

Dear Cynthia Lord,

Up until I was in fifth grade, when I bought the rubber duck-covered book titled *Rules*, I thought that there was nobody quite like my autistic brother Michael. I thought that I was the only girl lucky enough to have a Michael in her life. I thought that there was nobody who would be able to say that they were going through the same things as Michael, or as me. But after reading *Rules*, I can understand that there are people like Michael with autism. I understood that there are other girls who have a Michael. In *Rules* their names were David and Catherine.

Catherine was a 12-year-old girl who was happy to have her brother, and yet she sometimes couldn't understand him. Sometimes Catherine just wanted her brother David to be "normal." I know that Michael is wonderful just the way he is, but I, too, would sometimes wish for that typical brother who everyone I knew took for granted. The brother who I could joke around with; who would hang out with me like my close friend, sometimes my enemy; and who could even understand me like we were one person. But with Michael and me things were different. I never could figure out exactly what to do. How do I make him smile or laugh? Do I truly understand him? I didn't know how to answer those questions before.

I identified David as the charming eight-year-old with a wonderful smile and passion for the video store. David, with his perfectly wonderful and unique *Frog and Toad* language used to communicate with Catherine, was the fictional version of Michael. But Michael, though he shared David's smile, has sports as his hobby. And Michael does not use *Frog and Toad* as his sibling code, Michael uses sports. Reading *Rules* was like reading a biography on my brother and me. It was enchanting.

When I met David, I pictured Michael's smiling face. Michael would try to go to every Boston sporting event, as David loved the video store. Michael can recite the final call of the 2004 World Series when the Red Sox won it for the first time in 86 years, just as David could quote a line from *Frog and Toad* like it was the alphabet. As for me, I would try to go over to my friend's house, rather than them coming to mine--as Catherine did--so Michael's outbursts would be hidden inside of my house. Eventually Catherine realized--and I finally realized--that who my brother is makes him special, and he deserves to be loved for that.

After *Rules* I can take a glance at Michael's face and know exactly what he is thinking. I can see when he wants to stop doing homework and watch the Bruins, Celtics, or Red Sox. I can see how he would do anything to be "normal." But what I really see now is how Michael is not the typical brother I once fantasized over -- he is more. Thank you, Ms. Lord. Without you, there would be no *Rules*, and without *Rules*, the puzzle that was once my brother may have never been solved.

Sincerely,

Lindsay

**Lindsay Simmons, Grade 8  
Marblehead Veterans Middle School**