

Our dream wedding day

I was shocked when she first suggested it, and things were about to get even more serious

Vicki Cope, 67, Rockhampton, Qld.

Smiling as best I could through my utter exhaustion, I cradled my newborn baby girl as she slept.

The doctors were saying something to me, but I was too tired and elated from the birth to take it in.

Then I heard two words which snapped me out of my reverie.

"Down Syndrome?" I said, suddenly frightened. "Are you sure?"

Looking closer I could just detect her upward slanting eyes, a typical Down's trait.

In those days, they didn't offer the Nuchal Translucency scans so I'd had no forewarning that my child would be born with a disability. But I already loved her fiercely and knew that I would do whatever I could to protect her.

My husband, Henry, looked downcast. He had a cousin who was born with Down's, so he already had an expectation of the future that awaited our little girl.

But I didn't really know much about it. All I could think about were the few Down's people I'd seen

around town. They had awful, bowl haircuts and seemed to be dressed like old men.

Leaving hospital, the doctor's parting words proved to be the best advice.

"Treat her like a normal baby," he said.

To our older daughter Nicole, five, Mynissa was just her baby sister. She never treated her any differently.

Of course, I went through the usual, 'why me?' depression.

I was sad my daughter would never grow up to get married and have children of her own. But then I realised why not me?

Mynissa was a good baby and a loving toddler.

When she was three, we moved to Rockhampton to have better access to therapies.

There, I realised we were really lucky. Some parents had it much tougher than us.

From about six, Mynissa had to wear glasses, which she

"Can I take Mynissa out?"



Me, Henry and Nicole with the happy couple



The ceremony was full of love

hated. She would hide them in the most bizarre places. I remember one year, her teacher pulled me aside.

"Mynissa's glasses have really gone this time," she said.

They turned up a year later behind the blackboard.

Mynissa loved music, riding her bike and getting into mischief. She jumped off our second storey verandah - twice! She felt no fear and was luckily fine both times.

After finishing school, she became a voluntary teacher's aide and then went on to do some shifts at a university cafeteria.

At the same time, one of the parents from the school began to organise a social group so the kids could keep seeing each other.

It was at these meetings that

Mynissa became close to her friend Matthew. He had Down's, too.

She'd only mentioned him a few times when I got a phone call from him out of the blue.

"Hi Mrs Cope, it's Matthew here," he said, then paused.

I could tell he was nervous. "Can I take Mynissa out?"

he asked. I was shocked. I'd never considered Mynissa having a boyfriend before.

Flustered, I replied, "Let me ask her..."

Calling to Mynissa in the next room, I said: "Matthew is on the phone and he wants to ask you out."



Mynissa and Matthew on their big day

She looked at me, blushed and then nodded eagerly.

In the lead up to the big date, Mynissa was excited but I became nervous. Was it wise for her to have a relationship?

"Let's see what happens," Henry said.

A few days later I helped Mynissa get ready. She'd only worn make-up a handful of times before.

Wearing the white pleated dress she'd worn for her high school formal, she looked beautiful.

Then there was a knock at the door.

We opened it and were gobsmacked to see a stretch limo parked in our driveway. Matthew was dressed in a three-piece suit and had

flowers and chocolates.

As the pair walked out of the door, tears welled in my eyes.

Later Mynissa told me how Matthew had paid for her dinner and then guided her to the dancefloor. Afterwards he gave her a peck on the cheek and dropped her off home - the perfect gentleman.

Mynissa says: "I love Matthew. He's funny and makes me laugh. He's kind and takes care of me. I like being married because it means we can be together all the time."

From then on, they became a proper item.

Henry and I talked to them about sex and I took Mynissa to a family planning clinic to put her on contraception.

Things got serious quickly. "I want to get married," Mynissa said to me about six months in.

"That's a big step," I said slowly. "Matthew doesn't have a job and you'd have to find somewhere to live."

Despite our warnings things came to a head one evening. They'd gone out on one of their regular dates and, while at the club, Matthew proposed.

There seemed to be no turning back now.

Matthew's adoptive parents, Loraine and Kevin, were keen on the idea but Henry and I were hesitant.

Eventually, we decided we'd trial them living together in a rented unit.

We lived close by and a carer checked on them each evening. It worked really well and soon it was time to prepare for the wedding.

Nicole and Mynissa went wedding shoe shopping together and



We're so proud of the two of them

organised the invitations. It brought them closer together.

On the big day, Mynissa looked beautiful in her long white dress as she walked down the aisle in the Botanic Gardens

in Rockhampton.

Angels Brought Me Here by Guy Sebastian played - a favourite of Matthew's.

They exchanged their vows under a blue sky and the canopy of a towering tree; the two of them grinned at each other the whole time.

At the reception, 180 guests danced the night away. It was a truly happy day.

After the wedding, disability support charity Multicap found them an independent unit in a block of four, built especially for disabled people.

"I love it," Mynissa said excitedly, quickly putting up Adele and Taylor Swift posters.

Mynissa and Matthew are now like any other couple.

They love watching TV, seeing movies together, singing karaoke, playing board games and going to dances.

Matthew cleans up around the home while Mynissa prepares the meals.

He's very thoughtful. If she's upset, he'll give her a cuddle and make everything better.

When I first gave birth to Mynissa, I never would've thought she'd find love let alone get married.

Their story proves that love truly does conquer all.

For more information on Multicap's Homes4Life initiative, go to www.multicap.org.au



Mynissa and Matthew live a happy life together

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