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## Happiness was born a twin Family hasn't let Down syndrome be a hindrance

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People often are surprised to learn that Kris Faith and Katie Lingo are fraternal twins. He's male, she's female. He's short and stocky, while she's tall and thin. His hair is brown, while hers is blond.

The most noticeable difference: Kris has **Down syndrome**; Katie does not.

That didn't stop the siblings from establishing a close bond. They grew up like any other brother and sister, Katie says - laughing, learning, loving.

"We're just like any other family," Katie said. "We have had a very strong influence on each other, and who we are today."

Katie and Kris will be featured at a fundraiser tonight for the **Down Syndrome** Information Alliance. The local organization aims to provide education and support to families affected by the chromosomal abnormality with no known cause, which, according to the Centers for Disease Control, affects 1 in 733 people.

More than 350,000 Americans have **Down syndrome**, which causes varying degrees of mental retardation and cognitive delays, but misconceptions and myths continue to abound, said Elaine Linn, a vice president and founder of the **Down Syndrome** Information Alliance.

"Most think that people with Down are childlike, can't be independent and can't do things for themselves," said Linn, whose 3-year-old son, Toby, has **Down syndrome**. "As a society, we need to remember that they're individuals first and people with **Down syndrome** second."

Kris and Katie Faith were born June 8, 1978, to parents Rosalie and Cliff. The Faith family also includes adopted older twin sons Tom and John, who are 40; and daughter Carrie, age 26.

While the family's strong religious faith helped them to embrace Kris with open hearts, Rosalie worried for her son's future.

"We accepted Kris, but society doesn't always accept people with disabilities," Rosalie said.

When Kris and Katie were 3 years old, the family became involved with the National **Down Syndrome** Congress. There, they found the support and resources they needed to educate friends, family and the community and to advocate on behalf of Kris.

Growing up, Katie taught Kris how to ride a bike, roller skate and swim.

"We just assume he can do anything that anybody else can," said mom Rosalie. "We don't exclude him from anything."

With his family's unwavering love and support, Kris blossomed into a confident, independent and artistic man.

He earned a high school diploma from Shasta High School and has taken classes at Shasta College and Sacramento Community College. For the past year, he has worked at a Starbucks near his Land Park apartment, which is situated above his parents' garage.

"That's a way for him to have his independence and still have the protection of having us nearby," said dad Cliff.

Kris loves Star Wars and the rock band Journey. He plays pool, takes drum lessons and enjoys jamming with Katie's husband, Matt Lingo. He is also a prolific lyricist, having penned hundreds of songs.

He wants people to know something about people with **Down syndrome**: "We're just like them, but we do things a little slower," Kris said.

"Most people don't understand us, but once they get to know us, it's fine."

He enjoys flying down to Southern California to visit Katie and her husband. His stylish sister also buys him "cool" clothes and takes him to a salon for a haircut, complete with highlights.

Having earned a teaching credential and master's degree in special education, Katie teaches at Loma Alta Elementary School in Pasadena. As the school's site inclusion specialist, she collaborates with teachers, helps craft student curricula, and helps her students make progress toward the goals set forth in their Individualized Education Program.

Growing up with Kris and helping him master many skills influenced her eventual career path, Katie said.

"I get a lot of fulfillment out of seeing someone accomplish a goal that maybe others didn't think was possible," she said.

She and her husband hope to move to the Sacramento area soon in order to be closer to her family.

The Faiths agree that the easygoing, open-hearted Kris was the best thing to happen to their family.

"Kris really taught us that all individuals have worth and value," Katie said. "He embodies the unconditional love that we all should have toward each other."

## WHAT IS DOWN SYNDROME?

\* **Down syndrome** occurs when an individual has three, rather than two, copies of the 21st chromosome. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with **Down syndrome**.

\* **Down syndrome** affects people of all ages, races and economic levels.

\* The incidence of births of children with **Down syndrome** increases with the age of the mother. But due to higher fertility rates in younger women, 80 percent of children with **Down syndrome** are born to women under 35 years of age.

\* People with **Down syndrome** have an increased risk for certain medical conditions, such as congenital heart defects, respiratory and hearing problems, Alzheimer's disease, childhood leukemia and thyroid problems. Many of these conditions are now treatable, so most people with **Down syndrome** lead healthy lives.

\* Life expectancy for people with **Down syndrome** has increased dramatically in recent decades - from 25 in 1983 to 56 today.

\* Researchers are making great strides in identifying the genes on Chromosome 21 that cause the characteristics of **Down syndrome**. Many feel strongly that it will be possible to improve, correct or prevent many of the problems associated with **Down syndrome** in the future.

Source: National **Down Syndrome** Society

#### **EVENT AT A GLANCE**

What: The **Down Syndrome** Information Alliance Celebration of Hope. The charity fundraiser will feature a dessert and wine reception and a live and silent auction.

When: 7 p.m. today.

Where: Ben Ali Shrine Center, 3262 Marysville Blvd., Sacramento.

Who: Kris Faith and Katie Lingo will share their story, as will Rachel Simon, author of "Riding the Bus With My Sister."

Tickets: \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door. Call (916) 658-1686 or e-mail [celebration@downsyndromeinfo.org](mailto:celebration@downsyndromeinfo.org) for more information.

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