

Do Unto Others

Maria has some obvious challenges. Even in her last year of high school, she needed an aide at her side. Classes that were basic for others were beyond her mastery. It was hard for her to see, and perhaps harder still to interact with the jumble of sights and sounds and students that surrounded her each day.

But Maria has a gift, too. She can sing. Beautifully! Not only does her voice soar with clarity and sweetness, but her sweet and simple spirit lends a beauty that transcends mere sound waves. Her talent, rising from the midst of her many obstacles, is truly amazing.

Yet, as amazing as Maria's victories are, even more amazing to me is the response of her classmates to her.

Besides serving in ministry, I'm honored (yeah, it sounds mushy, but I really mean it) to teach at John S. Battle High School. I never had Maria in class, but I saw her in the hall each day.

It would have been so easy for the rest of her classmates to ignore her in their hurry to and fro. Perhaps we'd even expect some mocking and cruelty along the way, for far too many of us tolerate cruelty in ourselves and others.

But instead, I saw the JSB class of 2006 rise most beautifully to their own challenge of loving Maria. During graduation rehearsal, our principal spontaneously gave the mike to her as the chorus practiced their song, *The Wind Beneath My Wings*. Even though Maria had a harmonizing part throughout much of the piece, her voice soared above the rest of the choir. And then, at the conclusion, it happened.

The entire senior class gave her a standing ovation. And how she loves applause! So she took her bow, and gave her grin, and felt their love all over.

The actual graduation ceremony was a repeat performance—with an added bonus. They all stood to applaud her again as she received her certificate of attendance. I could have busted my buttons, I was so proud of them.

Isn't that what love is all about? At any time we can focus on our flaws and weaknesses and totally miss the glorious gemstones hidden within.

Watching our senior class love on Maria reminded me of how God *really* looks at me. When I focus on my failings, I need to remember Who He really is.

"We love Him, because He first loved us." (I John 4:19) Daily, I need to picture Him, just this way: Jesus, with the multitudes of angels, giving me a standing ovation, just because He loves me.