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Mary Kate Was Born With Extras

Our daughter Mary Kate was born with some extras. She has extra chromosomes, and some extra challenges with her health, and cognitive abilities. She also has extra smiles, sees all people as a potential friend, and has opened our eyes to the gifts of persons with Down syndrome and the blessings they bring to our lives. All children are gifted; Mary Kate's packages just open at different times.

Mary Kate is our fourth child out of five. She was born in 1995 and she will tell you that she is an adult. When Mary Kate was born, it was a surprise to us to find out that she had Down Syndrome and some health challenges. The first health challenge was meeting with the doctor and being told the negatives about our child. We were told we could and probably should institutionalize her; she would be a drain on our family. They left out the extras, Mary Kate would bring joy and laughter and celebration for the little accomplishments that are often taken for granted.

Two years later our fifth child, Sara, was born. During my pregnancy I was tested and the doctor determined that Sara would have a 1 in 26 chance of being born with a severe disability. I had to sign papers that I did not want to terminate the pregnancy and that I knew the risks. Sara was born healthy and she and Mary Kate were the best of playmates growing up and will walk at graduation together next year. All five of our children will be together for this extra special event although they will have to travel from out of state.

People sometimes ask, “What do you want for Mary Kate”. As her mom I want what I wish for in all five of our children. We want her to believe in God, be a good and moral person, be a giver, feel validated, and make a difference in this world. The world is a better place for her presence here and we all deserve some extras in life.

Some may ask what about those parents that are overwhelmed by the prospect of having a child with Down syndrome. They need to be told about the extras. They need to know that people with Down syndrome have challenges, but that with early intervention, and the support of Developmental Services and other advocacy organizations they too can enjoy the extras.