

## Reflection and Prayertime: How Marty Wilson Saved My Life

by Jan Trabue

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For some he was a target of cruel jokes, ridicule, and disdain. For others he was a nuisance, an object taking up floor space. Still for others he was simply invisible. He was no one's best friend. He didn't seem to belong anywhere. He was a lost boy. He carried a history that none of us cared to learn about. So, I can't tell you where he came from, or why he was being raised by his grandparents. I don't know why he wore a brace on his leg or why his hand curled up against his body or exactly why his speech was slurred. I do know he struggled academically and he looked different. I know that no one wanted to sit next to him. I know that if you touched a paper that he touched, then you immediately activated 'force field' so as not to be contaminated by him. If you were one of the unfortunate ones who was touched directly by him, then you tried to protect yourself by passing the germs on to someone else, informing them slyly, "You've got the Marty's. No give backs." The 'no give backs' rule was our supposed salvation from the germs of an unknown boy who was different. I know that he didn't have any friends, really, and it was in your best interest not to befriend him, for that would certainly lead to your social demise, if not social death. He was known to us by his disabilities and we often looked down on him, as if we were somehow better than him, above him; we, in all our healthier- than- thou, more -capable- than- thou, smarter- than -thou -glory.

But now I know the truth about Marty Wilson. He wasn't the disabled one. We were. Ours just wasn't visible to the eye. Our disability was a blindness, rendering us unable to see the person beneath his outer shell, to see him for the person that God created- a boy with feelings, like us, with hopes and dreams, like any of us; a boy whom God loved so much that He died for him. We were limited in our attitudes toward him - prejudice and fearful in our ignorance. We were high and mighty, too big for our britches, and frankly, we were cold-hearted. We shot verbal bullets at him without regard to his humanity. We didn't even have the decency to hide our disdain. We flaunted it and tortured him with alienation.

Our disability was a deafness to his story-the pain and suffering of the illness that entrapped him in a mind and body that couldn't keep up, catch up, or measure up; the story of who he really was, on the inside, his likes, dislikes, hobbies, interests, fears, and happy thoughts.

Our disability was muteness because we did not speak kindly to him or about him. We were often silent with indifference. He didn't matter to us so we couldn't care less. Decades later, we have outgrown or overcome our disabilities to a great extent, though sadly, too late for it to make a difference in Marty Wilson's short life. We cheated Marty and ourselves because we did not get to see the person that God intended him to be, accomplishing the plans God

had for his life! I am guilty for having done nothing to make a difference in Marty Wilson's life and overwhelmingly struck by the difference he made in my life.

You see, Marty Wilson saved my life. My experience of knowing Marty Wilson and observing how he was treated, and more importantly, how much harder life was for him, inspired in me a desire to teach children with special needs. As I sat there in Mrs. Murrell's fourth grade classroom I knew what my purpose in life was to be. It was a conviction that resonated within. Over the years, this conviction anchored me in ways that kept me from drifting into deep water during my crazy teenage years. During those rebellious days I sometimes scared myself. I saw some of my friends drift into unknown waters and never come back. There were times I feared I had crossed the point of no return, but the goal Marty Wilson inspired in me would draw me like a magnet back to my senses before I went too far. I had a focus, a purpose, and a passion. Though it lay dormant at times I was always keenly aware of it. I never doubted it. I never disputed it. I never considered anything else.

I survived those adolescent years and went to college, obtaining my BS in special education, then went on to teach special education before going on to graduate school. I think of Marty Wilson often and am thankful for the impact he made on me. I am sorry for my arrogance and being so indifferent towards him. I am determined that I will never treat another human being like that again. By the grace of God I will root for the underdog, love the unlovely, pay attention to those who seem to be invisible to others because they aren't gifted, charismatic, or especially attractive. By the grace of God, I want to make a difference in someone else's life. I want to be someone's anchor.