



# HEART STRINGS

Our children and adults with Down syndrome are the heart of our organization - and our most precious gifts.

*A bi-monthly publication for families and friends enriched with the Down syndrome connection.*

July/August 2005

## Message from Executive Director

Summer is in full swing and everyone seems busy with typical summer activities - swimming, family gatherings, picnics, vacationing, etc. It's hard to believe this is my third summer home with the kids. At times it can be exhausting, and other times exhilarating. I know the summer will fly by and our time together will be just memories so I'm trying my best to make good memories. Being a mom has wonderful rewards, but as we all know, kids are not always appreciative of the things you do for them. However, my daughter recently told me on several occasions that I "care too much." These occasions happen to be times that I insisted she do something - eat her vegetables, use sunscreen, wear a bike helmet, etc. She is only 7 years old and can't fully comprehend the responsibilities of a mother, but I'll take that as a compliment. Our lives may not be perfect, but there is love in our home and that's all that matters!

We headed for the beach shortly after school was out - before it got too hot - and before hurricane season began! Matthew handled the car ride surprisingly well, thanks to a borrowed DVD player and his big sister being out of sight & out of reach in the back seat. He enjoyed riding the waves and, of course, wanted to do it himself. Our biggest challenge was keeping him away from the water alone - he was fearless and those waves would have washed him away too quickly. So while mom and dad couldn't relax in their lounge chairs, we had a great time watching the kids have fun. After all, once you become a parent, that's what vacations are all about.

GRADSA has several events planned for the remaining summer months. Don't miss the Family Movie Night on July 30, which will feature the film "Shorty", about a 55-year old man with Down syndrome and the impact he made on his community. It's a wonderful story you don't want to miss.

JoAnn Tessandori, Speech Pathologist, will present a Sign Language class on Monday, August 29. And mark your calendar for the Holiday World Outing on Sept. 17. It's a great way to end the summer.

Hope to see you soon!

*Cindy Huston*

## Calendar of Events

**Saturday, July 30, Movie Night "Shorty"**, Winchester Center on the campus of Kentucky Wesleyan College, Center will be open at 6 p.m. and the movie will begin at 6:30 p.m. Don't miss this inspirational film about Walter Simms, a 55-year old man with Down syndrome, and the impact he made on his community (see inside for story). Popcorn, snacks, and drinks will be provided. We will also show a children's movie in the lounge area across from the bookstore (just down the hall). Volunteers will be on hand to stay with the younger ones so parents can enjoy the movie.

**Monday, August 29, 6:30 - 8 p.m.**, Sign Language Class presented by JoAnn Tessandori, Speech Pathologist. This class will assist families in using basic signs to help your child bridge the communication gap until they become more verbal. You are welcome to bring your child or you can use the Y Wee Care Child Care Facility. Snacks and refreshments will be available.

**Saturday, September 17, Holiday World Outing**, GRADSA will pay admission and lunch for individuals with Down syndrome and their immediate families. Please reserve your tickets by August 31.

*Please RSVP to Cindy Huston for all events  
(270) 771-4945 or [info@grada.org](mailto:info@grada.org)*

## News

**Saturday, July 2**  
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
**Racing to Help Car Show**  
Texas Roadhouse

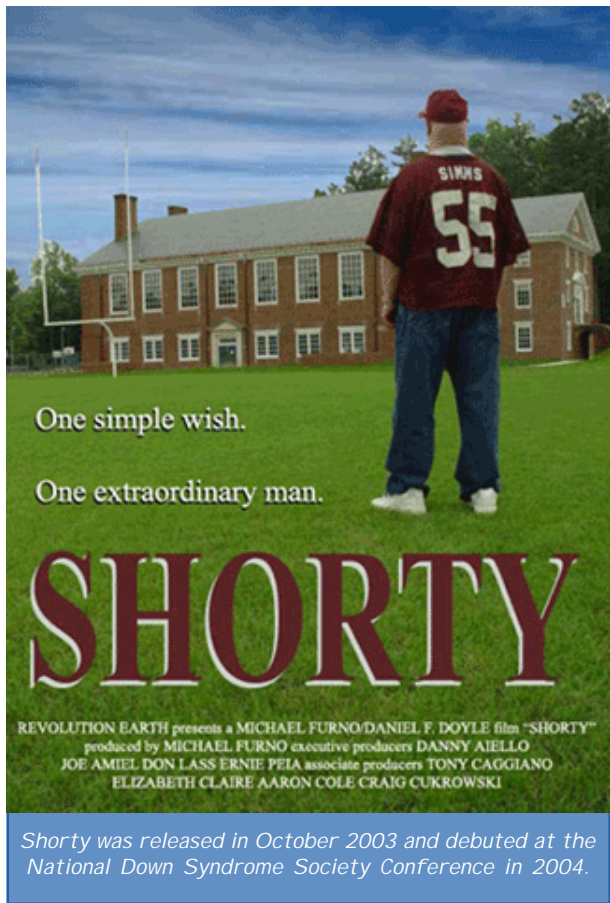
Poker Run, Live & Silent Auction, Activities for all ages  
Special Guest - Pro Bass Angler Mike Delvisco  
Proceeds to benefit local childrens charities, including GRADSA



**Elliott Williams** loved the beach in St. Augustine, Florida. Check out more photos inside to see how others are enjoying the summer. If you'd like to submit a photo for the next issue, please send it to us by August 15.

