



J. KYLE KEENER

Raising a special child

BY LYNNE COBB

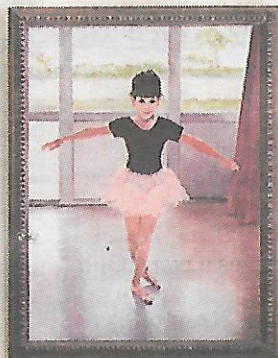
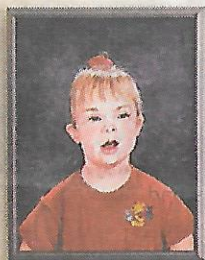
➤➤ Close to 24 hours after her baby's birth, a nurse approached Andrea Henry of Redford as she was resting.

"We've been looking at your baby in the nursery and suspect that she may have Down syndrome."

Andrea listened, in shock and disbelief. She was 41 at the time of Valerie's birth, and both appeared healthy throughout the pregnancy.

TOP: Andrea Henry cuddles her daughter Valerie Henry, who has Down syndrome.

BELOW: Andrea keeps portraits of daughters Valerie, left, and Christina on the dining room wall in their Redford Township home.



"I was completely stunned and then I thought — so what, it doesn't matter," Andrea says.

Blood test results confirmed Down syndrome; Valerie, who is now 14, had an extra copy of the 21st chromosome that causes physical and mental (cognitive) abnormalities.

Andrea's husband, Mike, was equally stunned. He, their daughter Christina and his mother had stopped for breakfast on their way to the hospital the day the results were due. Mike watched as caregivers supervised physically and mentally challenged adults on an outing.

"When Mike heard the news, he thought back to the scene at the restaurant and felt that God had prepared him for this possibility," Andrea, 55, says.

Andrea has fielded comments such as "You're a Christian, how could this happen?" She and Mike have an answer: "Why not a Christian? God will give us what we need and equip us to care for her."

Valerie is moderately impaired, meaning she's alert and engaged. She also is emotionally impaired, contributing to behavioral issues.

This fall, Andrea plans to help maintain the membership database for the support group Parents of Children with Down Syndrome (PCDS).

In the past 14 years, the challenges for her family have been many, but the blessings have been abundant.

"We are grateful to God for Valerie, and for the love and support of friends, family and church, but, at our ages, we are physically and mentally tired often. We realize that we won't see some of the most positive results of her development and our efforts this side of eternity. But we never give up."

Lynne is a Royal Oak based writer. You can talk to her at lynnecobb4@yahoo.com.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

■ **Faith:** Andrea's family finds spiritual support through the Gospel of John, Chapter 15, in which Christ explains that he is the vine, we are the branches. "Unless we abide in him, we can't meet her needs."

■ **Time:** "We live moment by moment — it can be very challenging due to the behavioral issues that are inherent with Down syndrome."

■ **Compassion:** "I have deep empathy for people in general, not only the disabled. ... There is more to life than what you see on the outside of a person."

■ **Perspective:** "Material things aren't as relevant. Moments where Valerie and I engage or really connect — that means more than anything."

■ **Support:** Andrea suggests that parents contact their local school district and places of worship because many churches host support group meetings.

RESOURCES

■ Parents of Children with Down Syndrome (PCDS): 248.646.0819 or www.pcdsmi.org/index.htm

■ The Arc: www.thearc.org
Northwestern Wayne County Arc:
313.532.7915

■ National Down Syndrome Society:
www.ndss.org