

As a mom who cried her eyes out when he was born, so afraid of what the future held for him (and us), I am so full in my heart to see who he is, who he is becoming, to see him so alive, so joyful, and so ABSOLUTELY breathtakingly adorable and loveable. Owen is food to my soul!

Why me God? This was the first question that came to mind after the diagnosis of Down Syndrome to our first born son, Owen.

At the young age of 24, I had a very “normal”, easy, perfect, routine pregnancy. David and I went to each appointment together and couldn’t wait to have our first child. The baby and I measured “normal” each visit, his heartbeat was always strong, he was growing perfectly, and very active in the womb.

At my 18 week prenatal visit, we had the ultrasound to find out that he was indeed -a boy!! We were so excited. We couldn’t wait to share the news!! David and I both wanted our first born to be a boy, to carry on his family name- since there were no other grandsons in the family.

My doctor came in to tell us that everything looked great; except that there was a teeny, tiny spot on his heart that was called an: Echogenic Intracardiac focus (EIF). This is a small bright spot seen in the baby’s heart on an ultrasound exam. This is thought to represent mineralization, or small deposits of calcium, in the muscle of the heart. EIFs are found in about 3-5% of normal pregnancies and cause no health problems.

My doctor assured me that he was 99% sure that everything was “normal” with the baby. But, he did share with us that there was a very, small chance that the baby could be born with Down Syndrome. He told us it was “*his job*” to tell us this, but he ***did not*** think this was the case with our unborn son. He asked did we want to travel to Birmingham for further testing. We opted against that, either way, we were going to proceed with the pregnancy and have a baby boy!! My doctor was supportive of our decision and our concerns. The only concern we had was to get his heart checked more thoroughly. My doctor and a few of his colleagues reviewed our ultrasound pictures and all agreed that there was no health related reasons (at that time) to go to Birmingham for further heart tests. They monitored his heart here, in Dothan, at every appointment and each ultrasound showed “normal” growth development and positive heart results.

I always had the words “Down Syndrome” lingering in the back of my mind. I don’t think I really thought Owen was going to be Down Syndrome, but I think the Lord was trying to prepare me for my future. I’m sometimes a bit of a “worry wart” so I just kept telling myself I was worrying too much. Everything was fine, besides my doctor was 99% sure there was nothing “wrong” ...

A few days after Owen’s arrival, we were about to eat our courtesy steak dinner provided by the hospital, when there was a soft knock on the door. The Pediatrician came in to talk with us about Owen. We had no idea the news we were about to hear. She told us that they suspected Owen was born with Down Syndrome. I couldn’t even comprehend what all she was telling us. I glanced across the room to see David’s eyes well-up with tears. At that time, mine filled with tears too. After she left the room, we were left cradling our baby boy. David and I held each other tight, not saying a word. I sat there thinking,

“Why me God?, What next?” After a long night of crying, David and I held each other tight, cradled Owen between us and we all fell asleep together in that small hospital bed.

The following morning, a nurse let us know they sent the blood work to Birmingham for confirmation of the preliminary diagnosis: Down Syndrome. We stayed in the hospital a few more days and then were released to go home. He was perfect! How could he be Down Syndrome?

Two weeks later, the chromosome test came back positive. When the doctor told us the news, I wanted so badly for her to come back and tell me they had made a mistake. I wanted them to say they re-tested the blood work and there was an error. But, little did I know, everything would be okay; we would be okay. **Jeremiah 29:11 stats: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”**

After weeks of sleepless nights, millions of tears shed, scared thoughts, and aimlessly wandering ideas of what the future held for us, I found my heart so full. I found my “broken heart” full of unconditional love and pure joy. Broken heart? Yes, I had dreamed and prayed for a “perfect, healthy baby”. And that’s not what I received. I was angry, sad, disappointed, overwhelmed and questioned God, why me? But, I was happy and excited at the same time because I had my new baby boy in my arms!!

Little did I know I would find myself so in love with this little 7 pound 9 ounce baby. He had the prettiest blue, almond-shaped eyes with Brushfield spots, a small round face, blondish-red hair, a smile so innocent. He was here! The baby we had longed for, for nine-long months! He was perfect! What more could I want? Why did I ever think he wasn’t perfect? Besides, God created him! He was a part of me and David, formed inside my body, and a perfect, healthy baby!

Psalm 139: 13-16 “For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.

About a month later, I received a baby gift from a dear, 11 year old-boy, who I had cut his hair for years, which had the verse painted on a plate that read: **“For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him.” 1 Samuel 1:27** It was *that* day, I realized God *DID* answer my prayers! I had prayed for a “perfect, healthy baby” and He gave me just what I had asked of Him! It took that simple gift for me to realize God hears us and knows our hearts!

Philippians 4:6-7 shares with us: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

It has been four years since Owen’s birth and God continues to show me the answer to “Why me”? God has shown me: He is always faithful, even when we think He’s not. God knew we needed Owen in our

family, not only for me and David, but our extended family too. Everyday life is very similar to having a child without a disability. We also have a 1 year old son, Evan, who is just as perfect, amazing, and special, as Owen. He and Owen are not only brothers but are beginning to become best friends.

Another parent once shared with us after Owen's birth, "Having a child with Down Syndrome is like driving down a country road instead of the interstate; it takes you to the same destination, but you see a lot more along the way." We have found this to be true! Each week, I take Owen to speech and occupational therapy (currently no physical therapy is needed, we had PT for the past 3.5 years) to help him overcome his developmental delays. He can do most of the stuff other children without disabilities can do; sometimes it just takes him a little longer to master goals. It's hard seeing Owen struggle sometimes not being the best at playing catch or running as fast as other children his age, but I know, with time he will get there!

Owen continues to amaze us every day. We consider being in the "Down Syndrome Family" a blessing. Owen has definitely taught us to love unconditionally. He doesn't see any differences in anybody. He has taught us to appreciate, love, and enjoy life more.

Through Owen, God has shown us so many things through His Word: Let go of our plans and accept God's plan, be faithful in prayer, and love unconditionally, just like God loves us! **1 John 4:8 says, "Who ever does not love does not know God, because God is love."**

Welcome to "The Family"!

**Love--Jenny, David, Owen & Evan Shawn
Buddy Walk 2012**

