

Letter to a Baby Who Was Thrown from a Bridge

by Astra Milberg



The photo above was shot by a surveillance camera only moments after the baby fell or was thrown from the bridge. The red square indicates the position of the child's mother and young brother. There are tourists end to end on a suspension bridge over the deep canyon. One cannot conclude from the photo what actually happened; it is at too great a distance.

Dear Baby Kaya,

When I read about your fall in the newspaper, my heart hurt. I know that the police are still trying to find out if your mother dropped you or if you were tossed over the guardrail.

But, in many ways it doesn't matter. The fact is, as soon as people knew you had Down Syndrome, that changed the story. Now there was a reason for you to be thrown away: you are a baby who doesn't really matter.

There are two things you need to learn. First, you come from a group of people who have a history of being thrown away. We have been thrown out of families into

institutions. We have been thrown out of schools into special classes. We have been thrown out of lives of employment into lives of poverty. And people like you and me, doctors don't really want us to be here in the first place. But we, people with disabilities, are glad you are here and welcome you to the fight.

And I, a woman with Down Syndrome, want to be the first to give you the second bit of news. Yes, you come from people who have a history of being thrown away, but you also come from a group of people who have learned how to survive.

I am a self advocate, that means that I have learned to speak up for myself and speak out against injustice. I take this seriously. There are some things that I learned that I want to pass along to you, things that I wish someone had told me when I was a little girl.

So, from me to you ...

Be proud of who you are. Having Down Syndrome is kind of cool. I think we have beautiful eyes. Everyone tells me that we have the greatest smiles, and I think they are right. Being proud will help you in so many ways. It will insure that you 'land softly' every time someone treats you badly or calls you a name. You will hear them all, Retard, Reject, Dummy. I've heard them and really don't care what people who use those words think. They may think I'm Retarded, but I know they are prejudiced.

Don't listen to people who say you can't do things. All sorts of people told me that I couldn't learn. Guess what. I went

to college, right along with typical students and I passed the same courses that they did. Oh, I had to sit up real late at night and study. I knew it was harder for me to learn, but I did it.

I can read. I can write. I can think. I can speak. There are more things that I can do than things I can't. Just remember, don't give up on yourself because someone says you can't do something. Try it. You may surprise yourself.

I really hope this was all an accident and you will know a mother's love like I have, but if not, there are lots of places where you can find love and acceptance. Find people who love you for who you are. Spend time with people who like you because of who you are. You will get tired from always having to teach people that you are a real person like everyone else. So find other people you can just have fun with.

I go to People First and other places where there are other people who have disabilities --you wouldn't believe the fun we have and the things we get up to. In my groups I've met other people with disabilities who are married, who have full-time jobs, who own their own homes, who decide their own fates. It's fun just to be part of the group. It's a relief from being special.

Discover!! Life is fun and full of surprises. You know, I never kissed a guy until I was twenty!! But I discovered I liked it.

Life is full of great things, like first kisses and chocolate. Every day I sit down and enjoy strong coffee, real strong

coffee, with milk and sugar. When I treat myself, I eat seedless grapes, cold and green.

You too, have lots to look forward to. I remember my first crush --on an older man. I remember playing races with my parents. I remember swings and slides and skipping and jumping. I remember playing with a puppy and rubbing his belly. Enjoy it all. Life is full of trials, but it's also full of excitement, and fun, and green grapes and chocolate.

I read in the paper (that part still surprises people) that you are a 'miracle baby,' that maybe God caught you and carried you safely down from that bridge to the earth.

I believe, Kaya, that God gave me an extra chromosome. It's an odd gift, but it's a gift. I believe that God does love you. And, I hope you realize, so do I.

Welcome, dear baby, welcome.

[Editor's note: The child survived, is said to be doing well, and has been returned to her mother. On February 9, the Vancouver Crown Counsel announced that no charges would be brought. 18-month-old Kayla Hama, who has Downs Syndrome, fell or was thrown from her mother's arms on September 9, 1999. A sign at the entrance to the bridge prohibits holding a child in arms. The mother, who was also holding her five-year-old son's hand at the time, has said that Kayla's fall was a horrible accident. We note, however, that after the accident she called not rescuers but her estranged husband. A surveillance video, shown at left, captured the scene just a moment after Kayla's fall.]

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