

October 1st 2002

October is Down Syndrome Awareness Month.

Hello District 34! This is the third year I have sent out an e-mail on October first about Down syndrome. Even if you have read my previous two e-mails I hope you will read this one too. I have received many responses from people and I thank you all for your kind words. This is information to increase awareness and to celebrate the strengths of people with Down syndrome.

My name is Jay Marshall, and my wife, Beth, and I have three boys. Flynn is 7, Will is 4, and Reed is 2. Flynn was born on July 1st 2002. We were told that there was a possibility that he might have Down syndrome. About two weeks later tests confirmed that possibility and we realized we had a new reality.

Down syndrome is the most common birth defect in the United States. Flynn has several characteristics that are caused because of an extra chromosome in all of his cells. Chromosomes are the blueprints our bodies use to build everything that makes us, us! Most people have 46, and Flynn has 47. The extra chromosome causes several characteristics or differences so the whole ball of wax is called a syndrome. It is not really a disease. Flynn is just put together differently because of the extra chromosome. Characteristics common to people with Down syndrome include mental retardation, low muscle tone, and certain physical differences like a gap between his big toe and second toe, and only one crease on his little finger which makes it look like he only has one knuckle instead of two. (Check out your pinkie, you probably have two creases!)

Mental retardation is a controversial term these days in our politically correct world. To be honest, I don't have a problem using the term. My problem is when people misuse the term. It does not mean that someone is stupid. It should not be tossed around as an insult. It means that someone takes longer to learn how to do something. Flynn has developmental delays. He can learn; it is just going to take him longer to do it. The purpose of Down syndrome awareness month is to focus on the accomplishments of people with Down syndrome, because in all truth, they have more similarities with everyone, than differences. Flynn goes to school and last week received a "WE CARE" award for picking up some paper towels that were all over the bathroom floor. His teacher said he walked in and saw them everywhere, and just knew that that was not right. So he picked them all up and threw them away on his own! He also wrote his name all by himself last week, and is an accomplished horseback rider at Main Stay Therapeutic Horseback Riding Stables. Flynn has a great time being a big brother. He can tease and wrestle and cause just as much mischief as Will and Reed. If you have ever seen us in public, you know what I am talking about.

Flynn has lots of challenges ahead in his life, but don't we all? My wife and I are both teachers and I can't help but think that Flynn is part of a big education plan for us to share with everyone we know. The first thing I remember after Flynn was born was a feeling that I would think every parent gets holding their first child. I had an overwhelming sense of awe of the child that I held in my hands. Of course I knew he was a child, but I found out later that Flynn had Down syndrome. Flynn was never a Down's baby, or a Down's child. Sometimes he would get down if we played that funky music, or we would put him down on the floor. The point is that he is a person first. My hope is that everyone that meets Flynn sees that he is a child first. He happens to have a few differences from other people, but he has lots of things in common with everyone.

Thank you for reading this and for allowing me to share this information with you. If you ever have any questions feel free to ask. I love to talk about Flynn and his special abilities.

Jay, Beth, Flynn, Will and Reed Marshall
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[Picture of Flynn on his horse.](#)

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