

Pass It On®...

Not Out of the Way, Along the Way.

Taking the long way to school makes for a long friendship.

On a cold November morning, William is up a little early. He packs his own lunch in a crowded kitchen while mom and dad get breakfast on the table for the family, pack lunches for the little ones and divvy out instructions for after school chores. William drops a sandwich into his backpack, says goodbye and plunges into the cold, dark morning.

School is only a mile away, but William's route is almost two miles. He pulls his jacket around him, too light for the weather just like his mother warned, and heads away from the school for a few blocks. He hurries up a walkway. The lights inside the house are on, and he knows John will be waiting, that the front door will fly open just before he gets there, that he doesn't really need to walk all the way up to the porch. But he does. The door bursts open, and John runs out without a coat. William tells John to go back inside and get a coat on. John's mother says the same and holds the door open.

"Hi, William," she says, smiling. William returns the hi, and John bounds out into the cold as if it is a summer morning. The two of them start their walk to school.

"John is a chromosome off, just one," his mother likes to say. "But everything else about him is beautiful." John walks excitedly toward school with his best friend William.

They won't see each other much in school. John will spend most of the day in special education classes, and William will be in college-prep classes and working with the photography club after school. John will wait for him, sometimes helping move equipment. John's mother knows that high school is a short time, that William will go on to college and that John will take a very different path.

William knows this, too, but doesn't think much about the future when he's with John. He takes him to the basketball games to shoot photos for the yearbook. John makes sure the equipment is safe, and he has no problem asking schoolmates to pause for photos.

Everybody loves John, but few take the time to actually be his friend. Except for William.

There are school dances, and games, and parties, but John doesn't go to a lot of them unless it's OK with his mother and she feels like it's not too big of an imposition on William. But you'll often see John in the middle of William's group, and you'll always see them walking to and from school together. It's their ritual, the one John enjoys the most.

Having a friend can be the most important possession in life when you are in high school. It means a lot more good days than bad. When the weather turns even colder, and snow floats magically out of the dark morning sky, William says "no thanks" to people who offer him a ride to school. Walking with John, chasing snowflakes and walking off smiley faces in front yards, is worth the cold. It's worth the time being with someone who is a little bit different, in a good way.

Be a Friend...PassItOn.com

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