

# Essay – I am Capable of More Than I Think I Am



Gregg Rogers - State College, Pennsylvania

*When prenatal tests revealed his soon-to-be-born daughter would have Down Syndrome, English teacher Gregg Rogers feared he wouldn't be able to handle the responsibility. Now Rogers realizes that what he once feared has become his salvation.*

**Themes:** courage, family, disability

“It is Trisomy 21. It is Down Syndrome.”

Beyond those words I heard nothing, sitting in the obstetrician's office. The doctor was talking about my unborn daughter, and the results of an amniocentesis. I know there were words after that statement, but I don't remember them. I do remember returning home with my wife and crying on the sofa. I distinctly remember saying, “I don't want this.” I didn't want this situation. I didn't want this responsibility. I didn't want to become one of those parents — the parents of a child with a disability.

People told me, “If anyone can handle it, you can.”

“Easy for you to say,” I thought.

“God never gives you more than you can handle,” they reassured me.

“Really? Then why do people have nervous breakdowns?”

“We'll help however we can,” they said.

“Fine,” I thought. “You have the kid with the developmental delay, and I'll help you out.”

For months I was terrified. My wife Lucy and I now refer to the period of time leading up to my daughter's birth as "The Pit." We barely spoke to each other because we didn't know what to say. We simply suffered through each day, together, but feeling terribly alone. And then Genevieve was born.

She spent her first eight days in the neonatal intensive care unit at a regional medical center. On each of those eight days I made the 150-mile round trip to see her, because she was my daughter. I sat in a surgical gown in intensive care, holding her in a tangle of tubes and wires, singing the same songs I had sung to my other daughters.

On the ninth day, she came home, and I began to realize that my feelings of fear and anxiety had changed in a way that no prenatal screening could ever have predicted.

I now believe Genevieve is here for everyone. I believe Genevieve is taking over the world, one heart at a time — beginning with mine. I believe that what was once our perceived damnation has now become our unexpected salvation.

Genevieve recently turned three and is doing very well for herself. She runs and climbs on everything and loves to wrestle with her two older sisters and her younger brother. She doesn't have a lot of spoken words yet, although her first full sentence turned out to be, "What's up with that?" She does have over 100 signs that allow her to ask for strawberries, pizza, or ice cream, or tell us when she wants to sleep or play on her computer. She goes to a regular preschool three days a week and seems to know more people around town than I do. I laugh every day because of Genevieve.

On my right wrist, I wear a simple silver chain with three little beads on it. I used to say the three beads signified the third chromosome that results in Trisomy 21, Down Syndrome. Now when I look at those beads, they simply remind me that I don't ever know as much as I think I do, but I'm always capable of more than I think I am.

For discussion or writing:

1. How would you feel if you had a sister or brother with Downs Syndrome? Could you understand how he and his wife felt when they heard the news? Describe those feelings in your own words.
2. If you have known someone with a visible disability, please describe your experience with that person. Imagine what it might be like for you to have a visible disability. What would be some of the challenges? Describe.
3. What can be some positive outcomes for you, if you were to be influenced by a person with a visible disability. Describe the growth in you as a person that could take place.
4. What does this mean: "...I'm always capable of more than I think I am." How can you apply that to yourself?

*Gregg Rogers is an English professor at Pennsylvania State University. He spent 10 years as a writer, reporter, and editor in New York and Los Angeles. Rogers and his wife host a website for other families.*

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