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Charity & Children

The historic publication of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina—first to tell the story since 1887.



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January/February 2024

Issue 1

Volume 137

God gives life...

All life is created by God. Human life is created in His image. It is distinct and valuable—from conception to the final breath, from the first heartbeat to the last. North Carolina Baptists unite through the many ministries of Baptist Children's Homes to advocate for the unborn through Christian Adoption Services; to give a hand up to families through Greater Vision Outreach; to provide children loving care through group cottages, wilderness camps, and foster care and adoption; to help special needs adults reach their highest level of independence; and to insure the frail aging are not alone through North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry. We honor God and join hands with you this month to observe the *Sanctity of Human Life*.

Ciara...page 3

From tragedy to hope to a bright future, Ciara reaches goal of college graduation.



Irene...page 10

Being there for Irene helps her avoid more falls and remain safe in her home.



Karielle...page 11

Birth mother Karielle finds needed support and stability at Emmanuel Home.



The bigger FLS family gives back with a big heart

By **Jim Edminson**, Editor

Two days and two tractor trailer trucks filled with 585 pieces of the finest home furnishings from the world’s largest furniture store, Furnitureland South (FLS) in Jamestown, to fill three homes at River Hill Refuge (RHR) located near Shelby in Cleveland County—this is the most recent culmination of a family’s commitment to help children through Baptist Children’s Homes (BCH).

“My grandmother Stella Harris always had her eye out for people in need, especially women and children,” FLS Director of Organizational Development Sydney Harris says. “It is my grandparents’ legacy and a heart for our community that drives the bigger Furnitureland South family to give back.”

FLS provided all the furnishings and the time and design resources to help launch RHR and welcome The Westmoreland Family Home’s first foster family (see related story on page 7). RHR is part of BCH’s growing foster care ministry where each of the three BCH-owned homes will have a set of Christian foster parents who will care for as many as five children at a time.

“We were overjoyed to help make this project

happen,” Harris adds. “It has been a true partnership with everyone who has worked to make RHR a reality.”

When approached about the project, Harris knew immediately who would take the lead for their company. She tapped longtime FLS sales and design consultants Sherry and Todd Needles. “I knew they would make this a project of the heart.”

The couple are members at The Summit Church in Kernersville and began the project by praying. “Every client and every project is important,” Sherry says, “but keeping in mind that the end user in this project would be foster children—we wanted everything we did to make a difference in their lives.”

FLS is known for its exceptional quality, and Sherry was intent that each piece they used would be sturdy and durable to stand the coming and goings of many children over the years.



Furnitureland South in Jamestown provided all the furnishings for the three homes at River Hill Refuge located near Shelby. Pictured above, left to right, are FLS Director of Organizational Development Sydney Harris and sales/design consultants Sherry and Todd Needles. Pictured to the left are the Needles and the FLS drivers who delivered the furnishings.

“Knowing that we are helping needy children means everything,” Todd says. “I’m proudest of this project than any other in my 35-year career.”

The couple assert that the project was a team effort, involving top FLS executives to a variety of staff members to those who loaded empty boxes back on the trucks to be recycled. “Everyone came together with a big heart,” Sherry says. “To help children, we would do it again in a second.”



Furnitureland South provided furnishings, the interior design, and placed all the furnishings for the three River Hill Refuge homes: The Westmoreland Home, Starlite Home, and Tucker Home. Pictured above is Tucker Home and three rooms in the home—the dining room, sitting room, and living room.

Mission:
sharing hope . . . changing lives

Vision:
To provide the highest quality of Christian services to children, adults and families in a caring culture of measurable excellence

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Ciara's decade in care culminates in college degree

By **Blake Ragsdale**, Managing Editor

Ciara sifts through a variety of toys and necessities delivered by motorcyclists for the children living at Mills Home. The container of gifts is so large that the arms of the 23 year old can barely reach the bottom. Item by item, Ciara helps the case workers, cottage parents, and staff find and sort the gifts purchased by the bikers for every boy and girl. Standing a few yards away, Mills Home children watch with wide eyes as the presents are organized by each of their names.

Almost exactly ten years ago, Ciara and her younger sister Erica would've been among the children anxiously waiting to receive their gifts. They were 13 and 12 at the time and had only moved to Baptist Children's Homes' (BCH) Thomasville location not even two weeks earlier.

So much has taken place in Ciara's life during the past decade. She became a believer on her 16th birthday. As a high school junior, she received a \$1,000 scholarship for her speech as a part of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Oratorical Contest. She has shared her testimony twice at the Annual Meeting of the Baptist State Convention of NC. And she just graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

It is obvious to those who know Ciara that her past, that is entrenched in tremendous loss and hurt, has not held her back.

