

A SECOND CHANCE

The first time I met him, I was holding my violin.

He shuffled close to me while I was walking into the lunchroom, my violin case slapping against my leg.

"Violin," he said as he approached.

"Yes," I said.

I had never really talked with anyone who had a disability and didn't know what else to say. He followed me to my table and sat beside me, pointing at my violin case.

"Violin," he said again.

I opened my case and his eyes lit up. Too roughly, he plucked at the strings. My heart thudded when I imagined a string snapping from my violin, and I eased the case shut. He encircled me in a hug before he left.

I saw him frequently after this.

Whenever he saw me, he would

Violin," William said as he approached.

wrap his arms around my shoulders as he kissed the top of my head.

For the rest of high school, I always tried to avoid him when I saw him coming. When he would find me and smother me with his hugs and wet kisses, I'd tolerate them for a few seconds with a forced smile and then walk away quickly without uttering a word.

"Oh, no," I muttered when I saw him at my last orchestra concert of high school. Following the concert, he meandered toward where I stood with my friends outside the auditorium.

My friends stood back as he came up to me with a grin, his arms open for a hug.

"William!"

I turned and saw a woman jogging toward us.

"Sorry," she said, linking her arm with his. "William loves the violin. He begged me to bring him to this concert tonight. Let's go, honey."

Until that moment, I hadn't realized that I never even knew his name. I'd

met William two years before but spent so much time avoiding him that I'd never made the effort to really know him. As I watched William and his mom leave, waves of shame rolled over me.

Years later, after I had gotten married, I gave birth to a beautiful

little boy with Down syndrome whom we named Spencer. I often found my thoughts lingering on William as I looked at my son, and I wondered if Spencer would have similar experiences. Would people avoid him because he kissed too much or hugged too tight? Would his peers be uncomfortable with his limitations?

When Spencer was four months old, I took him to our local hospital for an appointment. As I unloaded him from the car, I saw two people exiting the hospital. In disbelief, I realized it was William and his mother.

"William!" I called out when we got closer, my heart pounding.

"Hi!" He ambled across the parking lot, a wide grin lighting up his face. He thrust out his hand and grasped mine in an enthusiastic handshake.

"How are you?" I asked him.

"Violin," he said, the excitement shining in his eyes.

Violin. He remembered me too.

"Yes," I choked out through a teary laugh, "I played the violin."

As we spoke, my heart rose in prayer for the tender mercies of a loving Father in Heaven who knew how much I had wished to meet William again. I am grateful that God saw me—a struggling young mother overwhelmed with my son's health problems and worried for his future—and gave me an experience that reminded me that He is aware of us. ■

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