

Happy October 1st to you!

Why might I be wishing you a Happy October 1st? Because October is Down Syndrome Awareness month. (Among many other causes such as Breast Cancer Awareness and over 20 others that I found [here](#).)

But I am focusing on Down Syndrome because my oldest son, Flynn, has Down Syndrome.

And who might you be? I have written a letter like this for several years, but it started out as an e-mail to the teachers in my school district. Now it includes my students, Facebook friends, and other acquaintances both near and far so it has a wide audience. If you are reading this, thank you, and please feel free to share it. Last year I took a break and this morning my wife gently told me that people said they missed it. So I return this year trying to write this for a wide audience – which makes me think I lack some focus – but in the end probably doesn't really matter.

So here it goes. Flynn was born in 1995 which means he is now 20 years old. He has been a joy in our life and has added great depths of emotional experiences to our family which also includes Will – 17, and Reed – 15. Will and Reed are better people because of Flynn and the life lessons they have learned from growing up with a brother with special needs. They may not always show great brotherly love towards each other, but it is the rare exception when they get angry or frustrated with Flynn.

Down Syndrome is a genetic disorder caused by an extra chromosome. Also known as Trisomy 21, Down syndrome is a syndrome because there are a variety of characteristics that may or may not be present. Typically people have 23 pairs of chromosomes that tell your body how to grow. The extra chromosome gives extra information and causes a range of characteristics for people that have it. The important thing to remember about people with Down syndrome is that they are people first. Flynn is a man with Down syndrome, not a Downs person. He reminds us that he is a man. If we say "Boys, it's time for dinner." He will say that he is not a boy he is a man. People with Down Syndrome have 47 chromosomes. The typical number for most people is 46. For all the ways that people with Down syndrome might be different, they really have much more in common with all of us.

Flynn is still in our High School in a Transition Program. He will be able to stay in the program until his 22nd birthday. They go on community trips and work on life skills. His teachers are great and they see his strengths. He can help other students that others have difficulty approaching. He plans menus because eating is important to Flynn. He has a new friend in the class that also has Down syndrome, and they really enjoy each other's company. As much as he really enjoys being at school, he also has his days when it is a struggle to get him there. Flynn's perfect day would be starting school at about 11:00 am, having lunch, and then watching TV for the rest of the day. (That is not an uncommon way for him to spend his days on the weekend.)

Flynn has been active in the Special Olympics. He competes in Track and Field and last year he was in Equestrian. This summer he was on a relay team that went to the State Games in Bloomington. He travels with the team and the highlight for him is not the event I think, but rather the dance they have for all the athletes. We are told he cuts a rug. Flynn also goes to a summer camp called Camp Red Leaf in Ingleside Illinois. He has a great week and enjoys being away from home. The camp also has respite weekends during the year that he attends. While he does not tell us much directly about what he does, when we ask if he had fun he always says yes, and this is confirmed by the counselors that go with him.

I have written much about Flynn over the years and most of the letters are on my school web page. If you want to read more about him please feel free to click on this [link](#).

I think it is pretty neat when I see TV shows like Ink Master feature people with DS creating art that is then permanently tattooed on the skin of a loved one. The family members and the tattooists were transformed by the interaction with

these amazing people. If you have a chance to check out the show, it is awesome. [Ink Master](#) I also get concerned when I hear news about reducing the occurrence of Down syndrome. I mostly just think how sad for the people of the world that would not get the chance to experience people like Flynn. Beth's and my life changed when Flynn was born, but undoubtedly for the better. We don't focus on the things that Flynn can't do. We look at his abilities, not his disabilities. Of course it is hard sometimes like when Will is applying to colleges and Reed is starting to drive, but Flynn is ok with his school, and he likes being chauffeured around. So if it is ok with him then it is ok with us.

Whether you are reading this for the first time or if you are a "subscriber" thank you for taking the time to read it. I hope you learned a little. I hope you will be more aware of people with Down syndrome. I hope you are able to sit back and enjoy a bag of chips and a bottle of blue Gatorade, because that is what Flynn will probably be doing later today.

Thank you for reading and please feel free to share this with anyone. Spread the awareness.

I always hear back from people if I don't include pictures, so here are a few.



First Day of School 2015



Taking the cats to the Vet



The Relay Team 4th Place (Tough Competition at State)



The Bella Twins from WWE



Flynn and Pistol