

THE MAIN STREET JOGGER, VOL. I

Guitar Hero

by Cindy Morrow

If you asked Jeff to describe himself, he'd say he was a base player and a body builder. The first you might accept at face value, the second would give you pause. He will tell you all about his guitars if you ask.

I met Jeff one Sunday. He is 50 years old and lives with his younger brother and sister-in-law. Things are pretty good now. They weren't always good. Mostly bad. Or worse. Jeff is autistic.

Jeff is over six foot with a slightly stooped posture. He has to lift his chin to say, "Hi." He rarely just says "Hi." He'll say, "Hi, that daughter of yours sure can dance." Or "Hi, that husband of yours sure can sing." Or "Hi, I didn't recognize you with your hair up."

He loves to stake out the doughnut table Sunday mornings. He knows he isn't supposed to gorge himself, but he can't help it. There are doughnut holes and cinnamon rolls and bagels and orange juice. He doesn't have bad manners and cram it in his mouth all at once; he just stands near the table and feeds continually. Until his sister-in-law, Whitney, comes by and says, "Je-eff."

When she says it like that he knows he better move.

Whitney labels everything in the fridge at home, so he wouldn't forget and eat all the yogurts in one day. One per day. Unless she didn't label them.

No one labels the doughnuts.

He planned his own 50th birthday party. He invited the whole church and people from school and his day-group. A lot showed up. A real party.

Last week, Whitney dropped him off at Kroger to meet the day-group. She dropped him off at 7 a.m., and someone from the day-group always picks him up at 7:15 a.m. He was early. He waited and waited until 7:30 a.m. and no one showed up. They were late.

He ended up talking to the nice people who worked there. He asked about working at Kroger and how to get a job. After about an hour he asked to use their phone and called Whitney. She seemed real worried, but he told her the nice Kroger people were taking care of him. She got there real fast. The day-group had been cancelled and no one told them.

The manager and Whitney talked, and it looked like she almost cried. He wondered what he did wrong. But turns out they were happy tears because he'd talked to the manager about a job and that made Whitney happy. Jeff knew it a brave thing, to talk about a job, a real job after what happened so long ago. But he felt brave and ready, so he did. It felt good to talk about a job. And now he is doing more than talk, he is working at Kroger near his house.

And now you've met Jeff.

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