



This may not be the kind of Shining Star article that you've come to expect. You may be tempted to stop reading part way through. But I pray you don't.

Spencer Augustin won't wow you as an exceptional student, a gifted athlete or a local hero. He won't wow you by recalling some incredible accomplishment that a young man, impacted with Down syndrome, would be eager to claim. No great feats of strength to demonstrate here. No extraordinary expressions of intelligence. No Presidential awards or proclamations of bravery. Spencer is rather average.

His mother and I have always held out the highest hope for Spencer, praying that he would be impacted as little as possible by Down syndrome. That he could live a Normal life, free from hardships and pain, with a bright future. But as time passes, the reality that some of those dreams will not be realized causes a great ache in our hearts. And the process of letting go of hopes that do not materialize is painful.

Spencer is moderately impacted with Down syndrome. At 13 years of age we are still learning to count to 50, practicing a great deal of self-help skills, and continuing our work on Early Reader books and reading sight words. Spencer still needs help understanding the difference between who and what when asked a question. And the concept of appropriate personal space with strangers remains a sometimes (oftentimes if I'm totally honest) embarrassing issue.

This young man, Spencer, now sits in front of me, seemingly larger than I remember him being. His shoulders are broad, his hands are larger and stronger, and his voice is noticeably deeper. He sports a young man's face now, with a little chin hair and some pimples. He displays an attitude of stubbornness and self determination that challenges me to assess my own level of control with him. He wants his own space, more control over his day and the right to decide what he'll eat for dinner. Heck, he's 13 now! 13! and I gotta tell ya, it is a very

odd thing! His body is bigger, and his voice is deeper, but he still needs coaching to comb his hair, wash his hands, and brush his teeth! When I'm telling him he can't wear shorts and sandals in the middle of winter, he reminds me how cute his babysitter is! What a mixed up situation! AND WHAT A UNIQUELY SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IT CREATES FOR US! I'm trying to teach him what is appropriate and surprisingly enough I find myself going to school on him. He schools me daily on the value of a friend, the joy of a simple task done well, the importance of encouragement and touch, and the significance of family. He speaks volumes to me about perseverance and patience, as he struggles to keep his alphabet letters above the lines. He doesn't manipulate others for personal gain. He accepts the consequences for his own actions. He is not proud or boastful; rather he is often selfless, and extraordinarily accepting of others. He has a great sense of humor with a boyish laughter that is so genuinely pure it inspires you to do the same, and a love that cannot be constrained or withheld, but must be expressed with abandonment.

He is a great influence on me. And by popular definition, a person of great influence is called a Leader. A Leader yes...that is exactly who Spencer is! A Leader! He leads me in caring, in patience, in kindness, in love. He models perseverance, self determination, and strength of resolve. Moreover, he adamantly reminds me that a day without play is a day wasted!

Spencer opens my eyes to oppression. He opens my ears to prejudice. He opens my mind to what is valuable. He opens my hands to service. He leads me daily! He leads me down the road less traveled. The road discovered in Robert Frost's poem

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by.
And that has made all the difference. ¹

If Spencer were an actual star in the sky, the world would not find him particularly brilliant. He would not draw

their attention or be an anomaly of great discussion. However it would be apparent that the bodies surrounding the Spencer star would each shine much brighter for being in proximity to him. All together they would emanate a light brighter than any one single star could ever exhibit alone; each one of them more radiant.

The world has trouble understanding that Spencer is not the victim of an accident. That he is intentionally and purposefully made. *But I know* this truth, and the truth deepens in me each day. And the truth comes to others who meet Spencer. And the truth will prevail.

This Shining Star is all about Spencer Augustin. An average boy growing up just exactly as God designed him. Wonderfully!

Oh, that we could all be as average as Spencer!

I love Spencer beyond expression!

He is the brightest star in the sky to me!

— Spencer's Dad

¹Robert Frost (1874 - 1963), U.S. Poet, [The Road Not Taken](#)