

Signs of Friendship



By Amy Christenson
and Ashley Barnett

"I have called you friends"
(John 15:15).

"Mom, how can I find a friend?" Connor asked. He watched Mom put down her book.

"There are lots of ways," she said. "Did you try what we talked about? Smiling at people and talking about your hobbies?"

"Nothing works." Connor sat on the couch by Mom and twisted his hands together. "I just want a friend. Someone who understands me and will be kind to me." Connor was feeling sad and lonely, more every day. He had autism, and it was hard finding a friend who was nice to him.

"I'm so sorry," Mom said. "I know it's been hard without friends for so long, especially with the bullies at school. Did you try praying about it?"

"No." Connor sighed.

Mom smiled. "Sometimes friends find us. And sometimes we have to find them." She put her arm around Connor. "When I was younger, I was really lonely too. I prayed for two years, and then I found a very special friend."

Connor's back straightened. "Who did you find? Was it Jamie?"

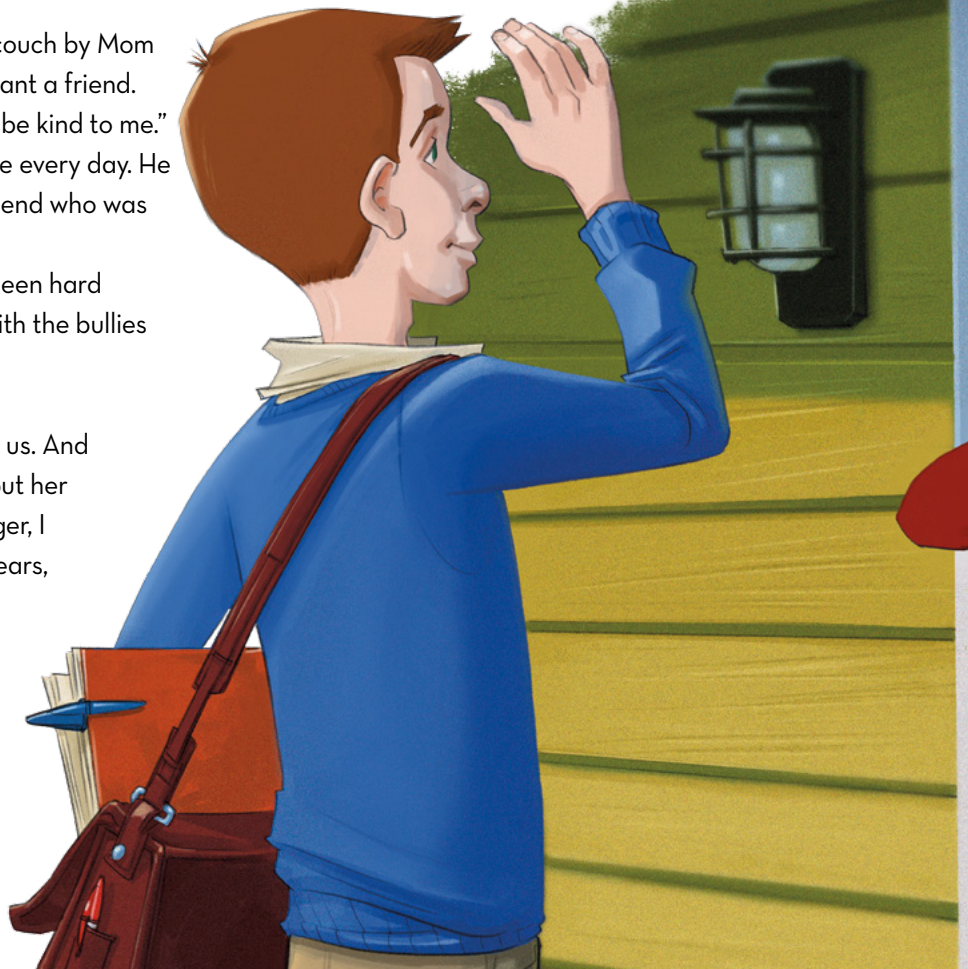
Mom nodded. "I prayed and looked for someone and found Jamie."



"She's your best friend!" Connor felt happier inside. If Mom found a friend by praying, maybe he could too! When he said his prayers that night, he prayed to find someone who also needed a friend.

Connor looked for a friend at school. He looked at the grocery store. He looked at church. And he kept praying.

Connor was walking home one day and saw kids playing outside. They were his new neighbors, the ones who just moved in with their dad and stepmom. Connor didn't know them very well. One of the boys, Seth, was deaf. He went to a sign language ward for church.



No one else in the neighborhood knew sign language. *It must be hard for Seth to feel like he doesn't have friends to talk to*, Connor thought.

Wait! he thought. *Seth needs a friend. Just like I do!*

Connor found some books at the library about sign language. He practiced everywhere he could. He practiced in the bathroom mirror. He practiced in the car. Soon Connor could sign lots of words.

Then one day Connor knocked on Seth's big front door. He held a notebook and a sign language book under his arm.

When Seth came to the door, Connor put his hand to his forehead. He kept his fingers close and then moved his hand out, like a salute. Connor had learned that was how to sign *hello*.

Seth made the sign too. He smiled a little bit. He pointed at the sign language book and raised his eyebrows.

Connor signed, *I'm learning sign language*. Then he opened the notebook and wrote, "Can you teach me more?"

Seth's smile got bigger. He waved Connor inside, and they sat in the family room together. They signed back and forth for a few minutes. Connor wrote down questions on the notebook, and Seth wrote his answers below. Seth taught Connor a bunch of new signs. Pretty soon the notebook page was filled.

Connor couldn't believe it. He was learning sign language with his new friend!

After a few weeks, Connor and Seth didn't need books or papers anymore. They learned how to understand each other, and they both liked having a kind friend.

"Mom, I did what you told me to do," Connor said one night after getting back from Seth's house. "I prayed to find someone who needed a friend and would be mine too. Seth was the one I found!" ♦

The authors live in Utah, USA.



In sign language, you use your hands and expressions to communicate.

Sorry, Stretch! I guess you weren't meant to sign.