

Shining Stars Griffin Tutwiler & David Miller

At 5:31 am on the morning of August 12, 1997, Griffin Henry Tutwiler came into the world with a small cry. What an angel, with his bright blue eyes and fuzzy blond hair! After a quick bath and all the newborn checks, he returned to the room and was greeted by the first of his fan clubs – Mommy, Daddy, Grandma and Grandpa. Before the sun even came up the next morning, a pediatrician came to the room to tell me that there was some physical signs that my angel boy had Down syndrome and was going to have to have some tests. Throughout the day, I kept looking into those beautiful blue eyes and searching for answers – is it true and what does this mean for us now? George and I decided that evening that we would keep this information to ourselves until we knew for sure. And a long eight days later, the answers came – yes, your son has Trisomy 21.

Like many parents of children with Down syndrome, we found ourselves thinking about what the future would look like for our family and for Griffin. As shoppers of the Scott's grocery store in Village of Coventry, we were often helped by a very pleasant young man named David Miller. We didn't know much about David other than he was very polite, well spoken, helpful and had Down syndrome. Our family wanted to make a connection but felt

awkward approaching him. Through the help of one of Grandma and Grandpa's neighbors, who was a co-worker of David's we were able to meet David and introduce Griffin to a new friend.

David and Griffin had their first outing together in April 2000 when they attended a fundraiser for the Learning & Development Center that featured television star, Chris Burke. Many people remember Chris as the actor with Down syndrome who portrayed "Corky" on television's "Life Goes On" or from his current role as guest star on "Touched By An Angel". Griffin and David hit it off immediately and spent the evening laughing and dancing and getting to know each other, in addition to meeting Chris Burke. What a sight, two people so different in age with one thing in common, forming a friendship so quickly.

Since that time, Griffin and David get together as often as possible (although I am sure they both would like it to be more often). Even though their outings are usually simple ones - lunch at Pizza Hut, a trip to the zoo or playing in the backyard - there is always one thing very evident; these two truly enjoy their time together!

Our family sees Griffin's friendship with David as a very positive influence for Griffin - almost as if David was his big brother. David is yet another person in Griffin's life to offer him encouragement and, in this case, David is someone who has already traveled the road that Griffin still faces. Because of their age difference, David's friendship offers Griffin one more person after whom to model his speech and behavior and to help him



as he grows. In addition, Hannah, Griffin's younger sister, also enjoys spending time with David and we hope that this friendship helps to strengthen her understanding of her brother and his disability. And at the same time, we hope that David benefits from this relationship by having more people in his life that care about him, especially a little boy that looks up to him so very much.

For our family, this friendship offers a glimpse of what our child might become - a very polite, well spoken young man who happens to have Down syndrome - in other words, someone much like David Miller. We were lucky we had a way to make this opportunity happen, and hope that other connections such as ours can be made through the DSANI network of families. Seek out that family who has a child or sibling older than your child and watch the magic unfold as a very special friendship develops.

- Julie Tutwiler



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