

Birthdays and Aging:

Individuals with Down syndrome love to celebrate their birthday. We believe our lives matter and we enjoy a fun party. My birthday is on September 17th and I love to celebrate it every year. On my 40th six years ago, I had a big party and I danced, surrounded by friends and family. This year, at 46, I hope to dance again and celebrate in good health after more than a year of Long Covid, pneumonia, surgery and a hospital stay.

But on the day I was born in 1977, twenty-five was the average age when people with Down syndrome died. Having family and friends nearby was uncommon for people with Down syndrome. That's because so many of us lived in state-run institutions where people with intellectual disabilities were kept out of sight.

On the day I was born, it was almost impossible to believe that someone like me, someone with Down syndrome, could have gone through public schools and graduated as I did. To compete for a paid job and get it. To actively and confidently speak out in private and public on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities. To be an advocate, author and speaker. To be a in a wedding party, an uncle and simply be out and about in the community, living my life alongside everyone else.

All those things that seemed impossible to the average person on the day I was born are commonplace today. And there is a simple reason why. It is because the medical field made advances in caring about us. It's also because society started looking at people with disabilities as individuals.

We have come so far since the bright, cool sunny day in 1977 when my parents thought the world was crashing down around them because their first baby was born with Down syndrome.



You can learn more about my work in advocacy in my book: "More Alike Than Different: My Life With Down Syndrome."

www.davideganadvocacy.com

