

Breaking Barriers

everybody belongs everybody serves

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⚭ A Ministry of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns

He Shared His Gifts Freely

by Dianne van den Ham

Archie loved to wait for the end of Pastor Evert's sermon, then walk all the way down the aisle to join the worship team as they sang the final selections. If he didn't know the words, he would sway to the beat of the music or beam a smile at one of his friends. Everyone smiled back!

Adriaan Buizer was born in Holland with a type of Down syndrome. Immigrating with his family at the age of 2, he became a professing member at First CRC in Brandon, Manitoba, on March 13, 1977. He served the congregation faithfully for many years, giv-



Adriaan "Archie" Buizer
February 23, 1954 - August 20, 2007

ing out the bulletins at the door every week before the service. Archie had a gift for remembering people's names, even guests who came occasionally. He served in other ways too.

At a winter Sunday evening service, Archie insisted that the pastor pray for his friend and fellow church member, Bill Douma. The Douma family had been away for the weekend. While the church prayed for the Doumas, they were traveling home. Their car slid on an icy overpass and crashed. Bill had to be hospitalized. Archie heard the Holy Spirit's urging that Bill needed prayer right then.

Archie loved to collect pictures of cars. The flashier the better! His bedroom had stacks of car magazines and dealership brochures that members of the congregation gave him. Several men of the congregation used this "ministry" as an excuse to subscribe to their favorite car magazines; "Archie would really enjoy them!"

Most of his life, Archie had been physically healthy, but a

few years ago he developed diabetes and had to go on kidney dialysis. He made numerous friends on his visits to the hospital three times a week. Until this time, he lived with his energetic elderly mother, but the need for a regulated diet and trips to the hospital precipitated his move to a group home. This arrangement relieved her of the day-to-day care she lovingly gave for so long.

Archie demonstrated love with big hugs and liked to receive hugs too. His presence in our congregation made everyone appreciate the needs that all of us have and value every-

one's contributions. Through Archie, God reminded us all to use whatever gifts and abilities he has given us to care for and serve one another.

At Archie's funeral, Pastor Tony Schweitzer said, "Archie taught me to listen, not just with my ears but with my heart. He taught me that if I truly believed that every person is precious in God's sight every person had to be precious in my sight as well. Archie's gift to me drove home the truth that every person has a gift and every gift is indispensable to the health and life of the congregation."

Casey

by Al Mulder

It seems like yesterday my son; it's standing clear before mine eye.
'Twas 1956, the 13th of December,
a damp and chilly day. The sun was hiding in the sky
that day when you were born. How well do I remember.

You were a tiny little child. With your slightly slanted eyes
you looked at us, and strange, we never heard you crying.
Things were so different with you. We often did not realize
how to raise you, but with God's help we kept on trying.

Your childhood was not easy. We did not always understand
why your behaviour was so different, but we loved you.
For you were spreading so much love around, no matter where
you went.

Your love was answered by the love of those who loved you.

Now, you're 20 years of age, a child no more, a grown young man.
We, your parents, brothers, sisters, all love you.
But most important, Jesus loves you, and some day, I don't
know when,
He'll say, "Come, live with Me, dear Casey, I've restored you!"

(This poem was written 33 years ago by Al Mulder, 88, about his son Casey who then turned 20. Casey was born in 1956, the sixth of seven children with two sisters and four brothers. He lives in his home, run by Christian Horizons, in Brampton, Ontario.)

This summer's *Breaking Barriers* will be available only electronically. Please go to our web site to subscribe.

▶ theme

In this issue we focus on **Down syndrome**. Thanks to everyone who submitted articles for this issue. Read more articles at www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org by clicking on the link for *Breaking Barriers*. There you'll be able to read more stories as well as results of a study which shows that couples with a child with Down syndrome have a lower divorce rate than the general population.



Down Syndrome Overview

by Elly Van Alten, Regional Disability Advocate for Classis Alberta North

Generally, people with Down syndrome are very loving and lovable. They are eager to participate with and please family and friends and develop close relationships with the people in their world. Life expectancy was 30 to 40 years of age as little as 20 years ago. With proper support and health care today, they can now live to be 50 or 60 years of age. Because they tend to age earlier than the general population, it is common for them to develop chronic illnesses seen more commonly among older adults, such as diabetes, arthritis, stroke, and dementia.

Down syndrome is considered a developmental disability (caused by an additional chromosome) that results in a combination of physical and cognitive impairments. Down syndrome is usually detected soon after birth—a seemingly flat face and nose, wide-spaced eyes, and short stubby fingers are telltale signs that a newborn has Down syndrome. Older parents are more likely to conceive a child with Down syndrome than younger parents. Heart defects are common, with some requiring repair at an early age. As the child develops, their mental (cognitive) function lags behind that of other children their age.

Most people with Down syndrome are able to look after their needs with some support. Thanks to ministries across North America such as Rehoboth (in Alberta) and Friendship Ministries that provide supportive living/working and spiritual/social opportunities, as well as thanks to many people in local congregations, good efforts have been made to make sure persons with Down syndrome belong to and serve in their congregations.

