

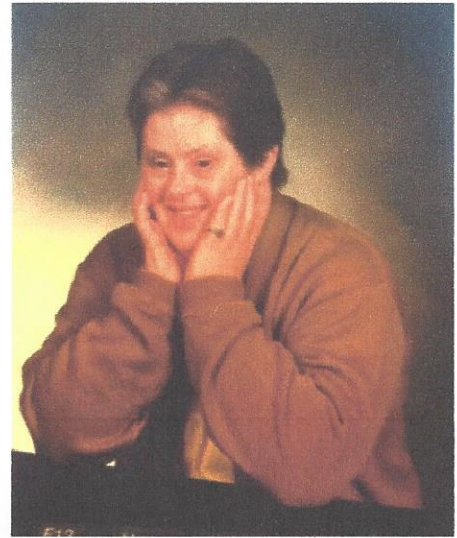
# Genie Eason – a Pioneer in Independence

(Excerpts from a Tribute given by her sisters at Genie's Celebration of Life, April 8, 2014)

Genie Eason, nicknamed "The Divine Miss Genie" by her three younger sisters, was born in 1954. In the 1950s, the shadow of Down Syndrome was strikingly unexpected and intensely serious. The prognosis that the medical community initially offered was quite bleak. But, they say every cloud has a silver lining; and if you knew the Divine Miss Genie, you also witnessed first-hand that rain clouds bring rainbows!

Genie was exceptional in so many ways. She was endowed with a gregarious interest in people. She had a sense of humor, unique charm, and had mastered the art of the one-line comeback. She was disarmingly truthful, and if someone asked if she liked a certain something and she didn't, she would respond with clarity, "Not really."

But, the more encompassing life story of Genie is so much more important than the details of her life. In fact her life story was written in large measure by her courageous and optimistic parents, Helen and Curly Eason. Together they observed and learned about their young daughter and taught her what she needed to learn. They, like other parents of the time, advocated for her entry into public education and then for dedicated classes and specially trained teachers in the new and growing field of Special Education. Genie was a student in the first special education classes in Greene County. Following her public school education, her parents and others, recognized the profoundly human need for a purposeful and productive life. And so, as part of a team of concerned parents and community members, Helen and Curly helped to establish a new concept called a sheltered workshop in Greene County. This was the root of Genesis Development and Genie became one of the first people to participate in the programs provided there.



Genie was truly enriched and validated by both her education and her work experiences. She read books, calculated basic mathematics, learned about the world, and lived on her own for many years. Genie enjoyed her many different Genesis work experiences. When the box-making machine was installed, she was *determined* to be one of those selected to run it. She also enjoyed the recycling line and cleaning offices. During the years that Genesis subcontracted to deliver the local newspaper, Genie met many new friends as she delivered papers to individuals' homes. Frequently, people who Dad and Mom did not know would greet her on the streets of Jefferson. She was moving in her own sphere, independent of them.

Genie dearly loved her independence, and she *loved* her paycheck! For many years, she regularly bragged to her sisters about how large it was. And she actually had to be *encouraged* to take vacation time. Work was such a large part of her identity and her connection with others. In September of 2010, Genie was recognized for her 35 years of employment at a retirement party in her honor. Taking an interest in politics, she advocated for the rights of the disabled and participated in multiple visits to the Iowa State House. She was proud that she never missed voting for an American president.

During her final few years, Genie's physical care needs became challenging, and our family needed to facilitate Genie's transition to increasingly structured support and care. Once again, Genesis Development was there to support her needs. Genie moved first to Supported Community Living services while she was still in her own apartment and then to the Harrison Home where she had several housemates.



Helen, Genie, & Curly Eason with Terry Johnson, Genesis CEO, at Genie's retirement party

Genie had a zest for life and loved so many things. She loved David Cassidy, ham sandwiches, ice cream, and watermelon. She loved competing in the Special Olympics and bowling. She loved "The Sound of Music," "Bonanza," and getting the window seat in the car. She loved the United States of America, beauty pageants, Grandma Eason's cookies and Grandma Caulkins' kisses. And she loved *equally* the Cyclones AND the Hawkeyes. For these memories and for her life, we celebrate the Divine Miss Genie.