



“I DID IT!”

We learn from problems, and we're starting to see. I help you, and you help me. (Children's Songbook, page 263.)

By Lisa Greene

BASED ON A TRUE EVENT

Kelly and the other fifth-graders had just come in from lunch when Mr. Aragon announced, “Our class is going to begin a special project tomorrow that I think you’ll find exciting. Are you all familiar with Victoria Benson School?”

Kelly nodded along with the rest of the students, but instead of feeling excited, she felt uneasy. Victoria Benson School was right next to their own school, Easton Elementary. The students at the two schools were approximately the same ages, but there was one big difference. Victoria Benson students all had mental disabilities.

“We’ll be visiting the school once a week,” Mr. Aragon continued. “You’ll be acting as tutors, helping the students one-on-one with the work they do in class.” As he explained some of the details of the special project, the students became more and more interested, until it seemed to Kelly that she was the only one who was still uneasy about the project.

She and her friends had sometimes watched the Victoria Benson students through the fence at recess. Some of their faces looked different around the eyes, and their speech was slow and slurred. They seemed awkward when they ran or threw a ball. As she knelt by her bed for prayer that night, she remembered the words to a Primary song her class had learned last year:

*If you don't walk as most people do,
Some people walk away from you,
But I won't! I won't!
If you don't talk as most people do,
Some people talk and laugh at you,
But I won't! I won't!*

*I'll walk with you. I'll talk with you.
That's how I'll show my love for you.**

I know that Jesus loves the Victoria Benson students, Kelly thought as she turned out the light. Maybe I will, too.

When her class entered Victoria Benson School the next day, Kelly had the worst case of butterflies in her stomach she’d ever had. But the Primary song kept running through her mind: “*I’ll walk with you. I’ll talk with you. That’s how I’ll show my love for you.*”

Mr. Aragon led them into a sunny, brightly decorated classroom and introduced the class to Miss Donnelley, one of the teachers.

“We’re really glad to have you here,” Miss Donnelley said. “The students have been so excited this morning! They’re eager to meet you, so I’m going to assign you to areas and get you started right away.”

A few students were sent to the cafeteria to help four boys setting the tables for lunch. Several were sent to the math area of the classroom to help with counting objects, writing numbers, and matching shapes. Others were assigned to a writing table, where a few students were learning to print their names.

Maybe they’ll run out of assignments, Kelly thought, and I’ll be able to just watch today. But Miss Donnelley led her to what she called the dressing area and introduced her to Sandra, a girl with long dark hair. She gave Kelly a big smile.

“Sandra is learning to zip her jacket,” Miss Donnelley told Kelly. “I’d like you to help her.” Then the teacher left to give out another assignment.

By myself? Kelly thought. *How do I do that?*

Sandra was still smiling at her as Kelly took a deep breath, stuck her hands into her pockets, and introduced herself. “Hi.” She tried to put friendliness into her voice to hide her nervousness. “I’m supposed to help you zip your jacket.”

“Hi, Kewwy. I’m glad you’re helping me.”

Kelly smiled back. “Well, I guess we’d better get started. First you stick that straight metal part into the slot in the other part,” she began.

Sandra’s face took on a look of concentration. She held the two parts of the zipper in her hands

and fumbled with them. Kelly waited a minute, then said, "Hold it at the top of the slot and then push it down." Sandra tried again, but still couldn't do it.

Kelly pulled her hands out of her pockets. "Look, Sandra—watch me. Do it like this."

Sandra watched as Kelly zipped and unzipped the jacket twice.

"Now you try again," Kelly urged.

Sandra's face looked even more determined as she tried again, but she just couldn't fit the parts together. Now Kelly was the one frowning in concentration. *What am I doing wrong?* she wondered. Suddenly Kelly had an idea. Surprising them both, she reached out and grasped Sandra's hands. "I'll walk with—I mean, I'll help you!"

With Kelly's hands guiding hers, Sandra soon

fit the parts together. As Sandra began breathing more quickly and nodding her head, Kelly let go and let her try it by herself. Kelly held her breath as Sandra fumbled a few times but finally fit the parts together. Kelly's smile was as big as Sandra's as Sandra slowly pulled the zipper all the way up.

"I did it! I did it!" Sandra grabbed Kelly in a big hug. Kelly was surprised, but she hugged right back. Then Sandra ran off to show Miss Donnelley, waving her hands in the air and still shouting, "I did it!"

As Kelly watched her go, she smiled and thought, *I guess I did it, too!*

** Children's Songbook,
pages 140–141.*

