

# ADVOCATES

First, we listen ...

*"Each of Us Is a Person First"*  
*By Karen Koser, 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize Winner*

My story starts several years ago. We used to be the best of friends and we did things together. We used to go down the Cape, go swimming together. We went to Six Flags 7 together, out to dinner many times. We'd go to the movies, and then maybe do some shopping. Sometimes, we would go on picnics down at the Cape. We really had a good time with each other.

We'd like to help each other out with the laundry. Because she was so small, she could not always reach the washer to put her wet cloths into the dryer, so I would take the wet cloths out of the washer and put them in the dryer for her. I would also set the table for her, and give her a break, so she could do other things. I would even help her make her bed many times, when she was just too tired to do it. And I would never get any thanks for this – NEVER! But yet, I would help her over and over again because I'm a good person who likes to put myself out for other people.

I'm a very caring individual; and my heart always goes out to other people who are in need. I'm a very thoughtful person too, always putting other people ahead of myself. I particularly like to help people like her, because she is so small she cannot do a lot of things. She is very limited when it comes to getting up to high places like the washing machine. Many times I would even share my snacks with this person, just because it is something she would really like, for example sugar free cookies from Christmas time, and other goodies I got from Christmas.

So what happened was, I noticed that my friend really started to smell. It seemed like I was always telling her to take a shower, because she always smelled. This girl just didn't want to take a shower; she was very stubborn about going into the shower. I kept repeatedly telling her that she smells; she really needs to be clean every day! Anyway, she started calling me stupid and every time I would talk to her she would say back, "stupid" to me.

After awhile I was starting to feel miserable, every time I would get near her. Then she just started calling me "stupid" for no reason, all on account of me telling her to take a shower. When I would then try to say something nice, she would come back with "I hate you!" It would really hurt my feelings, and I would start crying every time she would say she hated me. I would try to make up with her by buying her a soda or buying her sugar free chocolates, but she refused everything I tried to do too make things better between us. I finally confronted my manager, who turned this matter over to my counselor. The manager talked to the counselor about the situation and the counselor talked with me and to the other individual. At first my friend was stubborn and didn't even listen to the counselor. Finally the counselor had to put the two of us together and we had to apologize to each other and we even gave each other a hug. Just to remind you, this had been going on for several months! Now that we finally embraced, we can finally feel better about each other and about ourselves and I learned to never tell her to take a shower again!

In another situation, I was watching my friend's roommate play volley ball. I like to watch volley ball and I get excited when I watch others playing the game. I start to yell up and down to my friend, saying "come on Mike, go for it Mike and I'm yelling it out across the room, because I want to make sure he can hear me cheering me on! Every year I watch my friend Mike play volley ball and he makes me feel like I want to play the game too. I cheer him on with such enthusiasm. Mike always puts me in such a good mood, he is such a great player and everyone really seems to like him. All the girls cheer him on, yelling "Mickey, " "Mickey". I think they might have a crush on him.

Last year when I got gold medal for figure skating, Mike was there to cheer me on. And after I got the gold medal and stepped down from the podium, Mike was there to give me a big hug for doing such a great job on my figure skating. He has become my champion, my hero. I would be happy if I could skate as well as he could play volleyball. I would be feeling really great if that was the case (but I know that I skate as well as I can (and my dad is watching over me too because he is my guardian angel) anyway, let me tell you what happened that special day when Mike was playing volleyball.

I was yelling like crazy for him to do really great. I was rooting for him, and I got so excited I even lost my voice. And then, from somewhere out in the crowd, I hear this voice yelling "you stupid retard. You're a retard, and why don't you just go home!" I couldn't believe it! I turned around and there was my ex-boyfriend Rich, yelling at me like that! Making me feel like so small, like an idiot, I just wanted to dig a hole and jump right in it! Mike could hear him yelling at me and he just wanted to leap out of the court and wallop him. I was really feeling bad and my girl friend tried to help me feel better, because I was in tears by now.

So after the game was over, Mike tried to talk to this foolish guy Rich and to tell him how much he was hurting me. But instead of the guy caring about me at all, he just stood there and laughed. He thought the whole thing was so funny; he didn't seem to care at all about me. So when we got out into the parking lot, I could see Rich in the distance. Mike was walking out with me and then Rich started to grab my arm. Well, Mike came to the rescue and he walloped him right in the arm. And Mike said to this guy, "don't you ever talk that way to Karen again, or ever use that kind of language, because your words really hurt Karen!" Rich, started to run off, but Jim, the coach got hold of him and gave him a good talking to! He told Rich you just can't just talk that way to people.

When you talk that way, words can really hurt other people's feelings, as much as if you punched someone. After the talk, Rich never did say he was sorry, but I felt a whole lot better, because at least I had Mike to stick up for me. He was my bodyguard that day, and he will always be my hero.