

The Gift of Lee

Trisomy Day. Special thanks to Dr. Jérôme Lejeune, whose hard work has given hope to tens of thousands of parents of children with Down syndrome. Julie, Lee's mother, opens her heart to us about the gift of her son Lee, 34.

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The Gift of Lee

Where did this young man come from? How has he found his way into my heart?

Life brings surprises. Did I expect to have a child with Down syndrome? No, but I realised that God prepared me for it over many years. I spent years of my childhood on a street with two boys with DS and a baby girl as neighbours. As an adult and mother, I opened my door to a man with Down syndrome selling lightbulbs in my neighbourhood. Yes, I knew what Down syndrome looked like.

The whole family involved

But DS in the family? How different was that, and yet the same! Each child is unique, comes ready to be loved, has no match in a family. The whole family reached out to him to love, accept, protect and to scold, correct and guide him. I jumped into teaching him all I could to give him the best chance in life. I learned to enjoy small achievements amid the

daily struggles to grow and develop in spite of his handicaps.

God guided my steps

Did I cry with frustration some nights? Of course. Others couldn't see in this person what I did. The humour, the care for others, the desire to engage, to pray.

I have never been alone in my journey to find Lee's place in the world. God guided my steps, to school, educators, circle of support, church. Lee came along willing to try, engage with others, enjoy what the day brings.

I learned from him

What has Lee taught me? He taught me to relax, notice little things, remember people and stay in touch with them and greet them when possible. He has taught me to strike out on my own, and try something

new, to keep moving forward, in good humour. He notices others, brings snacks for visitors and loves signs of affection and humour.

Always ready to serve

These days Lee and I are the only ones left at home, my husband died ten years ago, and Lee's siblings have moved away. I live with a lovably imperfect young man. He is perfectly lovable in his imperfect way of being. He loves Jesus, he loves going to church. He was thrilled to receive his Confirmation in the Catholic Church last year, he was ready to serve.

He smiles and makes me smile. He says let's celebrate! What is coming next? What is on the calendar? What needs celebration today?

Lee is such a human being, not an angel. He makes snacks for others but enjoys them himself. He

overcame his fear of water to love swimming, but it took teamwork and perseverance to convince him. His stubbornness helped him through! He wants his way, tosses his head, but he can be convinced with patience and good humour, which we have to learn through him!

Stubbornness for good too!

Don't think for a minute that Lee lacks freedom and cannot make some decisions for his life. He can indeed! He makes clear his preferences with his delightful grin. He continues to learn new interests and share his love for music and dance, swimming and art... above all, gatherings of people he loves.

He expresses devotion to St. Josemaria in his collection of programs of the annual Mass and his pleasure at liturgical music, even the solemn pieces! He records rehearsals and plays them to keep abreast of the

upcoming season. He loves to prepare for celebrations and sends cards to family members. He also demands Zoom calls to his siblings every week with his news. He keeps me from getting too comfortable in my ways. Most of all he has taught me that he knows he is a child of God, that he should be here, that he is someone worthwhile getting to know. Yes, he will test my patience, but I have peace because I think he is ready for what God has prepared for him this day, ready for life!

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