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245

File Number

10218

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Title: The child that will never hold a grudge

Original source: Sydney Morning Herald

Resource type: Newspaper

Publication Date: 04/04/88

Publisher Info: -

**Abstract**

This is a brief story by the mother of a girl with Down Syndrome that celebrates family and the contribution that is made by her daughter. It tells of the fun, the laughter and their acceptance of each other. **Keyword: Families**

## *The child that will never hold a grudge*

Jane Baker

I am remembering ...

Little soft fingers creep across my cheek. Mary smiles and settles back to extract the maximum in cuddles from a mother who has spent 30 years in perpetual motion.

I, too, settle back, grimly determined not to deny my daughter all the affection she craves - and snatch a book so that I won't be wasting time at 10 o'clock on a Monday morning, by which time, had I been "working", I'd have had 1 1/2 lessons under my belt already.

When Mary was born, I'd got over the worst of the resentment of surrendering a teaching position I had loved for nearly 10 years.

My son was 14 months old, and I'd learned to love gardening with him scurrying under foot, fetching, carrying, chatting, just like his mother, though I never saw the likeness - just as I never understood the accusation "You don't know how to relax", or the criticism "too much gusto" of my approach to a task in hand.

Incompetent people irritated me, lazy people infuriated me.

Then Mary arrived, and with her my salvation, though I was the last to know it. Mary was born with Mosaic Down's syndrome. After the initial horror that my first-born daughter might die with heart-lung complications in those first few days I was seized with a burning love for

this little girl with the navy blue eyes.

Characteristically, I hunted for the best for Mary. I read all the literature, threw myself into early intervention programs, corresponded with writers of educational programs, and punctiliously practised fine and gross motor skills daily with Mary.

We crawled along balance beams, rolled on huge balance balls, threaded beads, and built towers of blocks. Day after day we did these things - and when we got to the five-block tower and it collapsed, Mary would laugh and catch my hand in glee, while I sighed with frustration.

That five-block tower became my nemesis. Two blocks, three blocks, four blocks - I'd hold my breath - the fifth block would crown the effort and then it would fall. And Mary would laugh - and sometimes I would cry.

Then one day Mary built that tower. It was a hot day, in a hot little room in hot Parramatta. I was tired, Mary was tired, Paul was crotchety, and the supervisor, already late for lunch, patiently took Mary through her program. Then it came - the five-block tower.

Mary poked away in a desultory fashion, clearing a space for her clammy little feet, and caught my eye in the process. I don't know

what she saw in my face, but she suddenly flashed me her endearing, lopsided grin, raked up an armful of blocks, and with studied nonchalance stacked five blocks into a tower worthy of the ancient Egyptians.

Then she laughed, swung her arms wide, and knocked it down, scrambling over to hug me. And at that moment, I loved her fiercely, because she loved me, loved me enough to build that silly little tower because I had an obsession about it, while she knew exactly how silly it was.

People look at parents with children who have Down's syndrome, and make well-meaning and stupid comments like "How well you cope", and "How lucky Mary is to have a mother like you". They do not understand that these children are our own children, part of us, and that we love them because they are ours.

But, even more, they do not understand that, like everyone else, a child with Down's syndrome has something to give to the people in his/her world.

Mary taught me what real love is. Like every other child, Mary laughs and cries, grumps and groans, teases and tattles. But, unlike every other child, Mary never holds a grudge.

She is the first to comfort a weeping brother or sister even if they were engaged in dire combat five minutes previously. She will pat me on the back and suggest we have a cup of tea when I've just been doing a very good imitation of a Valkyrie sweeping through the house. Mary will wrap her arms around me and assure me she loves me when I'm convinced I'm at my unlovable worst.

Last night, as I tucked Mary into bed her little fingers moved across my face as they did when she was tiny. We wriggled down for a cuddle and I did not reach for a book: "I'm nine," she whispered, as she has every night for a week. And I replied, as I have every night, with a tickle: "No, you are eight - tomorrow you will be nine."

She grinned sleepily and I went out to pick up my current reading - Peter Singer's *Should the Baby Live?*

This morning I hugged Mary. "How's my birthday girl? How old's my Mary today?"

Mary tilted her head to the side, fixed me with her blue-black eyes, and said, with wicked intent: "I'm 10".

And then the delighted laughter from both of us.

Eat your heart out, Peter Singer!