## A Star Was Already Born

By: Ken Woodley



HAMPDEN SYDNEY – Walter Simms is going to star in a movie being filmed during Hampden-Sydney College's football season.

Not just because the movie is about him, but also because his life will shine and bring light.

Michael Furno, Director, said the independent film company Revolution Earth came to H-SC "to find an example of humanity to prove there is a little bit left in this world, the goodness that can be brought out by one person."

Walter Simms has Down syndrome. But he is not down. There is nothing down about Walter Simms.

The 55-year old Simms, a collector and walking encyclopedia of pop music from the 1950's and 60's, is in his room and puts on the original 45 rpm single of the Beatles "I Want to Hold Your Hand". Within seconds his foot is tapping. Then he begins to move. And dance. But he hasn't begun to sing. Finally, when the Lennon-McCartney lyrics reach a certain point, he does sound out his voice in song.

The words that opened his lips?

"I feel happy inside," John and Paul sing. Walter Simms cannot suppress the moment, singing "inside" with the duo as if it explained everything.

He feels happy inside. Those are the words he cannot keep unsung.

One of the joys which music brings him, he said before the song began to play is "thinking about things where I am today."

And so Walter sings along with the rest of the song. Singing. And dancing like it was a courtside time out and an H-SC basketball game.

"I'm entertainment. I dance on the court. Basketball court, dancing. Entertain people. Help us," he said, "win games."

And it is very much "us."

Walter Simms and H-SC's football and basketball teams are nearly inseparable and the 2002 football season will provide the backdrop for the film Revolution Earth is making.

"Wonderful," Simms replies when asked about being in a movie. "It's the best time of my life. I am so thrilled."

### Faith and Grace

Down syndrome is a disorder caused by chromosome abnormalities that develop during germ-cell formation. About one out of every 800 babies born in the U.S. has Down syndrome.

When Simms was born, the life expectancy for someone with Down syndrome was about 25 years. Within days of H-SC's November 16 ODAC season-ending game with archrival Randolph-Macon, Simms will turn 56. Someone born with Down syndrome today has a life expectancy of 55 years.

"It's an enormous birthday," said Furno.

This birthday, along with everything else about Walter's life, will send a powerful message to others with Down syndrome and to their families.

Simms' brother Scott, who cares for Walter in the family's Hampden-Sydney home, has been told Walter, is the oldest living person with Down syndrome in the world. Whether true or not, the family was told that if Walter were to live past adolescence, it would be a "miracle", Scott Simms said.

The miracle feels happy inside.

"I've got faith and grace," Walter Simms said last Friday, "and I live up to it."

The miracle of his life, Walter's brother hopes, "will give hope to families with young Down syndrome people that they can live full and really productive life.

"For families touched by Down syndrome who don't have hope...it may really give people enlightenment," Scott Simms said, "and, through enlightenment, hope."

That is the message that the film, with the working title *Shorty*-the nickname given to Walter by former H-SC

football coach Phil Culicerto-will send loud and clear.

As loud and clear as Walter Simms singing he feels happy inside.

Told that it will make a lot of people happy to see him on the screen, Simms replies, "I'm proud, I want to be proud. I want to be. Proud of what I am and what I want to be in this world."

### The Genesis

Furno learned about Simms from former H-SC football player Anthony Caggiano, who told him about Shorty. "We were dying," Furno said of the good-natured stories about the joy Walter Simms brings to those around him. "We were cracking up...then a light bulb went off in my head."

A movie.

Simms' brother, Scott, relates that "Walter, is, of course, a character, if not a celebrity at Hampden-Sydney. He's a fixture. Walter can be hilarious at times."

For graduates who knew Walter well, one of their favorite pastimes is "telling Walter Stories," Simms said.

Furno contacted the Simms family, H-SC officials, and coaches to bounce around the idea of making a movie about Walter, following him through football season.

"We think," Scott Simms said, "it's a wonderful thing."

In August, Furno, Daniel Doyle, Craig Cukrowski, and Caggiano moved in and went to work. They are joined on week-ends by Aaron Cole.

"We really wanted to do this. It was something too good to pass up," Furno said, "It was good because of the subject matter. Everybody seemed to have wonderful things to say about Walter. He's a wonderful example of what values a human being should aspire to possess."

Furno added that Academy Award-nominee Danny Aiello, who helped form Revolution Earth two years ago, eagerly receives reports on filming progress.

### H-SC's Nurturing Community

The film will also demonstrate how the close-knit H-SC community has had such a positive impact on the Simms family.

