

Single mother faces challenges, blessings of Down syndrome baby

By Carolee McGrath

NORTHAMPTON — Chelsea Freeman didn't expect to be in such a situation at 22 years old. Then again, she said she didn't expect to ever find such incredible joy, either.

"It feels great. She is amazing. I never thought I could love something so small," said Freeman, speaking of her baby girl, Peyton Rose. Peyton arrived Feb. 5, weighing 6 pounds, 13 ounces. And already, this baby with Down syndrome is defying the odds. "They said that things were going to be horrible," said Freeman, recalling conversations with doctors. "She feeds fine, she's gaining weight. The things they said she wasn't going to be able to do, she does."

But, there is no doubt that Freeman and her daughter have a tough road ahead. Freeman is a recovering heroin addict currently receiving treatment at a residential facility in Northampton. Before that, she was homeless. To top it off, she found herself expecting a baby with a disability who some people told her to abort.

"I was shocked. I was scared. I was not sure how I was going to do it homeless," said Freeman, recalling the day she found out she was pregnant. "I wanted to

make sure I was making the right decision."

The decision, Freeman said, was whether or not to go through with the pregnancy. "People were like, just have an abortion," she said.

"Once you see that ultrasound and know it's a real life, it's not just about you anymore."

Chelsea Freeman

Freeman said she heard that from both medical professionals and friends. She added she might have gone that route. But, a year and a half ago, Freeman lost a childhood friend, who died after an alleged botched abortion at a clinic on Cape Cod.

"When Laura passed away, it

changed my views on abortion," Freeman recalled. (A grand jury indicted the former abortion practitioner, 65-year-old Rapin Osathanondh, on manslaughter charges in connection with Laura Smith's death. He maintains his innocence.)

Freeman added, once she saw the pictures of her unborn baby girl, there was no turning back. "Once you see that ultrasound and know it's a real life, it's not just about you anymore. It's about you and that baby."

Freeman said that baby is now her motivation. Peyton not only has Down syndrome, but a serious heart defect called Atrioventricular canal defect. An AV canal defect is a large hole in the center of the heart. Peyton faces open heart surgery in May at Boston Children's Hospital.

"I do everything I can to make sure she's healthy," said Freeman.

Even though Freeman has not had the support of the baby's father, she said her parents have been behind her, and so have some newfound friends, like Joyce Leckey, from the Down syndrome resource group.

"The moms in the group wanted to support her any way we can," said Leckey, who is part of the First Call Program for the group. Leckey, whose 4-year-old son, Thomas, has Down syndrome, met with Chelsea after she was given the diagnosis.

"It would be daunting just having a child as a single parent, never mind having a child with Down syndrome," Leckey said. In January, a group of moms, including Leckey, rallied around Freeman, giving her a baby shower.

"If someone in her situation



BLESSED BABY — New mom Chelsea Freeman poses with her baby, Peyton Rose. Despite a diagnosis of Down syndrome, and being told she should have an abortion, Freeman chose to continue the pregnancy. She says baby Peyton Rose is a blessing. (Photo by Carolee McGrath)

can face all those obstacles, you would hope it would give someone else the belief that they could do it as well," said Leckey.

Freeman is now looking for an affordable apartment. And while most first-time moms face the typical challenges like getting feeding schedules down and living on very little sleep, Freeman

is just hoping her daughter will get through her upcoming surgery.

Freeman said this baby has inspired her and helped turn her life around. Someday, she hopes to go back to school.

"I want to work and fight for children like this," said Freeman. As far as the challenges ahead, she added, she's taking it one day at a time.

"You gotta keep putting one foot in front of the other. I had it in my head that my daughter was going to be able to do anything and she can. She changed my whole perspective on everything."

March 25, 2009 Message to the World of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina)



"Dear children! In this time of spring, when everything is awakening from the winter sleep, you also awaken your souls with prayer so that they may be ready to receive the light of the risen Jesus. Little children, may He draw you closer to His Heart so that you may become open to eternal life. I pray for you and intercede before the Most High for your sincere conversion. Thank you for having responded to my call."

For additional information please contact:
Medjugorje in America
P.O. Box 303, No. Easton, MA 02356
781-356-5000



ROOFING ★ SIDING ★ WINDOWS

WE WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE YOU
WITH A **FREE** ESTIMATE FOR

ROOFING
ALL TYPES OF
SHINGLES • FLAT ROOFS

★ **LICENSED**

★ **FULLY INSURED**

Commercial & Residential

Class General Contracting • Brian St. Amand
Serving western Massachusetts
413.736.2766

DIOCESAN REVIEW BOARD



To report an incident of church related sexual misconduct call
Patricia Finn McManamy,
Diocesan Director
of Counseling, Prevention and
Victim Services
413-452-0624 or 800-842-9055