

# “You Know!”

How a son with Down syndrome took charge in a pinch

BY JUDY DuCHARME  
Ellison Bay, Wisconsin

I WALKED IN THE DOOR, EXHAUSTED after a long day of teaching fifth graders. I loved my job but all I wanted was a relaxing evening with my family.

“Hi, Mom,” my son, Chris, said. “Duke was here again.”

I set down my bag, an uneasy prickling at the back of my neck. “Who’s Duke?”

Chris was home alone for part of the day and was fairly dependable. There were concerns, though. He wasn’t your typical 25-year-old. Chris was born with Down syndrome. He doesn’t have the medical problems associated with Down but he has intellectual disabilities. He has a winning personality and a great sense of humor. He’s friendly, sometimes stubborn but always kind-hearted. My husband, Lee, and I had warned him to be careful around strangers. I thought Chris understood.

Every day after breakfast, I’d drop



Chris off with his bike at the restaurant where he worked. I always reminded him not to ride too close to the white line on the way home. At the end of his shift, he’d bike the two miles back to the house. He’d fix himself a turkey sandwich for lunch, do the dishes, vacuum, and feed our yellow Lab, Packer. Then he’d listen to music and watch movies on his DVD player until Lee and I got home from work. Chris was pretty

MIKE ROEMER

responsible. He knew not to open the door to strangers. So who was Duke?

Chris grinned. “You know Duke.”

I went through my mental Rolodex. We live in a small town. Everybody knows everybody else. We didn’t know anyone by the name of Duke.

“He came in the house this time,” Chris continued, nonchalantly.

“What?” My unease escalated. Our area is very safe, and our neighbors

**PACKER BACKERS** The DuCharmes love their team; Judy even wrote a book of meditations called *The Cheesehead Devotional*.

look out for Chris. Few folks lock their doors. Had a stranger taken advantage of Chris’s trusting nature?

“There was a strange man in the house?!”

“No, Mom.” Chris laughed. “I’m talking about the black dog.” *The black*

dog? Then I remembered a friendly black dog playing with Packer over the weekend. I let out a sigh of relief.

“How’d you know his name?” I asked.

“It was on his collar.”

“He let you get close enough to read his collar?”

“Well, like I said, he came in the house,” Chris replied, in the same tone I used with my fifth graders when they forgot something I’d told them five minutes earlier.

I reminded him that it wasn’t a good idea to bring an unfamiliar animal into the house. Some dogs are strays, and could be unpredictable.

“But I had to get the phone number off his collar so I could call the owner. She came by to get Duke,” he said.

“Chris, who is the owner?”

“Mom, you know.”

**I** SHOOK MY HEAD, FRUSTRATED. This roundabout reasoning... Chris did it so often. He didn’t know someone’s name, but somehow he was sure Lee or I knew the person and they knew us. It would take several minutes of creative questioning to get the information we needed. Sometimes we never got it.

“Chris, did you write down the phone number?”

“No, I called it.”

I asked if he remembered it.

“Nope.”

How could I figure out who the owner was? In my head I reviewed the chain of events that Chris described. Then it hit me. I snatched up the phone and

pressed *Redial*—we didn’t have caller ID—feeling pretty clever, considering my tired state.

“Hello?” a woman answered.

I began explaining who I was and why I was calling.

“Judy, this is Donna Stephenson.”

Donna! I’d taught all of her children (everybody really does know everybody else in our town). Donna said Duke had wandered off and they were worried.

“I’m so thankful Chris called. He said he would keep Duke in the house until I came by,” she said. “Actually, Chris ended up calling twice.”

The first time he’d left her a message. Donna had just listened to it when Chris called again. “Such a nice young man,” she told me. “So grown up and well spoken.”

It was good to hear that.

“He gave me your address,” Donna continued. “But I didn’t know where Tipperary Road was. When I asked him, he said, ‘You know.’”

I laughed. Typical Chris.

“I’ve seen him on his bike and noticed he turns down Porcupine Bay,” Donna said. “I just followed it until I ran into Tipperary. Judy, you should be proud of Chris.”

I was. Very proud. And as soon as I hung up, I told him.

Maybe I didn’t need to worry about my son so much. I could trust Chris... and the One who watches out for him even more than I do.

Who, you ask?

Well...*you* know.

