

I remember calling my sister-in-law, Cara the moment I found out I was pregnant. We had been talking about it for years and even pipe dreamed of being pregnant at the same time so our babies would grow up together. A dream that never seemed truly plausible and had been forgotten until she told me on the same phone call that she thought she might be also! The next few weeks were full of many emotions as we both found out in fact we were pregnant and due a day apart! I remember sitting at lunch when my mother-in-law Janice called to tell me that Cara was pregnant with twins. I was thrilled, but Cara was a bit overwhelmed at the thought. I suppose the thought of being a single mother for 5 days a week (because her husband works out of town during the week) to four children, three of which are three and under will dampen excitement over twins. So with the news of multiples Cara was assigned a high risk doctor to keep check on her and the babies. The pregnancy was difficult. Everything was magnified by two and life was full of doctor appointments and heartburn!

I don't remember the exact month we were told that the babies had short femurs and that could be a marker for Downs, but it was just shy of normal so we didn't think too much about it. Further into the pregnancy another test showed fluid on the brain of one twin and something wrong with the kidney of the other. These numbers were also very close to normal, but this combined with the other marker we became a bit suspect. Cara struggled with the question of having an amniocentesis test done to confirm or deny the possibility. In the end she decided that even if the twins were Downs there was nothing to be done so why risk the health of the babies with the test. Abortion was not an option that she entertained and didn't fit with our family as a whole. At the time I had no idea that 93% of Downs children were aborted. Throughout all of this an emotional roller coaster was in full effect for Cara and the rest of the family. Some days it just seemed impossible that there would be anything "wrong" with our girls other days it felt like we were waiting for the inevitable. I can't even tell you the amount of prayers I prayed to make them "whole" and healthy. So I was confident that they would be just fine when they were born.

The day they were born I was SO excited to see them. I was still four weeks from delivery myself and 8 hours away so I could not be there in person. I was relying on pictures and phone calls. Shortly after their birth it was made clear that there were problems. Both girls were kept in the nursery for a while. The exact details are amiss for me being that all updates were a bit sparse with all the excitement of the birth, updating family members and friends, and with potential problems. Things were needless to say hectic. During this time the doctors told Cara that they suspected that both twins had Down Syndrome. There would be further testing that needed to be done but it would take several weeks to get the results. In the meantime, we just couldn't see it. They looked like cute little

chubby babies! Some of the typical characteristics of a child with Down Syndrome just didn't seem to be present when I looked at them. I didn't know if I was being a bias aunt or stubborn, but I just knew they'd be fine. I admittedly didn't know anything about Down Syndrome at the time other than the effects for children affected can range dramatically. I immediately began to research DS. Some of the results were very scary. Various types of heart problems and an elevated risk of cancer were two of the most terrifying. Our little girls had just made it into this world and the last thing any of us wanted to hear was bad news. Fortunately our little angels were free of all major medical issues. Other than some feeding problems early on they seemed perfectly fine. They are now three years old and are still very healthy little girls!

Now it seems Down Syndrome is nothing more than a word. They are not not "Downs" babies, they are just Carley and Casey. They have their strengths and weaknesses, like any other child. We love them just like we love the other kids. They laugh and cry just like other kids and bring tons of joy to our lives. This diagnosis doesn't have to define your child. Let your child define themselves!