



Amanda, you're my Best Friend

By Bebe Bode

My sister, Jennifer and I became pregnant within six months of each other. My first, her second, we shared a lot of wonderful moments together during our pregnancies, and certainly afterward. Here comes the but...But, we also shared some not so wonderful moments together too.

My niece, Amanda, arrived first on August 12, 1994. She was a beautiful little butterball with red hair and a personality to be reckoned with early on. Six months later, I had Seth...my beautiful baby boy born on December 19, 1994.

Both my sister and I spent a lot of time traveling back and forth to each other's homes. She lived in Mississippi, I lived in Louisiana, but we were committed to keeping our kiddos close.

During the years, we both noticed things about our children we felt weren't quite right. Amanda was into everything and very hyperactive. She also began to have a fear of choking and stopped eating. Her fear of choking escalating and extended to the fear of others choking. She kept a close eye on other children, especially Seth.

Seth, on the other hand, was hypoactive and slipped into the world of Autism. Amanda was diagnosed with ADHD and OCD. My sister and I had our work cut out for us. We both immersed ourselves in learning about our child's diagnoses and shared information with each other on how we could help our children.

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When younger, Amanda had a hard time getting along with other children. Seth was not really interested in making friends, but when the two got together they always had a way of bringing the best out in each other. Amanda would engage Seth and he would follow along. He also had a bad habit of putting everything and anything in his mouth. Amanda watched him like a hawk and made sure nothing came close to going in his mouth on her watch.



When Amanda was the flower girl in my niece, Evelyn's, wedding; Seth watched the bride and groom dance. One of Seth's favorite Disney movies is Beauty & the Beast and the ballroom dancing scene. When he saw Amanda in her pretty flower girl dress, he asked

her to dance in Beast fashion, and they danced along with the bride and groom. The whole family was oohing and aahing at how adorable they were.

Although living in a different state, going to different schools, extracurricular activities, and/or therapies kept their visits from happening as often, their bond only grew. Watching Amanda bring Seth out of his shell during visits and family events was very endearing. It was like she took all that energy she had inside her and focused it on him, becoming not only his cousin but his teacher.

We would often have weekend and holiday visits, and my sister and Amanda would stay with us for a couple of weeks every summer. One particular visit, after going to the aquarium, we all gathered in Seth's room talking and laughing. When things quieted down a bit, Seth said, "**Amanda, you're my best friend!**" Yeah! It was one of those AWE moments again, and we were all overjoyed and teary eyed at his proclamation.



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During the years, they still remained close. Amanda even volunteered as a mentor at a camp for children with Autism that Seth attended. Many other events happened and time passed way to fast.

During one visit to my sister's, Amanda's boyfriend, Zach, was at their house. Seth was not a happy camper! He walked up to Zach and used lines from Disney's Peter Pan and said: "Take that, and that, and, that!" Then using his own words he said, "We don't need the likes of you here ever again, Zachary!" Seth was in protection mode! It was very sweet and comical.

Amanda is now in her second year of college working towards a degree in Social Services. We are so proud of her and all that she has accomplished. After dating her college boyfriend for two years, Amanda got engaged to Joshua Stanley. They both wanted Seth to be a part of their wedding. Josh asked Seth to be a groomsman, and Seth accepted gladly.

All the men got together for their tuxedo fitting and Amanda was there to handle the details. She was very emotional and started to cry. Jennifer tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Look!" I looked over and Seth was hugging Amanda, patting her back and saying, "There, there now Amanda, don't cry." I was so glad to capture the moment on camera.



On September 13, 2015, Amanda and Josh were married. Seth watched his best friend and cousin marry the man she loves. This time, it was Seth who got very emotional, tearing up during the wedding ceremony. I watched as he stood with the other groomsmen and kept wiping his eyes. My heart was filled with so many emotions as I watched my beautiful niece marry and my son crying during the ceremony.



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I asked him after the ceremony, "Why are you crying?" he said, "Amanda got married!" Then he asked, "When am I going to find a girlfriend?" I told him not to worry, that one day God would bring him a girlfriend, and Amanda will always be your best friend.



Best friends together again on October 19, 2015



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