

## Precious Memories

By Sheila Johnson

It's been over two months now since my little Angel Layton returned home to God. Although I miss him tremendously, he has given me enough joy to last throughout a lifetime. The fifteenth chromosome on Layton's DNA strand was duplicated causing him to live with a syndrome known, in short, as Dup15q. This condition causes developmental disabilities and presents itself differently in each person born with it.

Layton had many unique qualities inherited from Dup15q, and many of them were quite challenging. The good news about its presentation in my sweet little Layton is that he was naturally soft-spoken, and rarely raised his voice in a normal environment. However, high sensory atmospheres such as loud noise, bright lights, or too much touch would cause his anxiety level to rise. And even then, maintaining a loud voice level was rare for him.

Singing was one of Layton's favorite things. If he became over stimulated, we would just sing to calm him down. His teachers taught him many songs, and although non-verbal, Layton remembered most of the words and could sing along with the music each time. We sang to him at home, in the bathtub, at playtime, at dinnertime, outside, in the car, and especially at bedtime. In order to learn simple tasks, children with Dup15q require a repetition of most tasks on an average of forty-seven times. But our Layton could remember and sing songs after only a few reps, and he rendered the biggest smile that would light up the room. He faced many challenges, but learning to sing was not one of them for Layton.

Looking over the last month of his life, things were his behavior was changing. His appetite slowed down and his taste for food dwindled. He laughed longer and more often. He giggled at things usually unseen. He hugged longer and tighter. He joyously responded to instructions. On his last visit with Gramma Sheila he wanted to be picked up and held after his bath—instead of being happily chased. It was then that I noticed he had lost weight.

On his last day with Gramma Sheila, out of the blue, Layton began to sing out loud. I couldn't understand the words, but he kept singing a familiar tune enriched with his own words over and over again. A week later at the school memorial held in his honor, I learned that he had been singing his favorite song, *Ten Little Kittens Sitting in the Tree*. There we were, family, teachers, schoolmates, and friends holding hands, releasing balloons, and singing out loud his favorite song all the way to the end—*Ten Little Kittens Sitting in the Tree*, one fell off and then there were nine. When we came to the last verse, we were still singing out loud—one little kitten sitting in the tree, he fell off and then there were none. I believe Layton is with the kittens *and* the angels singing out loud!