

Maybe Someday

Anne and Al Reeves, Parents

Our son Mark, 26, is labeled as a person with Down Syndrome and assessed to be in the trainable range of mental retardation. He is also nonverbal and has been his entire life. Through the years we have always felt that somewhere there was a "key" to open Mark's abilities since he couldn't express himself. When you looked into his eyes you knew there was a reasonable intellect in there. Just trapped. So we held out hope that "maybe someday" the key would be found and Mark could express himself and overcome the limitations of the labels that have been placed on him.

That day did happen! January 26, 1993, Mark was introduced to facilitation and that key opened Mark's ability to communicate. And communicate he did, even on that first day. It was amazing then and continues to be as we learn simple and complex things about our son that we never knew. "I like yellow ... I hate brown," "You're too much in control, mom!", "I need to have some friends".

There has been much joy with this experience but also a lot of pain as Mark expresses his frustrations with the past 24 years. We realize that even though he can communicate very well using facilitation, not everyone believes in him or his abilities. He is very sensitive to people's attitudes toward him and refuses to type with those who are skeptical. This does not help him prove his abilities but he says, "They're not worth my time."

There are other difficulties involved with his ability to communicate now, but we are so happy that the key was found that it helps us tolerate the rough patches. At least Mark now has the opportunity and means to express himself and the worth of that has no price. Often he chooses not to "talk" as a means of controlling his life and the people's lives around him. That makes it hard but it is understandable. If he chooses not to "talk" it is his choice, not his disability of being nonverbal that prevents communication. Mark has much to learn about interactions with people now and needless to say much catching up in emotional development. We sometimes feel like he is stuck in the teenage years with social skills yet living the life of an adult in all other respects. We are working on those areas daily and are confident that in another year or maybe two, Mark will be communicating independently and be emotionally mature enough to accept his responsibility to communicate with everyone.