

At the Pool

By: Angela VanDerwerken, 2014
William's Mom



It was baby William's first time at the pool. We were in Florida at a conference with my husband Jay, and I was looking forward to enjoying a few relaxing days in the sun after riding the emotional roller coaster that was the previous year. At this time last year, I was eight months pregnant and hiding from the world the fact that I knew my baby had Down syndrome. I was so scared. Scared to let this baby out of his safe place, scared to look into his eyes and see the diagnosis, and scared that I wouldn't be proud of him.



Time had nearly come to a standstill for Jay and me after our prenatal diagnosis, filled with countless hours of tears, prayers, and research. Why us, we asked, why again? Grace was our previous child. She died as an infant after a prenatal discovery of a severe heart defect, a hopeful fetal operation, and a triumphant return home after birth and open heart surgery. Her death was sudden and unexpected. We spent the years after Grace grieving, healing, and hoping for another baby to fill our empty arms. Early testing revealed everything was 'normal' with this baby. We were so excited! Then a screening test came back with high odds for Trisomy 21 and the statistician in me began obsessing over false positives. After a few more tests, we were sure—our baby had an extra chromosome. Keeping William's diagnosis secret felt safe. I wanted to preserve the joy and innocence of this last pregnancy, feeling that like my previous experience that everyone would end up gazing upon me with pity. Also, we felt like it was only fair for the world to meet our baby before, or at least at the same time, as his diagnosis.

When William was born it was as if a measure of joy equal to our measure of grief had come into the world with him. It's so hard to explain, but he just attracts people to him. He will stare into your souls and somehow magically change you for the better. During my pregnancy, if parents talked this way about their children with Down syndrome, inside I would roll my eyes and think how they all must be drinking the same kool-aid... And then I experienced the sweet nectar

for myself and was transformed! The love and pride I have for my sweet boy is overwhelming sometimes. When I take him in public I feel like I am escorting a prince. Strangers frequently stop us to ogle, friends line up to hold him, and I'm sure no sibling has ever been more loved.



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