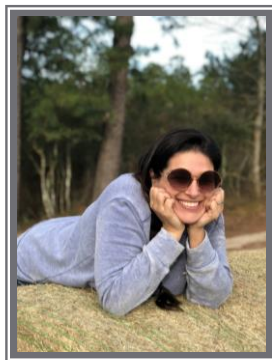


# WESTIN GLYNN SADLER

## TINY LIFE, BIG LOVE. THE STORY OF OUR TINIEST FAMILY LEGACY

I'm a farmer.

My husband, our three homeschooled kids and myself, own and live on a farm in the Sam Houston National Forest. Not just a regular cows and horses, kind-of-farm, but a chaotic menagerie of emus, alpacas, pigs, mini-donkeys, horses, chickens, rabbits, goats, sheep, ducks, an all-the-things, type-of-farm. It's literally...HEAVEN ON EARTH (cue: \*dreamy sigh\*).



Westin was a hugely anticipated gift to our family, and we all fell in love with her immediately at the news of her pending arrival. For so many reasons she was the perfect blessing at the perfect time for our imperfect family. She. Was. Perfect.

We were gifted 30 weeks of celebrating her life. We dreamt big dreams about who she would look like, what her personality might be like, where her life could take her, which family member would be her favorite (obviously: me).



My little sister Brittany and her husband Byron have always been the most incredible aunt and uncle to my kids. So as any proud new aunt would, when I found out SHE was pregnant with HER first child, I dressed our favorite rooster, Stump, in the proper

gender appropriate outfit and then released him, unsuspecting, into a crowd of our closest family and friends. It was pretty epic. Amid the fanfare, cheering and pink smoke, stood Stump, stoically in a little pink onesie with a bow in his comb. It Was...A Girl. I like to think she may have been one of the first to have a Chicken Gender Reveal Party; my niece: Westin Glynn Sadler.

Each of us in our own heads envisioning moments in her life we would participate in: new baby smell, giggles and snuggles, first steps and booboos, fights between cousins, first days of school, graduations, margaritas, all those treasured moments that go along with the hope of a new life in your family. And then just as quickly as she came into our lives, despite how hard she tried to cling to life.....she was gone. Just 30 weeks. 210 days.

210 days filled with tests, concerns, prayers, then theories, tears, answers, more prayers, more problems, more tests, diagnoses, heartache, prayer on our knees, acceptance, a few more prayers, more diagnoses, and finally heartbreak (and obviously: more prayer). She passed in-utero and was born

August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 at 4:35pm weighing 1 pound 2 ounces and 11.8 inches tall. We spent the day loving on her, praying over her and grieving together and her story could have ended on that sad day in that sad hospital room.



No though, not for my sweet little Grumpy Gills, as we like to call her. Her story isn't all storm clouds and bad weather.

Westin had been diagnosed at 18 weeks with Down's Syndrome and, in typical Sadler style, my sister and brother-in-law had researched to the end of the Internet to find the best school in the country that would set their new baby up to have the best life she could possibly have in response to her diagnosis. Enter: The Rise School of Houston.

**THOUGH SHE BE BUT LITTLE  
SHE IS FIERCE.**

Now, being a farmer, it's over an hour to the school in downtown (and if I'm honest, I'm far-gone from my days of driving assertively in traffic to serve corporate America and am more prone to being anxiety riddled nowadays), my schedule is notoriously chaotic, I wasn't really in the position to, nor did I really understand the need for it, but when my sister asked if my mother and I would please join them for their tour of The Rise School I reluctantly, but of course, agreed. Westin wouldn't be going there for years so it seemed extremely preemptive but, as I would learn later: God had plans.

On the day of the tour the unexpected anxiety that crept over me on the long drive in slowly escalated into an overwhelming ball of nerves by the time we had arrived. What if I said something inappropriate? (I'm somewhat notorious for that, as well.) What if I didn't know what to say at all? What if I was awkward or terrible with special needs kids? Does that mean I'm going to be a terrible aunt? How is my sister going to handle all of this? Will my brother-in-law be okay?

