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Reflections . . .

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Dreams Do Come True

By

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Years ago my husband Jerry and I were “Pilot Parents” to families who had babies with Down syndrome, like our youngest daughter Kelly. In that capacity, we met the Hibbs family, who brought an adorable 3-month old to a meeting at our home. Kelly, then 18-months, fell in love with baby Sterling on the spot.

The families drifted apart, and then came back together after we founded Down Home Ranch and began holding summer camps. Sterling’s mom called and said even though he was a little young for camp, she thought he’d do well because he was used to fending for himself as the middle kid of two brothers.

She was right, and Sterling quickly became a fixture at camp, as well as appearing with Kelly on our pamphlets and brochures for the past eight years. Our poster-pair. What’s more, Sterling and Kelly became good friends, and as they approached the teenage years, *more* than good friends, as this picture of them at 11 and 12 sweetly shows.

Now they’re 20 and 21, and have remained true to each other through the years, waiting for the day Sterling makes it through high school and moves to the Ranch. They’re planning their wedding at “their” church and, well, we’ll see what the future holds. We’ve been surprised before.

A few weeks ago Sterling’s mom Cecilia tipped us off that Sterling had been nominated for Homecoming King, the first time any kid from Special Education had been so honored at Elgin High.

We were impressed, and made plans to attend the game and cheer him on no matter what the outcome.

The night of the game where the King and Queen would be announced, we sat with Sterling’s family as one student after another passed by, high-fiving and shouting, “I voted for you, buddy!” Sterling was elegant in a new purple dress shirt with a garter mum for each arm. SAs half-time approached Cecilia took him down to the field where he assembled with other members of the Homecoming Court.

Finally the big moment arrived. The band was playing in the background as the ten couples processed onto the field through an immense balloon tunnel.

The runners-up were announced. First the third, then the second, and then the first runner-up. My knees were knocking and my heart was beating louder than the band’s drums.

When the announcement, “And now, our King for Homecoming 2005,” came over the speaker the tension became unbearable.

When Sterling’s name was called, the stadium erupted into the biggest cheer of the entire night. Sterling stepped



forward to await the announcement of the Homecoming Queen, and proudly offered her his arm, which she accepted with equal pride.

"That makes me jealous," Kelly muttered in the stands.

I thought Sterling's family and I might just float away along with all the purple and white helium balloons escaping into the cool night air. Cecilia and I were crying, of course, and Sterling's little brother Keegan was ricocheting off the risers.

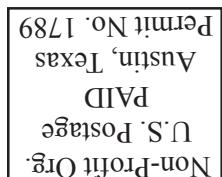
Sterling's teacher offered to take Kelly onto the field so she could congratulate the King and, no doubt, assert her domain. She was proud of her man, but a little wary of his Court.

Unfortunately, the opposing team went on to lick the Wildcats pretty darned bad. But the magic of the night remained undiminished—a rare moment of pure happiness for just about everyone in the stadium.

If only for a moment, the playing field had been level, and we had witnessed a testament not only to a very special and wonderful young man, but also to a group of seniors with uncommon ...well, class. In our eyes, the Elgin High Class off 2005 will be the one we'll remember forever.

Down Home Ranch is a working farm and ranch for people with special needs and those who choose to live and work beside them. For more information, go to www.downhomerranch.org, e-mail us at info@downhomerranch.org, or call us at 888-926-2253.

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