

In mid-January, while walking with me back from the lunch room, Bryan stooped over and then doubled over in what appeared to be severe abdominal pain. I sat with him in the middle of the hallway for ten minutes, consoling him and trying to figure out what was wrong. It is a horrible feeling to know a child is in pain and not know exactly what hurts or if anything had happened. With the help of an administrator, we had him stand and walk back to the room. The school nurse took his temperature (which was normal) and said that he might have gas or constipation, that he obviously was not feeling well and that she would call his mom. Both the nurse and I knew that Ms. Long was unlikely to come and get Bryan if he did not have a temperature, and that sometimes Ms. Long's kids would spend hours lying in the clinic waiting to be picked up.

We decided to inform Ms. Long of his condition so that she could make a decision about how best to treat his symptoms. We noted that Bryan had not had a bowel movement at school in several days, and that students with Down Syndrome are prone to bowel problems.

The following day Bryan was not at school, and, so, the nurse called home to check on him. An elderly woman, possibly Ms. Long's mother, answered the phone. She said she did not know if Bryan was home sick or not, that the door to his room was closed, and that she did not know if there was anyone else in the house. When the nurse called Ms. Long's cell phone, Ms. Long was very curt, saying "He's fine!" and literally hanging up on the school nurse. On the third day, Bryan returned to school. He was obviously in pain, walking very slowly, unable to stand up straight, hunched like an elderly man. I took him to the restroom, and he cried while trying to have a bowel movement. Finally, I carried him to a beanbag in the classroom and called the school nurse.

She examined Bryan and said that he needed to be taken to a hospital immediately. We called Ms. Long, and receiving no response, called Ms. Stanton. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Long came to the school to pick up Bryan. I could not get Bryan to stand up from the beanbag to walk to

the office to meet Mr. Long, and, so, the nurse brought Mr. Long to the classroom. He joked with Bryan, made him smile, then pulled him up to standing. The nurse – knowing that both Mr. and Ms. Long are from eastern Asia and do not speak or always understand English perfectly – followed Mr. Long and Bryan to their car, repeating how serious his condition was and that if they were not taking him directly to the hospital, she would have to call an ambulance. Meanwhile, Mr. Long was talking to Bryan, saying “You’re just teasing us. You just want a comic book,” promising to take him home and buy him a comic book while the nurse exclaimed, “No comic books until after he goes to the hospital!”

We were unable to receive any information about Bryan’s condition until the Monday of the next week of school. The bus driver reported that she heard Bryan was in the hospital. We called the house and received no clear answer and called Ms. Stanton who confirmed that he was in the hospital and was scheduled to be examined by a surgeon. Later than afternoon, the school principal and I drove to the children’s hospital to visit Bryan – not knowing exactly what was going on but hoping that we would be able to visit. We found Bryan’s room and, as we walked in, were “greeted” by Ms. Long icily questioning, “Why are you here?” She remained defensive and almost offended while we were in the room, although she let us visit with Bryan who was groggy, having just had his appendix and part of his colon removed in surgery that morning. Ms. Long maintained that “He’s OK” and “I don’t know why you keep bothering me,” and so we left, comforted by the knowledge that Bryan was finally being treated at the hospital.

When Bryan returned after a week of rest at home, we had no doctor’s note, no recommendations for PE or what activities he should avoid, no dietary restrictions. The nurse – warily – called Ms. Long who did not seem to understand the concern and said that maybe he should not run in PE for a few days. Bryan recovered quickly and was soon back at lunch and recess with his 3rd grade friends.