

# STUCK with BEN

*My friends said he was weird.  
Now he was my class partner.  
This would be interesting.*

## Name Withheld

When I walked into my 10th-grade biology class the first day, Mitch and Amanda\* were standing near the front of the room, over by the wall. I hurried over to visit with them.

“You’re stuck with Ben.” Amanda motioned to a list on the wall that told who our class partners would be for the semester.

“Who’s Ben?” I asked as I glanced over the list.

“That’s Ben.” Mitch pointed toward the back of the room to a boy with curly red hair and glasses. He was staring at the floor.

“What’s wrong with him?” I asked softly.

“Watch this,” Mitch said. He quickly made five or six spitballs and aimed them in Ben’s direction. One of them hit Ben in the head; he didn’t even look up.

“Stop that!” I said. “It’s mean!”

“Oh, Ben doesn’t care,” Amanda said. “He’s always like that. He lives in his own little world, oblivious to everyone.”

The bell rang, and we took our seats. I looked back at Ben. He still hadn’t moved. Mr. Davis stood at the front of the room.

“Have you all seen the class list?” he asked. “Now I want you to find your partners and sit together. That will be your assigned seat for the semester.”



I picked up my books and headed toward the back of the room.

“Hi,” I said. Ben stared at the floor.

“Are you Ben?” I asked. There was a long pause.

“Yeah,” he muttered, still looking down.

“I’m Beth. I guess we’re partners.” He almost looked up.

“Uh, hi,” he said.

We both sat silent for a few minutes. Then I noticed a book on his desk. It was one I had always wanted to read.

“Hey, are you reading that?” I asked. Ben didn’t say anything.

“Would you mind if I looked at it?” Ben half glanced up and tossed the book to me. I leafed through it for a few minutes.

“I’ve always wanted to read this. Is it any good?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Ben answered quietly.



I thanked Ben and gave the book back. As class went on, I asked Ben a few more questions, but I got very little response. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the bell rang.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you tomorrow,” I said. Ben muttered something, and I picked up my books and walked out of class.

As the semester went on, I talked to Ben every day. He never said much, but little by little I began to notice changes. First, the snickers became less common. Ben actually looked at me instead of the floor when I asked him questions. He always completed his half of the assignments, and once I even caught him smiling.

On the last day of class, Ben said, “I hope I have another class with you, Beth.” It was the most he’d said all year.

We never did have another class together. I would see Ben in the hall occasionally, and I would smile and wave. He would wave back. A couple of times, I sat by him at lunch, and once I ran into him at an assembly and talked with him for about 20 minutes.

At the end of our senior year, there was a dance. I was standing with a group of friends when I felt a soft tap on my shoulder. It was Ben.

“Would you like to dance?” he asked.

“Sure,” I said. We walked to the dance floor.

“So, what are you going to do now?” he asked.

I told him I was headed to BYU.

“I’m going on a mission,” he said.

We danced silently. As the song ended, Ben suddenly threw both arms around me and gave me a giant hug. “Can I sign your yearbook?” he asked.

I walked over and got my book. I handed it to him, and he wrote for a few minutes.

He wrote:

*Dear Beth,*

*Thank you. I don’t know how I ever would have made it through the last three years without you. You probably don’t realize how often I would wake up, dreading the school day, and then I would remember I had a friend! What a wonderful thought. Somebody cared about me. When I felt like I just couldn’t go on, I would think of your beautiful smile and your little waves, and I would feel like maybe I could face another day, because I had one friend.*

*Thank you. Love, Ben*

I never saw Ben again. We graduated and went our separate ways. But I will never forget him. I didn’t realize a simple wave and a little smile could help someone so much. I am glad I was his friend. **NE**

\* Names have been changed.



## REACH OUT

“If we are truly disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will reach out with love and understanding to all of our neighbors at all times, particularly in times of need.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “*Doctrine of Inclusion*,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 36.