

What's in a Label?

By Tori W. McCollum

What's in a label? Hmmm, this would be a spin-off from what's in a name? A strong, viable, powerful name . . . a name that speaks volumes, a name that will follow or haunt an individual for the rest of his/her life A name, to some degree, describes our character or pride Names are derived from heritages, cultures, and are loving caricatures of what we want our children to be known by. However, when there's a name that causes eyebrows to furrow, the corners of mouths to crinkle in laughter, or faces to become blank with concern, that's a sure sign that the name pronounced in a crowded room or spelled on a pre-designed form has a place value in the lives of others. I mean, how many Judas' do you know, but by the same token, how many Jesus' (pronounced by the Hispanic culture) are there?

The same holds true in a label. When we become so engrossed with labels that would seemingly and supposedly describe our special needs children--the children that were carried in our bodies during a gestational period of up to forty weeks--we allow our concerns, fears, and woes to cloud our positive thinking. Labels, like "bad" names, will follow our children for the rest of their lives. They will at times cause laughter, furrowed eyebrows, and panic upon the faces of family members, employers, and the general public. Well, they will if we allow them to! It's important to know that if a label is attributed to your special learner, that you as a parent not home in on all the negative aspects of the text-book stereotype that it offers. The parent is the child's best advocate and can demand respect and opportunities for the child to be an active participant in society and his community

Down Syndrome, Autism, Asperger's, Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, ADD, ADHD, Dyslexia, to name a few, are all diagnoses . . . labels that, when delivered to loved ones, can create disparaging results, but discouraging as these names are, they don't have to be definitive of our children's futures.

In her book *Homeschooling Special Needs Children*, Sharon C. Hensley, M.A., an educator in the public school system before leaving to homeschool her own three children, one of which is a special needs child, ensures that her reading demographic understands that labeling is not at all what defines our children. She utilizes such labels to identify a problem that requires a learning style solution, but does not in any way hold onto the aforesaid as a means to diminish a child, his/her parents, or their future goals. "We shouldn't become slaves to a definition . . . it's the knowledge we need, not the label. When you homeschool your special learner, you shouldn't be interested in a label for the purpose of qualifying for an educational program."

Before leaving the public school system myself, I was told that, unless I accepted a certain type of label in addition to another label that had been attributed to our son, he would not be eligible for student services. Excuse me . . . student services? The services that he had already been receiving within the year he had been attending kindergarten? The services that by right belonged to him, no matter how many labels were heaped upon us? No, that was it, no more! We

weren't going to allow additional labels to follow our son's future just so that he could receive services that were already legally due him

The *only* label we're interested in is "child of God." We will instill the love, nurturing, and education that our son needs and ensure his abilities by doing what God gives us strength to complete. Remember to rest in God's power and His sustaining grace to provide for your *every* need, including the education of your special needs children.

Biographical Information

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Tori W. McCollum, columnist, editor, freelance writer, homeschooling mother, poet, professor, and tutor was born in San Diego, California. Accepting Christ at the tender age of nine, she became very involved in her church, where her father has served as undershepherd for thirty-five years. Married for 14 years, she has been blessed with three wonderful, yet precocious children (all boys).

She resides in Murrieta, California, where God continues to show his favor on her family.