"My sister and I are from a small town in Tennessee. You wouldn't even know it existed because it's off of an exit that's basically a big U-turn and with a lot of trees," Ciara describes. "Our mom was a single parent who had a drug problem. It was her way of coping with a lot of trauma."

Their mother's battle with addiction culminated with tragic results. In July 2013, an overdose would take the single parent's life and mark the beginning of an entirely different life for her two daughters. Ciara and Erica went to live with an aunt in North Carolina, but after only four months, she made arrangements for the siblings to live at BCH's Mills Home in Thomasville.

"In the end, it was a better decision for everyone because BCH offered a lot more resources than my aunt could access—like grief counseling and just counseling in general," Ciara explains.



An orphan and survivor of traumatic circumstances, 23-year-old Ciara has flourished since first coming to live at Baptist Children's Homes' Mills Home a decade earlier. Above, Ciara became the first person in her family to graduate college on December 17, 2023. Below, Ciara received a \$1,000 scholarship in the MLK Oratorical Contest in 2018.

"I'm glad she made the decision to get us (in BCH) because I have met some awesome people."

The two she met first were Dan and Alice Arrington, the cottage parents that were there the day they moved to BCH. Gene and Dayna Bird were the other half of the cottage parent team at Johnson Cottage, the sisters' new home

along with the other girls living there.

"I love them. They're so fantastic," Ciara says of her cottage parents. "They've all taught me so many different things. Collectively, I have a lot of 'tools' in my back pocket."

Through the modeling of Ciara's cottage par-

ents and her church involvement, the girl who never knew her biological dad learned about the unconditional love of a Heavenly Father. On her 16th birthday, Ciara made the decision to follow Christ.

"My faith upholds me," Ciara shares. "It was very personal because I (made the decision) by myself after years of going to church, being around church groups, and doing devotions with my cottage parents."

Academics were also a personal priority for Ciara. That focus translated into success as Ciara graduated as Valedictorian from her 2019 high school class and was accepted into UNC Chapel Hill. Scholarship opportunities, including funding available through BCH's advanced education program, made it possible for Ciara to realize her college dreams and live in an on-campus dorm.

What could not be foreseen was how COVID-19 would turn the beginning of her college journey upside down. The University shut down the entire campus in Fall 2019 requiring Ciara to leave the dorm. Being 18 years old and a legal adult, returning to live at her former Mills Home cottage was not possible. However, leadership at BCH's Thomasville location quickly came up with the support Ciara and other higher-education students needed. Their solution was to repurpose Huffman Cottage, a Mills Home cottage that was empty because of recently-completed repair work, into a place for Ciara and other displaced former residents.

(Continued on page 12.)



Thank you for *new beginnings*—today and tomorrow

By **Brenda B. Gray**, Executive Vice President, Development & Communications

January is a month of *new beginnings*. As we begin this new year, it is also a time of reflection on the old year. It was a difficult year as we were faced with many challenges. However, as I reflect on the past year I am reminded of the many blessings and miracles God has bestowed on us. Those blessings provided *new beginnings* for those we serve—they provided *hope*.

So many of those blessings came wrapped in your love and your prayers. Your encouragement and support touched our hearts and the very core of our being. We could not do what we do each day without you.

Your gifts provided a home for a mother of three small children that had been living on the street.

Your gifts provided cottage parents to console and care for a sibling group of three who discovered their parents after a drug overdose.

Your gifts provided hope for a fourteen-year-old mom and her precious baby boy.

Your gifts provided a safe refuge for two young children left in the cold overnight.

Your gifts provided a forever home for 41 babies adopted this year.

Your gifts provided medical care for a precious four-year-old boy in Guatemala who weighs less than 20 pounds.

Your gifts provided sanctuary for a young girl whose mother is in prison.

Your gifts provided family for two sisters. Ciara and Erica came to us as young teenagers after living in abuse and losing their mother to a drug overdose. Ciara will be a first-generation college graduate in December and Erica will graduate from college in May.

Your gifts provided joy and excitement as our children opened gifts on Christmas morning.

Your gifts provided home and family for 52 intellectually/developmentally disabled adults.

Your gifts provided freedom for hundreds of senior adults through the gift of wheelchair ramps.

Your gifts provided 83,634 meals for

children and families who were struggling with food insufficiency.

Your gifts gave us the opportunity to share the Gospel message of the ultimate gift – Jesus. Last year 173 asked Jesus into their hearts. Over the past five years, 661 lives have let go of their painful pasts by accepting Christ as their Savior.

Because you gave, lives were transformed and changed—*new beginnings* were made possible! I am so grateful for your many acts of caring and generosity.

A new year brings new commitments. I am not talking about the usual resolutions—exercise more, diet to lose weight, etc. I am asking you to continue your commitment to be a part of changing our world one child at a time and one family at a time. I am asking you to take time to enjoy the gift of God's grace in your life and determine to continue to share it with others.