Everyone should have the blessing of having a person with Down syndrome as a friend.

Amazing Grace

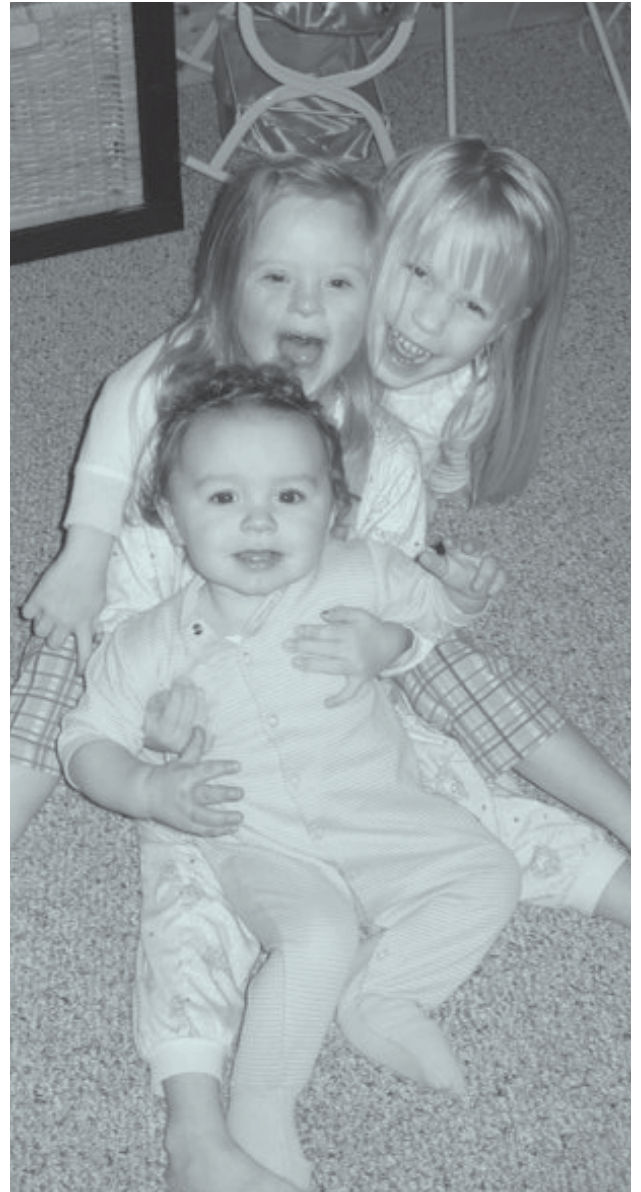
by Jessie Kuipers

In an amazing way, God prepared us to be Grace’s parents.

Three weeks before I gave birth to her, my husband and I were at McDonald’s with our oldest daughter, Cecilia. While she romped in the playground, a three-year-old girl joined her. This little girl had Down syndrome. My husband and I were drawn to her. We watched her play with our daughter while we ate. This little girl took our breath away and stole our hearts.

When we got back into our car my husband and I discussed this lovely little girl we had just met. We specifically remember saying what a wonderful addition a child with Down syndrome could make to our family. We talked about the amazing character traits of people with Down syndrome. Little did we know God prepared us to have that discussion because three weeks later we were blessed with our second daughter, Grace, who has Down syndrome. Grace is now four; just as we had thought, she is an amazing addition to our growing family of five.

As our children mature, we aim to teach them to be loyal, empathetic, and caring individuals. Our Gracie exudes these character traits on a daily basis. She works so hard for things that come so easily to others and reminds us daily to prioritize what is important in life. If only we all had her drive and determination! Our Grace can’t yet tie her own shoes, spell her name perfectly, or count past ten, but



Grace (middle) playing with siblings Cecilia and Samuel.

she can beautifully sing all the words to “Jesus Loves Me.” Again, she reminds us of what is really important.

We’re thankful each day for Grace. We’re thankful that God has chosen us to be her parents and to lead her journey. We’re also thankful for such an accepting congregation that has embraced Grace unconditionally and aims to treat her like any other child and not as a “special” child.

The word *grace* comes from a Latin word that can mean blessing, and our amazing Grace is definitely a blessing!

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resources

Sharing story through literature is just one way of breaking down barriers. The following picture books and novel were written by people blessed to have shared their lives with someone who has Down syndrome.

Picture Books:

Victoria's Day

story and photographs

by Maria deFatima Campos



This story was written for the author's daughter, Victoria, who has Down syndrome. Victoria attends preschool and like all her classmates, she loves to read books, bake cookies, paint pictures, and play with her friends. Victoria especially likes a story, cuddle time, and kisses before going to bed at night.

How Smudge Came,

by Nan Gregory, illustrated by Ron Lightburn



When Cindy finds a puppy on the way home from work, she scoops it up and tucks it into her bag. A puppy is not allowed in the home where she lives. She sneaks it along to the hospice where she works during the day. Rules are rules, and Cindy must give Smudge up to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but in surprising way, Smudge finds a home at the hospice after all.

