

A girl with a gentle heart



Just a momentary glimpse of Amber Tacke's sensitive deep brown eyes and jet black hair reveals the deep well of gentleness that seems to make up the core of the young woman's personality.

Her exchange of a few shyly whispered responses to questions followed by the hearty, enthusiastic comments of her parents further reveal that neither Amber or her family are troubled much by the Down Syndrome that has shaped all their lives since Amber, their youngest daughter, was born 18 years ago.

"Amber has a very loving, honest, gentle heart," her mother Tammy says. Placing a loving pat on Amber's arm Tammy continues, "We're very lucky you're in our family." Amber beams at the comment.

Down Syndrome is caused by a full or partial copy of chromosome 21 which alters the course of fetal development and causes the characteristics commonly seen in people with the condition. Amber displays the typical low muscle tone, small stature and upward slant of the eyes caused by the genetic dysfunction.

Early on however, Amber's unique personality shone through the generalities associated with her condition.

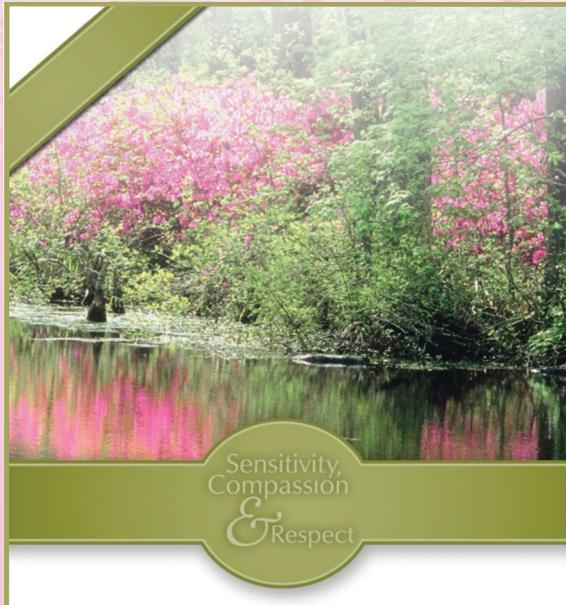
"In the first stages of physical therapy for Down's Syndrome children therapists use a blanket toss to help small children get used to movement," Tammy says. "Typically, Down Syndrome children don't like that motion, but Amber loved it."

Therapists were puzzled at Amber's response to her therapy, but Tammy and Tom knew it stemmed from the fact that they related to Amber just as they did to their other children.

"There was no special or unusual treatment," Tom says. "Our kids carried her around and roughhoused with her just as they had one another. We never set her apart from our other children. She's always been included in everything our family has done."

Every couple years Amber gets her hair cut and donates it to Locks of Love.

■ Photo courtesy of Maria Luze



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