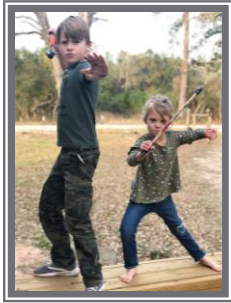
My mother and I met my sister and brother-in-law in the parking lot, and we all walked in together, as a family. Little did we know, we'd walk out, as warriors.

Walking through the doors of the school was like stepping into another planet. A world of acceptance, of sincerity, consideration, encouragement, mentorship, teamwork, happiness, learning and loving, growth and community, laughter and singing. The school was teeming with so much of what this world needs more of. I recognized it immediately: HEAVEN ON EARTH!

Our anxieties quickly waned as we spent the day meeting all the different types of teachers, therapists, and students, touring the facilities, hearing about the program goals, therapies, curriculums, AND THEN we were invited to sing along with the kids during a music class (uh, yes please, I'll take Lead!!). It. Was. Magical. I had found my people.

As our tour wound down, we joined in on activities and were lucky onlookers for a seasonal festival that just happened to be going on that day when a small figure came running out of the crowd from across the room, in full speed, I might add, and tackled me in a powerful, yet tiny, 5-year-old bear hug. I looked down and recognized one of my little impromptu back-up singers I'd bonded with from the music class we had visited hours before...and, if only. IF ONLY I would have known what MASSIVE comfort would unfold over the course of the next few months from that tiny, prized hug... I shoulda/woulda/coulda held him for a lifetime. That simple, sincere moment would bring me and my sister through our grief, even to this day, every

single time we retell or relive that story. That tiny hug was what I like to refer to as a “Trauma Blessing.” One of those lifelines God so graciously grants us before, during and after our “hurricanes” in life. Why is it so many times, we can only count our trauma blessings in hindsight?



Looking forward, had Westin survived, I know we would have been as thick as thieves. Sympatico. Besties. It’s just something I know deep in my bone marrow. My kids talk about her regularly. They would have been a wild bunch for sure.

But with the acceptance of Westin’s condition, we found a community. Within the walls of The Rise School, we replaced our anxiety with answers. From our heartbreak, was borne hope. From loss, we found love.

Westin’s story didn’t just end when her life ended. With nothing more than 210 days and her tiny spunky spirit, she inspired us in ways you can only understand if you’ve been touched by the agape (or God’s) love, or the spirit even in Westin’s case, of someone with Down’s Syndrome. We all talk about her and tell her little brother Kasen about his big sister. We expect she will most likely be playing pranks on him like tickling his nose while he’s asleep or ruffling his hair when no one is around (her momma is a prankster like that). Westin granted us such a gift; she gave us just a brief taste of true unconditional love, of the breathtakingly beautiful trauma blessings that can come with turbulent waters. A blessing and a community our family will never quit fighting for. My niece is a warrior, she’s building an army, her spirit animal is a horse, and her favorite color is forest green. Some things...you just know.

Love you Grumps.

-Aunt JoJo



**DEDICATED TO MY BEAUTIFUL SISTER AND WONDERFUL BROTHER-IN-LAW, WHO, AS IT TURNS OUT, AREN'T JUST THE BEST AUNT AND UNCLE BUT ALSO SOMEHOW MANAGE TO BE THE BEST PARENTS AROUND. LOVE YOU BOTH SO MUCH ( BUT KASEN MORE, SORRY, NOT SORRY ).**

SAVE THE DATE

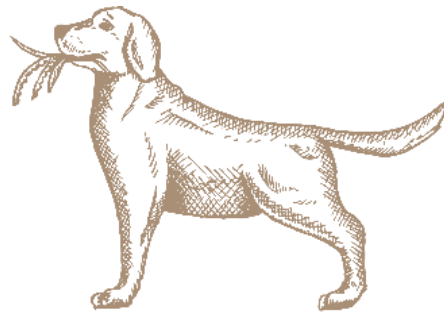
For the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual

# Rise School Fundraiser

at

Agape Farms

18913 Bethel Road | Richards | TX 77873



**AGAPE FARMS**



*April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022*

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