

# OPINION

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Much more than an egg hunt for local family

To everyone who participated in the Carbon Valley Rotary Club Easter Egg Hunt:

When a member of the Rotary originally invited my stepson and me to this hunt I had a lot of hesitations. How would Matthew handle the crowds that would be there? Would he even go through the fire department's safety house? Would the crowd of children scare him away from the hunt? Would it upset him too much? Was I stepping out of bounds and risking hurting him emotionally?

Matthew is 25 years old, with Down's syndrome, Autism, a heart condition and is legally blind. Because he stuttered so badly when he was young, he gave up speaking and only makes occasional noises. Mentally, he is about 3 to 4 years old. Because of his blindness, anything with a shadow tends to worry him. In his own element he is a happy, contented boy with a lot of love in his heart and a ready smile on his face. Outside of his element he is intimidated, fearful and apprehensive.

I finally decided that we would go. When I told him he was going to an Easter Egg hunt, he looked at me with anticipation but when we got there his fear set in and he clung to me. My friend, Barb Goettsch, came over to greet me and meet Matt but he would not shake her hand, as is his usual practice, but rather clung to me and buried his head in my shoulder. He gave Barb his Easter basket as if to say, "Here, I

don't want this."

I decided to start off with the safety house. While we waited in line, Matt held my hand tightly. The firemen were taking small groups of people through at a time. Finally, we came to the head of the line where Fire Marshal David Puccetti greeted us. I explained Matt's handicap to him and immediately he started addressing Matt. He had other kids and their parents to consider when giving his speech about the hazards of a household and what to do in case of a fire in your home but still worked with Matt as much as he could. He made Matthew comfortable with the little blow-up house we were in. When we went outside the house and to the safe place, Matt smiled at me in approval but then grabbed me again in insecurity.

Next we hit the egg hunt area. I was afraid he would not go into the restricted area without me and yet I knew that he would be happy if he could find an egg. Fortunately, at the moment he entered the taped area, no one else was there. I showed him some eggs. He bent down very close to the object that was in the grass and slowly picked it up. To his delight, it was something good. So he went about until he found several other eggs. During the time he was picking up the eggs, other children entered the taped area but he never even noticed them because he was so involved in picking up the pretty eggs on the ground. After a bit he came running out, delighted that he had filled his basket. I showed him that they opened and candy fell out of them. Oh boy, now that

was something special! We were to recycle the plastic eggs but that just wouldn't do. He was not giving up his eggs for anything!

Now we were headed to the "baby cows." At this point he had completely lost his fear and insecurities and his curiosity took over. He had never seen a cow that small and stuttered, "d-d-dd-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-o-o-o-o-o-o-g!" and laughed. The chocolate milk topped everything off. Now we were in heaven! Chocolate candy and chocolate milk ... items I never let him have at home. Grinning at me, we headed over to the pavilion where we could sit and rest a minute. We opened all of the eggs and found that he had won a book. I picked out a book with big pictures in it much to his delight.

While he sat there in the pavilion playing with his eggs, I looked down at him and realized that we had hit a milestone today. Matt stepped out of his comfort zone with a little gentle encouragement and was excited at the results. He opened up just a bit more and really had fun doing so. Now he was ready to shake Barb's hand and smile at her. He had enjoyed his new adventure and had grown just a bit more.

Thank you, Rotary Club, for doing such a fine job and for being a part in this for Matthew's sake. Thank you Frederick Firestone Fire Protection District for being there and understanding Matt and his special needs. Thanks to everyone for holding this event!

Mary Ellen Jones  
Carbon Valley