

## Mother finds room in her heart for three

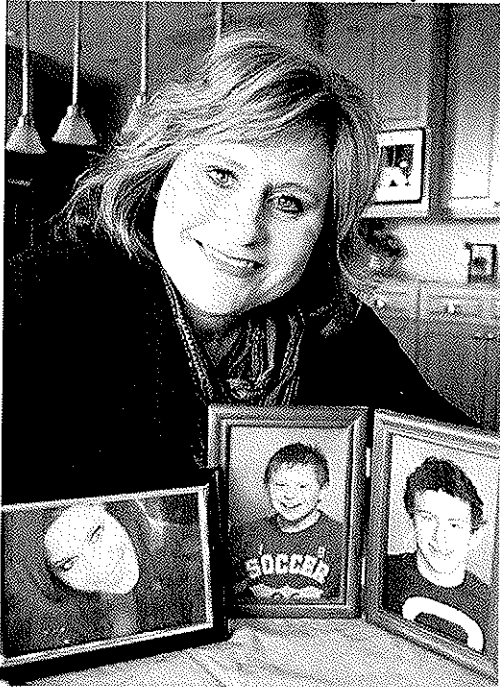
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**Lewiston Tribune**



**David Johnson**

**Up front / everyone has a story David Johnson David Johnson**



Robin Erickson with photos of her three kids, (from left) Abby, Isaac and Elijah....

People featured in this column have been selected randomly from the telephone book.

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COLFAX - With Mother's Day just a couple of days away, 48-year-old Robin Erickson accepts the opportunity to reflect on her maternal leanings. That is to say, she's more than happy to talk about her three children.

There's Abby, 19, a symphony in the making, if you will. Then there's Elijah, 15, a sweet work in progress. And finally, we have Isaac, 10, a tearfully special blessing in disguise.

"These are my children," Robin says, gathering three pictures. "My daughter is the oldest. And then I have a middle son. And then our youngest son is Isaac ... and he has Down syndrome."

A pause follows the last two words.

"What that means is he has three 21st chromosomes. That's what Down syndrome is."

But before Robin explains the love her family shares for a boy nicknamed "Little Buddy," she opts to give her two oldest children their due. After all, there's always excess room in a mother's heart.

"Abby is going to finish up her second year at Eastern Washington University," Robin says. "And she wants to get her doctorate in psychology." A 2009 graduate of Colfax High School, Abby is applying her talents and scholarship dollars towards at least another six years of higher education, Robin says, that will hopefully make her dreams come true.

"I think her dream is to be a counselor. I think it's lofty aspirations, but she's capable and real disciplined, and really has a focus," Robin says. "So, knowing her, she'll probably get it done. I think she'd be really good at it."

Elijah, who goes by Eli, continues to negotiate his way through a wealth of potential. That's the way his mom describes her oldest son. "Eli is just sweet. He's a work in progress. We've joked that his brain has been on sabbatical the last couple years. In other words, he's 15. He's smart, his grades are sound and he plays three sports."

Sometimes teenagers, and especially boys, need to realize that their parents can't always push, prod, pull and otherwise protect them along the twists and turns of the road called life, Robin reasons.

"Eli is learning to be responsible for himself," she says, "having to be accountable for his homework and his actions, the consequences of his life."

The best part about Eli, Robin declares, is that he's getting it done. "He's lovely and fun, and kind of has a gift of gab and I think he has loads of potential."

Robin assesses her oldest children from the unique perspective of a mother who was suddenly caught by two surprises that left her wrestling with all-consuming introspection.

"He was a surprise. We weren't expecting to be pregnant," Robin recalls of Isaac. "And he was a surprise because we weren't prepared for a child with Down syndrome."

Now, 10 years after Isaac came into the world, Robin says the blessing in disguise wasn't the arrival of her youngest child as much as it was the process of coming to grips with heartwarming reality.

"It's been quite a growing experience for all of us."

Robin says her husband, Leif Erickson (linked only phonically to Leif Ericson the Norse explorer), shares the love she has for all her children. That was most evident when Leif stayed by her side as she struggled with feelings she feared were far less than maternal.

"You're thinking, I don't want to be special. I don't feel worthy of this challenge. It is daunting to think of what this is potentially going to be like," Robin recalls of feelings that left her even thinking about the putting Isaac up for adoption.

"We've had people say, 'You know, I'd actually like to adopt a little person with Down syndrome,'" Robin recalls. "And I'm thinking, no, really you don't. That has nothing to do with how we love Isaac and cherish him. But I mean the reality is that is absolutely not how you'd like it to go. What we all would like first is a healthy, normal child. That's what you hope for."

Of course, Robin recalls, Isaac just being Isaac eventually erased all the consternation and doubt. He burrowed his way into a family that consumed him with unconditional love in exchange for something truly special.

"The lessons we've learned and the things we've appreciated through Isaac's life are immeasurable," Robin says wiping tears from her eyes. "He is special in the true sense of the word. Differently able, but absolutely adorable and so loving and completely entertained by the simplest things in life."

Isaac's honesty, Robin says, has allowed her to be honest with herself and with those who are willing to listen and learn about special-needs children.

"Someone who has a child with special needs completely understands," she asserts. "Isaac's just a joy. That's not to say I wouldn't give my left arm to have Isaac without Down syndrome. I would not be truthful if I said I wouldn't love to know who Isaac was without Down syndrome."

But a mother's love, Robin says, doesn't work that way. It's not always unconditional. But it is truly conditioned by the fact children need love. Some perhaps more than others. And Mother's Day is just a reminder a mother's love must be an everyday offering.

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