

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

**Loving Andrew: A Fifty-Two-Year Story of Down Syndrome**

Romy Wyllie

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CreateSpace

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Four Stars (out of Five)

*Loving Andrew: A Fifty-Two-Year Story of Down Syndrome* shares Romy Wyllie's account of what life was like raising her afflicted son. She contrasts her experience of raising Andrew in the 1960s and 1970s with two other families who also have children with Down syndrome, one born in 1980 and the other in 1994. Clearly, the laws affecting the rights of people with disabilities and the overall public perception of this population changed a great deal during the later decades of the twentieth century.

Wyllie's book is well written and engaging. The memoir is filled with both inspiring and heartbreaking glimpses into the daily life of parenting a child with Down syndrome. The author is able to recall her feelings about certain events with painful accuracy. The confusion, isolation, and turmoil of the early years pull readers into Wyllie's experiences as a young mom.

One such moment is when she describes taking Andy on walks: "This was definitely the Chevy of prams. Everyone else in the neighborhood had Cadillacs, beautifully designed prams...I forced myself to join the pram parade, but I felt miserable and humbled by my funny, floppy baby in his canvas cart alongside the neighbors' beautiful bouncing babies in their elegant carriages." Wyllie's acute feelings of not fitting in and not being the "perfect" picture of a family will undoubtedly impact readers.

That sense of sticking out, of being imperfect, flawed, and abnormal, haunted Wyllie off and on throughout Andy's childhood, but it in no way diminished her love for or treatment of him. She spent great amounts of time documenting his developmental milestones and achievements. While some readers may find this data interesting and informative to read as a comparison to either a typical child or another child who has Down syndrome, others may find such data tedious. This level of detail without much action detracts from the overall impact of the book.

Wyllie also covers what life was like when her son was an adult, coping then with the challenges of both Down syndrome and schizophrenia, which Andrew later developed. One scene in particular highlights the difficulties of Andrew's schizophrenia: "When I left the airport, they went in the other plane with my air ticket, both of them follow me to California. They are here to try and take me back to Chicago." The problem is, there was no "they." Andrew was haunted by people following him, watching him, but in reality there was no one there.

The issues that expectant mothers face with the prospect of choosing whether or not to keep a baby with Down syndrome is also touched upon here. Today, testing is very accessible and accurate, so the choice to abort a baby who will have disabilities is an option many potential parents consider. Wyllie covers the topic from her family's perspective by including her husband's and her other children's opinions, and she also offers the viewpoints of other women. The author openly and honestly explores this delicate issue.

The fact that Wyllie, along with her husband, makes the decision to keep Andy despite being told by medical professionals to put him in an institution speaks of her character. Throughout *Loving Andrew*, readers are able to see that same character and spirit flourish and serve Wyllie well as she faces the challenges of being a mother.

This volume will be of interest to families and professionals who have someone with Down syndrome in their lives. It is also recommended for students learning about developmental disabilities and special education, as well as readers of memoirs.

*Laura Munion*