Be Good to Eddie Lee

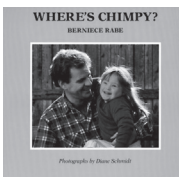
by Virginia Fleming, illustrated by Floyd Cooper



Eddie Lee tags along when Christy and JimBud go off to the woods pond in search of frogs' eggs. "Be good to Eddie Lee" Christy keeps telling her friend when Eddie Lee gets too noisy. In the end it is Eddie Lee who makes the real discovery of the day. Beautifully poignant both in text and illustrations.

Where's Chimpy?

by Bernice Rabe, photographs by Diane Schmidt



Although this book is 20 years old, the photographs and story stand the test of time. As Misty gets ready for bed, she finds that her plush monkey, Chimpy, is

lost. Daddy helps Misty go back through her day, finding many things that Misty played with until they finally find Chimpy.

Novel:

The Man Who Loved Clowns

by June Rae Wood



Twelve-year-old Delrita is not exactly an only child, because her thirty-five-year-old uncle who has Down syndrome lives with the family. Delrita discovers how dearly she loves her uncle. A very tender must-read for adolescents.

Thanks to Jenny DeGroot for the reviews above. Some additional resources are collected below:

Article:

"Welcome to Holland"

by Emily Perl Kingsley

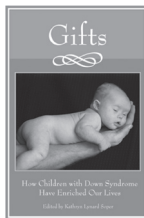
www.our-kids.org/Archives/Holland.html

The author compares having a child with a disability to planning a trip to Italy and discovering you arrived in Holland. Julie Graveline (see "Out of the Box," p. **) read it aloud to her congregation when she and her husband introduced their son Leo; then they invited their congregation to join them on their trip to Holland.

Book:

Gifts: Mothers Reflect on How Children with Down Syndrome Enrich Their Lives

Edited by Kathryn Lynard Soper



A collection of heartfelt personal experiences, and a valuable, comforting read for parents expecting a child with Down syndrome or already blessed with a new little one.

Website:

www.downsyn.com

Includes a helpful and extensive forum for parents and family members.

Blog:

www.newhopechurch.ca/glog/

John Van Sloten, Pastor at New Hope CRC in Calgary, maintains a blog that includes musings about adult son, Edward, who has Down syndrome. These posts can be found by clicking on *Edward* in the left-hand *Topics* column.

Talent Night at Friendship

by Jouke Schaafsma

One night at a Friendship meeting, we celebrated the talents that God has given us. Many people came forward, taking turns to make a presentation. One man does an imitation of Johnny Cash. Still another plays very quietly on a harp while everyone listens intently. Several more take a turn.

Then Jake and Mary (names changed), who have been married for eight years, come to the front. Mary brought a CD by Shania Twain and chose the song, "From This Moment," a song of love and loyalty. Her husband, who had not been to Friendship before, agreed to join her for this special night. They held hands and shyly waited for the music to begin. With the first words, they turned to each other and started to sing along. As the song continued, their love for each other was obvious. They danced. They hugged. They smiled at each other. They were lost in a world of their own; a world in which the other person was all that mattered.

What an example for all married couples! Jake and Mary both have Down syndrome.

Out of the Box

by Julie Graveline

It was quite a day. My husband was in Afghanistan and I was homeschooling my two children, but I still had to find time to go for a special ultrasound for mothers over 35. I was eager to know my baby's gender, so I didn't mind the extra inconvenience.

Then suddenly my pleasant anticipation changed to anxiety—the ultrasound showed soft markers for Down syndrome. A later blood test indicated that our baby boy had a one-in-four chance of having the extra chromosome 21. I declined amniocentesis (a test that gives definitive results) because I didn't want to risk miscarriage.

What to do? My husband Jason came home, and we had some long talks. We concluded that surely there are worse things than Down syndrome. We had friends who lost a newborn to a rare genetic disorder, and they would give anything to have him back, regardless of his disabilities.

We felt blessed to have the opportunity to cherish and love



our baby, but I didn't really know anything about Down syndrome, and I didn't think I had the patience to care for a child with special needs. I thought it would involve a fair bit of doom and gloom, and that perhaps the whole family would be affected. I had spent my life trying to fit into "the box," and I wanted my kids to be smart and have good prospects for a happy and prosperous future

Well, along came birth day and out came my beautiful 9

pound 11 ounce baby boy, Leo, who was confirmed to have Down syndrome a week later. When we introduced him to our congregation, our brothers and sisters in Christ accepted him with open hearts and open arms. In fact, during fellowship time after the service, I often have to scan the crowd to find out who is cuddling him.

Through God's grace, Leo has opened my eyes to the fact that "out of the box" is actually a pretty fine place to be.

Articles Welcome

Our summer issue on **mental illness** will be available only online to save money. If you or a loved one has lived with mental illness, please send us your note, poem, drawing, or article by April 15, 2009.

Our fall issue will focus on **hospitality**. In living with your or your loved one's disability, in what ways have you received a warm welcome or a cold shoulder? Please tell us about it by July 15, 2009.

Items may be sent to disabilityconcerns@crcna.org or see our physical address on page 2. Do not submit anything longer than 500 words; items may be edited for appropriateness and length for either/both the print and electronic version of our newsletter. Letters are always welcome.