

The Turning Point

By Ted Scofield, Indianapolis, IN

If there's one thing I've learned in the six years since my son, Benjamin, was born it's this: It's not about me!

Society charges fathers with the responsibility of ensuring our children are "successful." That may mean taking over the family business someday, being a star football player, launching a rewarding career or starting a family. In a father's mind, those are our responsibilities.

So, imagine how a father might feel when told for the first time that his son or daughter has, or will be born with, Down syndrome. Poof! In an instant, all of our hopes and dreams – our responsibilities – seem unattainable. For those who know little about DS, diminished possibilities loom large. A father can feel as though he personally has failed.

Of course that's not true. But, from the new father's perspective, when our children fail to achieve goals that we (or society collectively) set for them, it is a direct reflection on us.

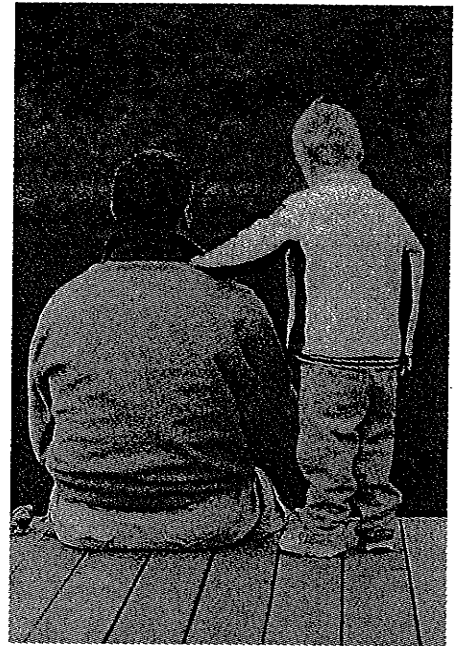
But, amid all this anxiety, life goes on. Diapers need to be changed, baths need to be given and crying needs to stop before sleeping can

occur. It was in these quiet moments that the change occurred for me. Holding Ben, singing a makeshift lullaby pieced together from an old Bob Marley tune, I realized that this little child in my arms needed me just as any child needs his Daddy.

From that point on, there were other little changes. The ball didn't have to roll right back to me. The walk from the house to the car could take as long as it needed. The tricycle was just as much fun being pushed as it would be if the rider were propelling it. And boat rides didn't always have to end at a favorite fishing spot – they could just go on and on.

I had reached the turning point; the point at which my son became more important than anything I could have ever imagined for him. That's not to say that my desire to help my son succeed had diminished, it hadn't at all. I just learned that Ben's success would be achieved by reaching his potential, not mine. It wasn't about me.

Over the past six years, I've had the great fortune of becoming good friends with many other fathers of children with special needs,



TED SCOFIELD AND BEN

particularly DS. Our stories are remarkably similar. There's a reason you don't hear about fistfights breaking out between fathers at the Special Olympics. We recognize that success is achieved when individuals reach their own potential. It's not about our expectations.

I can't imagine a more wonderful reward for any father than that.

Ted Scofield operates a small graphic design/marketing firm and is a founding member of D.A.D.S. (Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome).