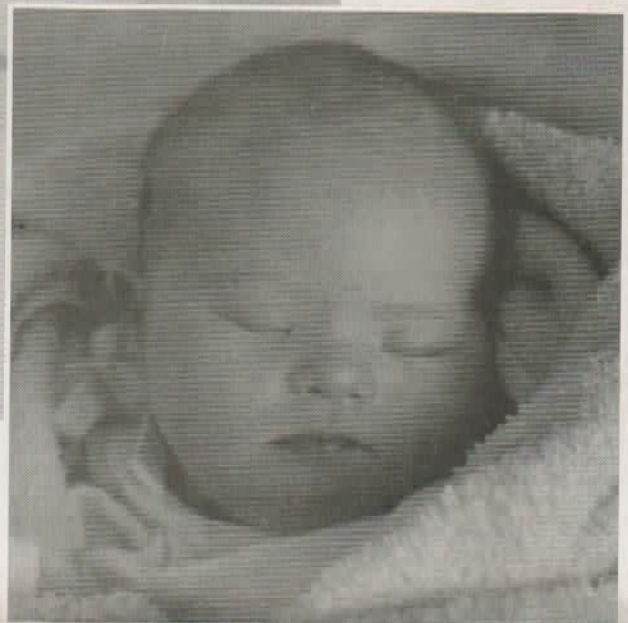


# OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, October 5, 2008



When I look back to August almost 20 years ago, although I thought that my life was ending at the time, I realize now that it was actually truly just beginning.



Emma

## SPECIAL NEEDS

# Unexpected challenge turns into gift of love

**B**lessed, vexed, or accepted, most parents don't plan to have a special-needs child.

There are wonderful people who request a special-needs child in adoption and those who choose to have testing done prior to or during pregnancy that gives them an indication of what may be in the future.

There are those who choose not to be tested during the pregnancy and allow nature to take her course.

The fact is, the majority of people don't anticipate a special-needs child in the planning process.

Why would parents want to have a non-typical child, you ask? Good question. It could be that they have had the pleasure of working with a person with a disability (PWD), maybe had known someone growing up, volunteered for a special needs organization or worked with a PWD.

As our society gets more aware and, hopefully, more accepting of how "typical" non-typical people are, the interfacing is much more regular.

We had been blessed with a few of those "typical" high-achieving, seemingly intelligent and likely the most beautiful children anyone has ever laid eyes on — when our lives changed.

One day, along came our third child and we pretty quickly realized that she was different than the others.

The doctors alerted us to the concern they had as specialists. They believed she had Trisomy 21, Down Syndrome. Who knew what the future held for her, her parents or for our family and friends?

You might know or be someone who has been in this situation. You may have watched them or have been at the crossroads yourself, perhaps in anguish or acceptance.

The array of feelings that hit when confronted with this news is always intense, always right — as that is how one feels.

But it can be very confusing.

"Did we do something wrong to cause our little girl to be "challenged?" "How can we make her better?" "Should we give her up for adoption to a more knowledgeable family who can properly look after her?" "What do we do now?"

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ALLISON  
MCNEILL

*Whose Challenge Is It?*

**Our daughter taught us patience, true love and acceptance, to enjoy small things like snowflakes falling, the first swim in the lake, teaching her to ride a bike and ski.**

## Coming events:

**October is Community Living Month, a celebration of people with differing abilities.**

**Many events are planned. Visit the website at [www.communitylivingbc.ca](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca) or call 250-712-3609.**

**— An ALS fundraiser at the Kelowna Art Gallery is planned for Oct. 17. A young husband and father of two young children has this terrible disease. Tickets \$50 for more info 250-765-2040.**

We had been going along nicely, my husband and I, in careers that we were doing well in. We had a great housekeeper-nanny to help with our two little children and my husband's older ones. Our friends were great, family wonderful, we had a nice house, great neighbours and life was pretty "perfectly typical."

Then this unplanned situation hit us full-force and we found out a lot about ourselves, our family and friends, some good and some not as good.

What transpired in that first few months, changed all of our lives. Many people resist change; they prefer to go along in waters that are known to them, to plan trips to countries that are intriguing and romantic, exciting and make them feel wonderful.

For us, accepting our little bundle was kind of like diving off a cliff into unknown waters, or planning a trip to one country to find out we were going to a completely different place. (It was different, and we didn't like it at the time.)

The reality is, you never know truly what

is going to happen to your little bundle, even if they do look and act typically. Not to scare new parents but, quite honestly, there are a whole host of situations that can arise much after the pregnancy, delivery and bringing Junior home.

Comparably speaking, we had it pretty easy as special-needs situations go, as our daughter was high-functioning and basically healthy and smart too.

Our daughter has taught us patience, true love and acceptance, to enjoy small things, like snowflakes falling, the first swim in the lake, teaching her to ride a bike and ski.

When we sent out her birth announcements, we included a little story that someone had sent me to help us in our acceptance of our situation. It is called Welcome to Holland, and if you are interested in receiving a copy please contact me by e-mail and I will forward it to you. It kind of sums things up.

In the next few articles, we will be providing you with all sorts of information regarding people with disabilities; information about upcoming events seminars and financial scenarios, opportunities and options for working and living situations and much more.

By the way, our daughter is equally as beautiful inside and out as all of our children are.

**Allison McNeill is a mother to four children, a stepmother to two, married to their father, and is an advocate for equality for people with a disability. She owns and operates a media and communications company based in Kelowna.**