"Without the supporting, nurturing support of the Hampden-Sydney Community," Scott Simms said, "I would have never been able to manage Walter when it became my total responsibility. Without the nurturing support of Hampden-Sydney, it could never happen."

"The community there," Simms said, "is very special."

That "specialness" was immediately visible to Furno and Revolution Earth.

"It is quite evident that Walter is the story and the community is the story as well," Furno said. "I have never seen a community rally around one person. And if anybody

is deserving of that, it's Walter."

Reflecting on the H-SC community, Scott Simms said, "So many people have done so much above and beyond the call of duty...Nobody has done anything superhuman or Herculean for Walter, but lots of people have done a little bit and some have done a lot."

Simms' father, Dr. Gilman Z. Simms, graduated from H-SC in 1930 and after retiring from his dental practice in Charleston, West Virginia returned to H-SC and served as its athletic trainer until 1982.

Walter Simms began his relationship with H-SC through his father's work with the athletic department. During the football season, Walter Simms helps prepare the football field, washes the uniforms and prepares the locker room during the week. During games, he stands on the sideline cheering, and will assist H-SC's Director of Sports Medicine.

Simms' presence, according to H-SC sports information Director Donny Turlington, has been accepted by every coach since the legendary football coach Stokley Fulton.

During the summer months Simms has been helping repaint the walls and fixtures in Gammon Gymnasium.

Walter Simms will tell you that "The school around me, it's a part of my life." He can tell you any score, any player's name, any uniform number, from any year.

You don't have to ask Walter about his family, however.

"My mom and dad passed away. It's hard to believe they're gone," he said, giving

more meaning to the last word than most who use it. "I love my brother."

### The Starlight That Shines

Walter Simms, wired for a microphone during Friday's filming, enjoys being a star. There is a large picture of Elvis, mid the sports memorabilia on his wall.

"Not Elvis. Nobody. I am. I'm the star," he said, "Not Elvis. Me."

A star that is going to shine farther than anyone but believers in miracles would have imagined.

There are tears now, flowing down Walter's cheeks. But he is not down.

"I'm not crying," he said, standing in his room, a gray sky outside the window soon again to answer prayers for rain. "My tears come out. I can't help it. This is who I am. This is how I feel things."

But he is not down. Not at all.

"And guess what?" Simms said, a color painting on the wall over his left shoulder of Jesus kneeling with little children. "God made me a great one. I am a great one. I am proud." And happy inside.

I'm proud of what I am  
and what I want to be in  
this world.

Walter Simms



Elliott Williams loved swimming and playing in the sand on his family vacation to Florida.

# The Joys of Summer



Paige Roberts enjoyed the waves and the beach on a family vacation to St. George Island.



Sam Winstead plays in the sand at Fort Walton Beach.



Will Graves Beyke gets a kiss from Minnie Mouse on a recent trip to Disney World.



Leland Ibill fills up a bucket of sand while on vacation in Florida.



Top and Right: Lance Morris and his daughter, Amie, celebrated her 4th birthday by defeating Mom in a game of Yahtzee.

Left: Andrew Conway is busy playing T-ball for Wayland Alexander School in Hartford.



## July/August Birthdays

Alan Bennett - 37 years old on July 30  
Will Graves Beyke - 25 years old on July 26  
Shelby Faye Crook - 9 years old on July 9  
Sam Fenwick - 3 years old on July 18  
Abbey Garvin - 2 years old on July 3  
Dana Hamilton - 24 years old on July 20  
Linda Murphy - 41 years old on August 3  
Brent O'Nan - 4 years old on August 23  
Taylor Palmer - 6 years old on July 5  
Shannon Peterson - 34 years old on July 21  
Kyrstyn Randolph - 11 years old on August 22  
Shawin Riney - 33 years old on July 15  
Aaron Shoemaker - 21 years old on Aug. 20  
Luke Stone - 2 years old on August 22  
Charity Wilkerson - 25 years old on July 31  
Beth Wilson - 13 years old on August 20

If this information is not correct or a birthday is not listed, please let us know!



## Mission Statement

GRADSA's mission is to enable families enriched with the Down syndrome connection to share resources, build friendships and advocate together for the future of our children.

## Services

GRADSA, an affiliate of the National Down Syndrome Society, is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization that provides its members with a bi-monthly newsletter, educational workshops, social activities, a website ([www.gradsa.org](http://www.gradsa.org)), a New Parent Outreach Program, and a Hospital Outreach Program. There are no membership fees.

## Policy Statement

GRADSA does not endorse, recommend or support any specific regime, therapy, or editorial submitted for publication.

## Printing of Articles

GRADSA welcomes articles from parents, professionals, and other interested parties. Material for consideration should be sent to Cindy Huston. Articles written for *Heart Strings* may be reproduced if credit is given to the author and GRADSA. Permission to reprint articles not original to *Heart Strings* should be acquired from the original source.

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All board meetings are open to the general membership. The next meeting will be held on Monday, August 8, 6 p.m., at the Family Y.



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