

2012

AIDS Awareness Month  
Child Abuse Awareness Month  
Cyber Security Awareness Month  
Energy Awareness Month  
Healthy Lung Month  
Jazz Awareness Month  
Lupus Awareness Month  
National Brain Injury Awareness Month  
National Breast Cancer Awareness Month  
National Disability Employment Awareness Month  
National Down Syndrome Awareness Month  
National Liver Awareness Month  
National Orthodontic Health Month  
National Spina Bifida Awareness Month  
Psoriasis Awareness Month  
Rett Syndrome Awareness Month  
Vegetarian Awareness Month

This is a pretty good list, and by no means would I like to prioritize these causes, but if I may, I would like to focus on Down Syndrome.

I have learned much from my oldest son, Flynn, in the 17 years and 3 months that he has been alive. My wife, Beth, and I found out Flynn had an extra chromosome after he was born. I have learned that the extra chromosome gives Flynn some characteristics that are not the same as typical kids, but that his similarities outnumber the differences from those of us with 46 chromosomes.

He stays up too late listening to his iPod in his room. He does not like waking up in the morning. I am pretty lucky that I get to wake him up nearly every morning and give him a hug. That is also when I find out if he wants to go to school that day or not.

He goes to our local High School where Beth is a teacher. He has a great social life and says Hi to everyone at school. From what I hear nearly everyone says Hi to him. Last year a new student started sometime in the winter and Flynn knew he was a new kid! He introduced everyone to him once he knew who he was, but before he found out his name he just told everyone "new kid".

He continues to run the flag up and down the sidelines of the football games. Last year the team made it the State Final and he got to run the team out onto the field of the University of Illinois. He has some great friends that watch out for him and he has had quite an impact on the school. Last year Beth and some students sold T-shirts with the slogan Rockets Reject the R-word. One of the graduates relayed to Beth in August his disgust and confrontation of a professor referring to "retards" during a lecture. He was one of the football players and he was/is one of Flynn's best friends. I am not sure what the end result of the discussion was, but knowing that Flynn has had an impact on someone's character like that gives me a great sense of pride.

So if you don't know anyone with Down Syndrome, know that they are people first. You can refer to them as people with DS or a kid with DS or a baby with DS. Don't refer to them as Downs kids. Know

that many of them are mentally retarded or developmentally delayed. Just don't throw the R-word around at people that are not retarded. It is insulting to people that are.

I am typing this at home and Flynn just came down to give me a hug goodnight. He won't let us call him a boy anymore. He lets us know that he is a man. We can compromise and call him a man-boy. I am just happy that he still wants to give me a hug every day. Thanks for reading and for being aware. It would be great to have this passed on to build the awareness. I have many other yearly letters on my school web page. <http://www.antioch34.com/webpages/jmarshall/october.cfm> Take Care.