



Downs Side Up

Life with Trisomy 21

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[Health and Wellbeing](#) | [Changing Perceptions via the Media](#) | [Learning Activities](#)

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What to Say When a Baby is Born with Down's Syndrome

So, you hear the news that someone in your family, a close friend or an acquaintance has given birth to their baby. Wonderful news! ...



Many people say that 'special children are only born to special parents', or those that are strong enough to cope.

Others assert that 'special babies choose their parents carefully'.

Maybe this is said to boost us, or make us feel we can deal with what life throws at us, but sadly I've heard enough stories about children with disabilities in my time who are unloved, unwanted or maltreated to be rather suspicious of either of these statements.

A recent chat on Facebook highlighted that this is one of the phrases that SEN parents loathe to hear the most. Because it simply isn't true? Because all types of children are born to all types of parents? Or perhaps because we all know that we are not infallible? Or perhaps because we find this kind of sentiment patronising?

Perhaps some of us are lucky enough to have learnt such a lot from our children, sat back and allowed them to teach us, that they have made us just a tiny bit wiser and stronger, more resilient than we were before they were born... It's not always the case, many of us feel overwhelmed and under-supported.

We often feel we are doing our very best and still feel guilty that it might not be enough. Or we are exhausted from the battles we face, or we despair as we try to erase the struggles in our children's paths.

This piece by Erma Bombeck is over 30 years old. The language is outdated and the tone is religious. Dads and carers are omitted. Many love it, just as many don't. For me, there is just something about the final virtue that strikes a chord. See what you think, and take from it what you need.

Watch my TedX talk



Our book for children

The Special Mother by Erma Bombeck

Most women become mothers by accident, some by choice, a few by social pressures and a couple by habit.

This year nearly 100,000 women will become mothers of handicapped children. Did you ever wonder how mothers of handicapped children are chosen? Somehow I visualize God hovering over earth selecting his instruments for propagation with great care and deliberation. As He observes, He instructs His angels to make notes in a giant ledger.

"Armstrong, Beth; son. Patron saint...give her Gerard. He's used to profanity."

"Forrest, Marjorie; daughter. Patron saint, Cecelia."

"Rutledge, Carrie; twins. Patron saint, Matthew."

Finally He passes a name to an angel and smiles, "Give her a handicapped child."

The angel is curious. "Why this one God? She's so happy."

"Exactly," smiles God, "Could I give a handicapped child to a mother who does not know laughter? That would be cruel."

"But has she patience?" asks the angel.

"I don't want her to have too much patience or she will drown in a sea of self-pity and despair. Once the shock and resentment wears off, she'll handle it."

"I watched her today. She has that feeling of self and independence that is so rare and so necessary in a mother. You see, the child I'm going to give her has his own world. She has to make him live in her world and that's not going to be easy."

"But, Lord, I don't think she even believes in you."

God smiles, "No matter, I can fix that. This one is perfect -she has just enough selfishness."

The angel gasps - "Selfishness? Is that a virtue?"

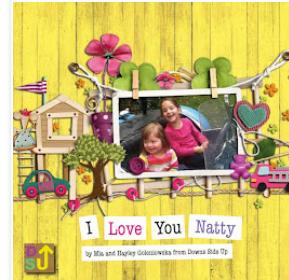
God nods, "If she can't separate herself from the child occasionally, she'll never survive. Yes, here is a woman whom I will bless with a child less than perfect. She doesn't realize it yet, but she is to be envied. She will never take for granted a "spoken word".

She will never consider a "step" ordinary.

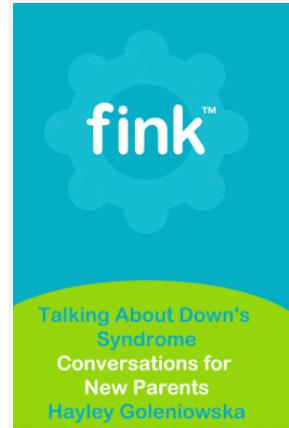
When her child says "Mummy" for the first time, she will be present at a miracle, and will know it!"

"I will permit her to see clearly the things I see...ignorance, cruelty, prejudice....and allow her to rise above them. She will never be alone. I will be at her side every minute of every day of her life, because she is doing My Work as surely as if she is here by my side".

"And what about her Patron saint?" asks the angel, his pen poised in mid-air. God smiles, "A mirror will suffice."



Our new resource for new parents and professionals



As seen on TV



By Hayley Newman at Downs Side Up [Downs Side Up](#)Down's Syndrome, Down Syndrome, support, parenting [disability](#), [Erma Bombeck](#), [parents](#), [special needs mum](#)

12 comments:

**Jane Duckworth** 7 July 2012 at 16:57

Thank you so much for sharing this beautiful post Hayley.

[Reply](#)[Replies](#)**Downs Side Up** 12 July 2012 at 10:57

You are most welcome lovely lady.

**Anonymous** 2 July 2022 at 04:38

This was published way before 1993. I had a copy of the in the early 80s and it gave me comfort when I needed it. I shared it today with a friend with a special needs child and I could tell it also gave her comfort. People can be cruel when it comes to special needs children and it's only because they're clueless of the struggles so anything positive like the above Erma Bombeck article should keep being shared.

Anonymous 22 December 2022 at 16:57

I too love this very much. My special needs son is now 36.

[Reply](#)**jane @ northernmum** 7 July 2012 at 18:47

Thanks for the mention it is a truly fab comment x

[Reply](#)**Sandy** 8 July 2012 at 05:48

I am so going to have to de freind you if you keep doing this to me! Luckily I have learnt not to read your blogs unless I am alone and I an give into the tears that will inevitably come without damaging my tough image. This is simply lovely.

[Reply](#)[Replies](#)**Downs Side Up** 12 July 2012 at 10:57

Sorry Sandy! It does us all good to cry sometimes :)

mumsnet

[Reply](#)**Unknown** 16 October 2012 at 14:04

amazing blog. really touched me and so true, Hannah Kemp

[Reply](#)[Replies](#)**Downs Side Up** 16 October 2012 at 14:11

Thank you Hannah. Made me sob too :)

H x

[Reply](#)**Unknown** 16 October 2012 at 14:09

Amazing blog!! So true and so touching. I myself have a son and a younger brother with down syndrome and I believe that they were placed in our lives for the sole reason of teaching us lessons in unconditional pure love and complete patience. I wouldn't change my life for the world regardless of the obstacles we face every day. and I am so grateful to have been blessed by such amazing and compassionate and pure angels. every day brings new surprises and new miracles.

[Reply](#)**Unknown** 4 November 2013 at 20:54

11/12/23, 8:42 PM

Downs Side Up: Erma Bombeck: The Special Mother

I'm stepmother to a 23 year old young man with DS and life has been richer for having him in my life. Others told me I shouldn't take him on as my sin was falling in love with his widower father. I love him like my own and have also had the comments and looks but my own children are better kids for having a big brother who yes is different but also amazing young man. He has achieved much more than the doctors who said they could "sort it" for his parents. My own daughter now wants to work with adults with learning difficulties despite having a learning difficulty herself.

[Reply](#)

Anonymous 13 April 2023 at 20:04

It is 2023 and I have had this on my fridge since my 46-year old son was a baby. I can't imagine how a woman who did not have a disabled child could know exactly what our lives are and how we cope. Ms Bombeck is undoubtedly in heaven for the goodness and comfort she brought us, mothers who fulfilled and understand. I still cry when I read it and share it with our club, the MOD squad (mothers of disabled).

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Natty the model with Down syndrome



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11/12/23, 8:42 PM

Downs Side Up: Erma Bombeck: The Special Mother

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