

Right planet, right child



By [Beverly Beckham](#)
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Sometimes I think it's as simple as this: my granddaughter Lucy was born on the wrong planet. There was a mix-up in paradise and she got on the wrong shuttle and ended up here on earth instead of in some galaxy a trillion miles away where everyone is like her.

Because in the world she was meant for, Lucy is perfect. Perfect size. Perfect student. Perfect child. She lands in the middle of every performance chart that doctors and schools so revere. She reaches all her milestones exactly when her peers do. She smiles and rolls over and crawls and talks and walks right on schedule.

In the world she was meant for she climbs as high as everyone else on the jungle gym, runs as fast, plays as hard. In class she knows as much as the boy in front of her and is a little bit better at sequencing than the girl beside her.

At lunch, she talks to the kids across the table and they talk back. She gets invited to play dates, has lots of friends, sings and dances and plays along with everyone else. And every afternoon when she comes home from school, her mother holds up her art work and spelling and arithmetic papers and smiles.

In the world she was meant for, even strangers look at Lucy and think, “I wish I had a little girl just like her,” because she epitomizes childhood.

But by some geographical glitch, she landed on earth instead, in the hinterlands of evolution, where innocence is meant to be grown out of and where the tongue does all the talking, not the heart.

On the afternoons I pick up Lucy from first grade, I watch the children racing across the school yard, yelling and whooping and smiling, so many children, all the same. And then comes Lucy, holding her aide’s hand, taking it slow, beaming when she sees me.

And I think, if we were the only family on earth, we wouldn’t know that Lucy should be adding and subtracting and reading chapter books and running across a school yard eager to go home and play Wii. We wouldn’t equate Down syndrome with limitations. We would instead think, isn’t she amazing? Look at how she loves us. Look at how happy she is.

Lucy needs extra help with things. She depends on extra help because it takes her longer to learn what typical kids pick up easily. How to clap in rhythm. How to pump on a swing. How to say a whole sentence. How to add and subtract. How to write her name.

But she tries and tries and tries and tries. And when she gets it right, she is all joy.

Here on earth, we all depend on wheels. We don’t have wings — we can’t fly. This is our disability.

We accommodate this disability by using bicycles, cars, trains, and planes and, yes, these are clumsy, cumbersome things and, yes, we’d get places a lot faster if we could just spread our wings and fly.

But we don’t beat ourselves up over this. We don’t think of ourselves as imperfect because we can’t take flight.

But we would if everyone else could fly.

Lucy cries when someone else cries. A child she doesn’t know starts bawling on the playground and Lucy’s lips quiver and the next thing you know she is crying, too. But soundlessly. This is Lucy’s heart talking.

Was she sent here by mistake? Is she on the wrong planet? Or did she one day gaze out at the universe and see us here, on this flawed, messed up earth, and think: That's where I want to be. That's where I choose to be, with that family. With this mother and that father. In that little room with the tilted ceiling. Because that's where I am wanted. Because that's where I'll be loved.

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