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"My 'super-abled' daughter"

Angela was born in 2003 with Down Syndrome. Her father says that, with faith in God's Providence, confronting this reality brings with it great rewards.

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I once heard someone say that having a child with Down Syndrome is like preparing with great eagerness for a trip toFlorence and then, after taking off on the plane, having the pilot tell you that you will

be landing inHolland. Well,Holland also has wonderful sights to see, and beautiful countryside and cities to visit.

In our case, after initial moments of trepidation and some tears, my wife and I tried to embrace our tiny new “Dutch" daughter. Although we didn't know how it would all work out, we said: *this is her home; God has sent her to us, so it must be for something good. So no more negative thoughts and let's get to work.*

An unexpected problem we soon confronted was that, like many children with this condition, our daughter had a serious organic disorder as well as her psychological limitations. The doctor told us that she “seemed to have a small hole in her heart that would have to be watched closely. Sometimes these situations resolve themselves, but if not an operation will be needed." In

Angela's case it soon became clear that she would have to undergo surgery. Luckily the surgery was a success and she recovered quickly; her appetite soon improved and she was able to undertake her physical therapy exercises without becoming tired so quickly.

When she turned three, we began to consider what school Angela should attend. A special school or integrate her in a normal one? In the end we decided to send her to *Entreolivos*, like her sisters. The staff at this school, begun by concerned parents who are members of Opus Dei like myself and friends of theirs, showed great willingness to adapt to a situation they had very little experience with. Training was provided to teachers on how to tailor classes and learning material to Angela's special situation, and her incorporation in the school has been a great success.

I also became involved in the Seville Down Syndrome Association, and have gotten to know many other parents with children in this situation. We share our experiences and pass on tips on how to educate our children better. I could tell you some very edifying stories about parents overcoming difficulties that sometimes are truly quite daunting. I think having faith in God's Providence is a big advantage in confronting this reality.

Personally I don't like the term “disabled" for children with this condition. While it's true that learning for them presents special challenges (they are like little “tortoises" who go more slowly but who, with patience and perseverance, can go quite far), in other areas they a clearly “super-able." And these are in the most important areas in life that help so much to make the life of those

around them more joyful: goodness, affection, absolute sincerity without even a hint of deceit, unflagging cheerfulness, no concern about what others may think when showing their love and affection, an eagerness to improve, and a great ability to enjoy even the humblest things in life. I at least learn something new each day about how to grow in these qualities.

Sometimes people have asked me what I would do if a way were found to remove the genetic alteration Angela suffers from. I always reply that I love Angela just as she is and I don't think I would love her more if she were different. With all her difficulties, Angela can be happy as easily, or even more so, that the rest of her brothers and sisters, and she has great gifts that are a big help to those around her. These children are all born with a special “glue" that unites families more closely, and they

teach us so much about being grateful for what we have. Besides, it's so easy to love them!

Carlos Barón Rivero

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