



The Diagnosis that Designed Me

"Some designs are born from data. Others
are born from destiny."

The Day the World Tilted

They handed her to me, swaddled in a hospital cotton blanket and hope. She looked different, and my mother's instinct told me something wasn't right.

But in that first hour, I wasn't thinking about chromosomes or diagnoses or any of the possibilities the world might try to place on her shoulders.

I was just a mother holding her child, wondering if the pregnancy complications had caused side effects.

And then, it came.

The shift.

A doctor. A pause. A glance too careful.

He said it with a calmness that didn't match the thundering in my chest:

"Your daughter has Down syndrome."

I don't remember what I said back. I just remember silence. The kind that sits on your shoulders like a weighted blanket, daring you to breathe beneath it.

I have pixel memories of that day—fragmented, blurry, but deeply imprinted—until I became fully immersed in her, my daughter.

Grieving the Blueprint That Never Was

Here's the truth that no one tells you when you get a diagnosis like that:

You're not grieving your child—you're grieving the plan you secretly made without even knowing it, the unspoken, imaginary blueprint of motherhood you carried in your mind.

It wasn't Eman I mourned—it was the path I thought she'd walk; the milestones I thought would come easily; the assumed future, the future I had assumed was hers.

And as a designer, that hit me differently. I had spent years refining layouts, planning user flows, and creating "ideal states." And yet, in this most sacred of designs—motherhood—my mockup had crashed.

But the beauty of design is that you can always start again. You can always change your toolkit and start from scratch.

The Work Before the Work

During those years before I became a “professional” designer, I was already doing the work—just without the job title.

I was volunteering with nonprofit organizations, planning events, raising awareness, and standing beside other families who, like mine, had been handed a diagnosis and a stack of unknowns.

I became a community leader in the Down syndrome space—not because I set out to be, but because the need was there, and my heart couldn’t stay quiet.

We were organizing walks, support groups, social events—and I was always the one offering to create the flyers, write the newsletters, or build the email templates. It was communication design, experience design, systems design—just not in the language of tech.

But all of it shaped me.

Every conversation with a new mom, every meeting with a school board, and every event that made one family feel less alone.

This wasn’t the design studio I imagined—it was the design

studio life gave me. My canvas wasn't a screen; it was community events, parent meetings, and late-night conversations with other moms who just needed to be heard.

My tools weren't wireframes and color palettes yet—they were flyers, newsletters, and systems that helped families feel less alone. And my users? They weren't abstract personas on a research board.

They were real parents, real children, real people navigating invisible barriers every day. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was already practicing human-centered design in its rawest form—creating solutions in the spaces where love and necessity intersected.

“Where have you already been designing solutions in your life—even without realizing it?”

Designing While Healing

I didn't jump into advocacy with banners and blogs. I started small. Quiet. I journaled. I researched. I redesigned my expectations.

Design helped me process.

I stitched wireframes - I poured my confusion into projects and color palettes. And slowly, a light returned. I started to trust the process. I started to trust God—there is no greater artist than Him.

I began seeing everything—everything—as design.

The way public spaces were inaccessible.

The way people didn't understand what Down syndrome meant—or worse, misunderstood who she could be.

That's when it hit me:

The problem wasn't her.

The problem was how people are conditioned to see as a limitation, not a difference.

The First Accessibility Audit: My Own Perspective

Before I ever ran an ADA audit on a website, I ran one in my own life.

Was our home designed for her needs?

Were our schools prepared to see her, not just serve her?

Was I designing a future she could thrive in—or just survive?

That's when something shifted in my UX brain: I wasn't just solving user problems—I was living them.

And suddenly, accessibility wasn't a checkbox at the bottom of a compliance list. It became personal.

I could no longer design anything without asking: "Can Eman use this?"

If the answer was no, I went back to the drawing board.

From Fear to Framework

When I first heard “Down syndrome,” I feared I would be walking into the unknown. But the truth is, I was walking into purpose, into clarity. My design career didn’t lose direction—it gained it.

I began making checklists, not just for buttons and links—but for dignity.

I started advocating in my work—teaching businesses how to build for all users.

I stopped separating my personal life from my professional purpose. They merged.

And the first thing I designed from that space?

EmanCards.

A simple idea: digital cards that reflected the joy, love, and brilliance of my daughter. No pity. No stereotypes. Just a celebration.

It wasn’t just about greeting cards. It was about rewriting the narrative.

Designing a platform where people with disabilities weren’t hidden—they were centered.

It was my first intentional act of design with inclusion at its core—born not from trends, but from truth.

UX Lessons from Motherhood

Motherhood turned me into a better UX strategist—not in spite of my challenges, but because of them. These weren't just UX principles I picked up in school. These were lessons life taught me at the kitchen table, in waiting rooms, during meltdowns and milestones. Here's what I learned, and what I teach others now:

- **Empathy isn't a tool. It's a responsibility.**
Eman taught me to see the world through someone else's eyes—not for research, but for survival.
- **Clarity creates confidence.**
In hospitals, in schools, in systems—confusing design causes fear. Clear design empowers.
- **Inclusion is proactive, not reactive.**
If someone has to ask, "Can I even use this?", you've already failed the test.
- **Every design includes a message.**
Is your message "You matter"? Or is it "You're not our user"? Your design already told them.

A Letter to My Readers

Maybe you're a designer. Maybe you're a parent. Maybe you're simply someone holding a new chapter in your hands and wondering, "What now?"

Let me tell you this:

- You can grieve and grow at the same time.
- You can break down and still build beautiful things.
- And you can take the most unexpected diagnosis and turn it into your life's blueprint.

You don't need to have all the answers today. You just need the courage to keep asking the right questions.

You don't need to be unshakable. You just need to stand again, even if your knees are trembling.

And you don't need to design the whole world at once. You just need to start with the space in front of you—the home you live in, the systems you touch, the people you serve.

Every small change matters. Every choice shapes the future.

Every act of inclusion is a design in itself.

Because the truth is: you are already designing—whether you realize it or not. The question is, what kind of world are

you building?

With love,
- Eman's Mom

"Eman didn't need to be redesigned. The world did."

Reflection Exercise: Your Own Diagnosis Moment

Take a moment to reflect.

What was your “diagnosis moment”? It might not have come from a doctor. It could’ve come from a job loss, a relationship, a failure, or a painful truth you couldn’t unhear.

- What old blueprint did it force you to tear up?
- What new values began to rise from the ashes?
- How can that moment inform the way you design—your life, your work, your systems?
- Where have you already been designing solutions in your life—even without realizing it?

Write it down.

That’s where your story starts. And stories? They’re the most powerful designs of all.