

May 22, 2008

Sonoma County Down Syndrome Support  
P.O. Box 1916  
Windsor, CA 95492-1916

Dear Mom or Dad to be,

I am a mom of three children who once sat in a genetic counselor's office to hear news about my positive AFP (Alpha Fetal Protein) blood test. At the time, I was twenty weeks along with my pregnancy. I chose not to have the amniocentesis, but to have another ultrasound done to see if any more information could be gained. The news about the possibility of Down syndrome and a confirmed congenital heart defect known as AV Canal felt like a great load of questions and fears had been dropped in my lap. I relied on faith to persist and face each challenge, with the help of my family and friends.

The baby you are carrying is unique in some ways, but also very similar to every other baby. Keep in mind that your baby will look like a baby, act like a baby, and will grow gradually with all of your attention like other children do. You will devote more time and energy teaching simple steps that you may not have to teach other children, but your child will learn, and will succeed in so many ways beyond your imagination or understanding today.

When my child with Down syndrome was born six years ago I asked every question that came to mind, read everything I could get my hands on in books and on the Internet, and still had more questions. Then I spoke with a mother of a child with Down syndrome, and she helped me see the possibilities of raising my child like any other child. I spoke with a man who had a sibling with Down syndrome who felt blessed to have grown up with his brother as an example of a life well-lived.

My passion and strength grew daily raising our daughter, with my husband and two older children. Our daughter, Hannah, has taught us to look at her capabilities each day by her wit, humor, patience, and zest for life. We learn more about what she can do, and the way in which she will not give up trying to do anything she sets her mind to. The power of perseverance is obvious in the way Hannah has mastered the monkey bars, learned a few chords on her Ukulele, practiced reading her sight word book, and accomplished learning sign language and speech. We celebrate each accomplishment knowing they were once her challenges.

Today, you might be wondering if there will be anyone to help you raise a child with different needs and abilities. Support groups, agencies, nonprofits, and schools are available to help meet your child's needs and help you take an active role as your child's first teacher and advocate.

I strongly recommend meeting with other parents in a support group in your area. These parents have been where you are today and have experience and hope to offer. You will connect with new friends and quickly realize that the parents you meet just may be the friends you count on for the journey.

Raising a child with Down syndrome has brought out the best in our family and our community. I wish you joy and love, the two gifts that will look you in the face each day through the eyes of your child.

Love,

Diane Hobough  
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Buddy Walk Chairperson  
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