the boy did. Ethan snickered and did the same. Soon a line of boys were shuffling their feet and twisting their hands. When the boy mumbled to himself, Ethan and his friends mumbled too.

The boy stopped and turned to look at them. Did he know what they'd been doing? Ethan couldn't tell by

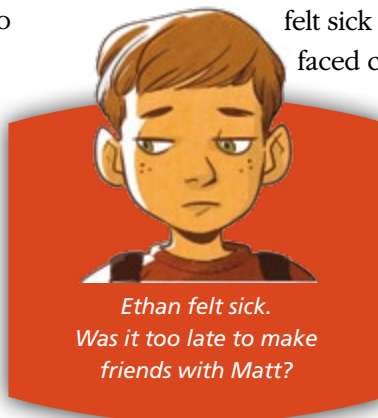
the boy's blank expression. But then the boy turned and hobbled faster, like he wanted to get away from them.

As Ethan thought about what he had just done, he felt sick inside. He realized that every day the boy faced challenges that Ethan didn't have—and he had laughed at the boy like he was a cartoon character on TV instead of a person with feelings.

"I should've helped the boy, not made fun of him," Ethan thought to himself. He knew he should apologize, but what would he say?

"I'll just forget the whole thing ever happened," Ethan decided. "Except I'll try not to laugh at people anymore."

As days went by, Ethan had a hard time forgetting. Sometimes when Ethan saw the boy and remembered what happened, he got the same uncomfortable feeling inside. He knew the Holy Ghost was telling him he



*Ethan felt sick.  
Was it too late to make  
friends with Matt?*

needed to do something more to set things right. Finally, Ethan gathered his courage and walked up to the boy.

“My friends and I weren’t very nice to you,” he said, “I’m sorry. I wish I hadn’t done that.”

The boy didn’t say anything at first. Then he smiled a little. “It’s OK.”

Ethan couldn’t tell if the smile was real or if the boy’s feelings were still hurt. But he didn’t know what else to say.

One Sunday, Ethan’s ward boundaries changed. He was surprised when the boy from the playground walked through the church doors, and he was thankful that he’d already apologized. Otherwise, he would have felt embarrassed when the boy saw him sitting in church, learning to be like Jesus.

“Hi,” Ethan said. “What’s your name?”

“Matt,” the boy said.

“Are you going to Scouts this Wednesday?” Ethan asked.

Matt said he was.

At Scouts that week, the boys were learning to fish. Ethan watched as Matt struggled with the fishing pole. He could hold the rod, but he had a hard time casting the line.

“Would you like me to cast it for you?” Ethan asked.

“OK,” Matt said.

Ethan cast Matt’s fishing line into the pond. He handed Matt the pole and reached for his own. “Can I fish here too?” Ethan asked.

“Sure,” Matt said.

Ethan was surprised how easy it was to talk to Matt as they fished.

“See you Sunday,” Ethan said when Scouts was over.

“Yeah, see you.” This time Matt grinned so big that Ethan didn’t have to wonder. He could tell that his new friend’s smile was real. ♦

