

She has not been made fun of or mistreated.

Zoe is a magnet. I am better connected to the world because of her power to draw people in. I notice that they aren't giving her the pity attention I expected. They are cheered by her apple face and grin. She gets therapy (I choose for them to come to our home) for speech and cognitive skills. Soon she will transition to a classroom setting for preschool to be with peers and keep track of goals. As I see her incredible social skills at work, I am less worried about what will happen in her school settings. She is friendly, but strongly independent and I am sure will handle conflicts as she develops in the same way that my boys have.

She brings happiness! Zoe is, above all things, Daddy's girl. When Daddy is napping or eating, or tending the fireplace, Zoe comes to lovingly pat his hair and give him a gentle rub on the back. She just added her first three word phrase to her repertoire - "uv oo too." She lets me know when she is worried, afraid, hurt, tickled, or wants to be in front on a walk. Her brothers love to play games with her that they've invented together. She is definitely pleasurable company. I am no longer surprised to know that there are waiting lists to adopt children with Down syndrome. She is in command of a very happy life that is enriching to others.

My goal is not to sell you on Down syndrome. I want to show you a progression that I have experienced and heard from many parents of special needs children. It started off as the most disappointing and petrifying news we'd ever heard. It ended with a limitless love and appreciation for getting to be the ones to care for a fun and happy soul. When Zoe was 18 months, my then eight year old son asked me what the chances were of Zoe being born with Down syndrome. I told him that at my age they were 1 in 1000. With wide eyes he said, "Man! We sure got lucky!" I couldn't have said it better. ★

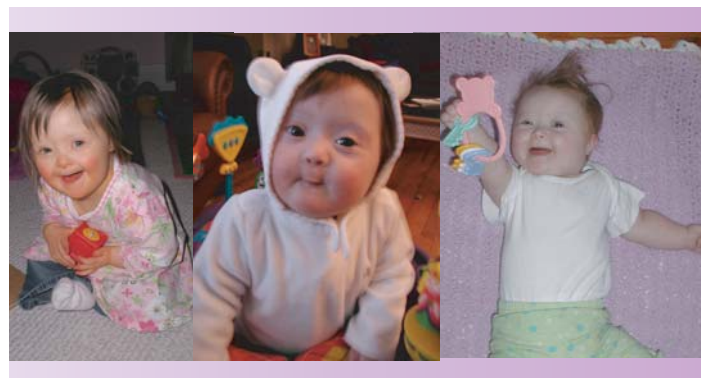


Online Booklet – Promising Future Together
http://www.ndss.org/media/pdf/2005_NPP.pdf

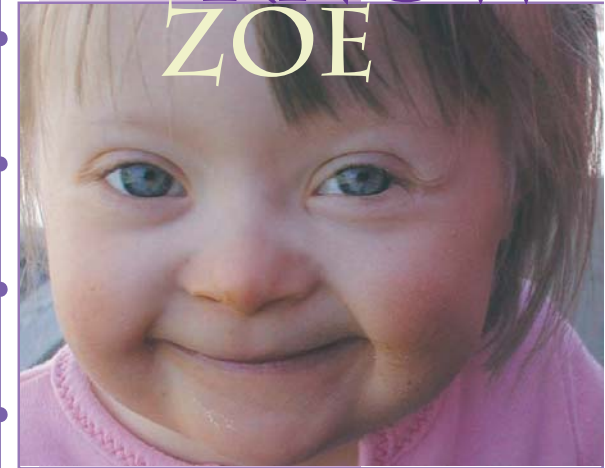
Down Syndrome Adoption Agencies
<http://www.adoption.org/adopt/down-syndrome-adoption-agencies.php>

Down Syndrome Information
<http://www.ndss.org/>

My email address
zoepiper@triad.rr.com



GETTING TO KNOW ZOE



Personal insights on having a baby with Down syndrome

Besides a Prince Charming of a husband, I've wanted a daughter since I was 11 years old. Twenty years and two sons later, my dearest wish was finally granted. But when my baby girl, Zoe, was eight hours old they told me that she had Down syndrome. I truly believed that my family's lives were ruined, not just for the moment, but permanently.

It may sound odd, but my first thought was, "This doesn't suit us. This isn't who we are." I pictured a long, heavy life of being tied to her needs and inabilities. I figured my husband and I would end up estranged by unfulfilled personal needs and burdens. My boys would lose out and by necessity would live in her needy shadow. It felt as if someone had died and I mourned the girl I had always imagined having. I kept wishing we could just try again and pictured a big bubble gum machine full of babies in pink and blue plastic balls. I wasn't the sort of mom it seemed this baby would need.

I'm sharing this with you because I've learned over the past three years that this is how a lot of mothers feel when they find out that their baby has Down syndrome. I had so little understanding of what it meant for Zoe, that I went as far as to think she was going to be a 'vegetable' and would not be able to communicate or share feelings with me. I want you to know more than I did those first few weeks. I could have used something to fuel the worries into hope and rekindle the excitement I had about nurturing a tiny life. We rely heavily on knowledge in times like these and most parents are left to their incomplete preconceptions. In retrospect, all of our fears were really of the unknown. Here are some of the things I have learned while getting to know Zoe.



She can learn...a lot! I remember telling the boys that their new sister wouldn't be able to learn like they do. This is a common misconception about children with Down syndrome. Zoe, who is now three, just had her preschool evaluation. Overall she is about a year behind in her abilities, but has so many important skills. Here is a sample of abilities she has enjoyed acquiring:

- Match shapes she is given to those placed on the table
- Stack 4 blocks into a tower
- Identify and say many nouns/verbs (car, spoon, go, hat, play, etc.)
- Express needs verbally (diaper, eat, tv show, (pick me)up, (put me)down, etc.)
- Sing and hand signals for 20+ songs
- Two word phrases (Bye Daddy, Zoe eat, etc.)
- Pretend play (brush doll's hair, put her to bed, cooking, shopping, etc.)
- Book play (identifies and says common objects and animals in her books)

It is no longer unusual for children with Down syndrome to go to school, read, have jobs, and become productive members of society. Just like our typical kids they are teachable and trainable from an early age. The difference I've seen with Zoe is the pace is slower, but she hits all of the key achievements the boys did and it is a thrill to succeed with her.



She was a real baby! Somehow I thought Zoe was going to rob me of having a baby in the house. Instead she was cuddly and good for long naps on the couch. She made delighted baby noises when she saw herself in her crib mirror. Her little head wobbled when it wasn't ready to be upright on its own. Great victories came in the form of her first turn over, first crawl, first game of peek-a-boo, and triumphant first steps. It was all there! Her low muscle tone made these milestones come more slowly than they did for my boys, but she headed steadily toward them until reaching them.



She is a best friend, not a burden. My favorite thing to share about Zoe's Down syndrome is that we cried so hard when she was born, only to find that she is the lightest, pinkest joy in our home. If you ask each of us, she is our favorite thing in the world. More than once my husband and I have missed her enough after her bedtime that we slept with an article of her clothing next to our pillows. She was the easiest of my three kids to care for as a baby. She had heart surgery as an infant, and even in recovery was solid and made no notable demands in her care. She has an incredibly sharp sense of humor and a sweet magnetism that I wish I could copy in my own personality. She learns routines and recently started feeding herself. She does empty her dresser drawers and pinch her brothers through the backs of their dining room chairs, but I don't think this is due to her diagnosis!