This year as you begin to plan how you will make a difference through your giving, please know that

your financial support is critical to our being able to help those who so desperately need our care. This year we are opening five new homes—four for foster care and one for transitional living. We have numerous cottages that need painting and maintenance upkeep. (Volunteers are always needed to help with these projects.) Our Every Child foster care program and our adoption program is experiencing substantial continued growth. There are so many children and families in need. Our ability to make all of this happen is dependent on your prayerful support. Thank you for helping us be able to continue, with confidence, offering many opportunities for *new beginnings*.

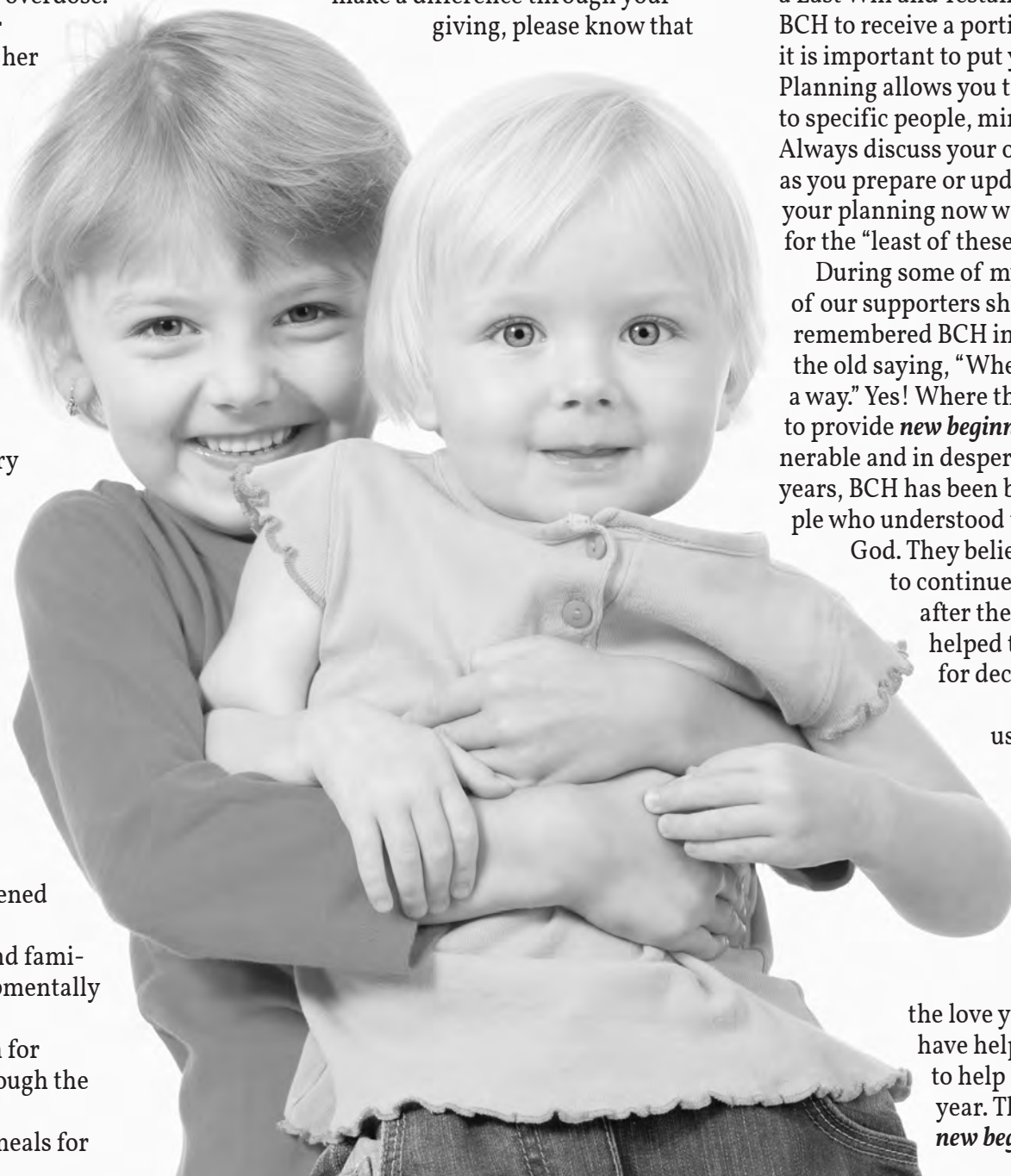
The challenge gift that was issued in October is still open. Every gift will be matched dollar for dollar up to our \$300,000 challenge.

January is **Make Your Will Month**. Did you know the majority of Americans die without a Last Will and Testament? Whether you name BCH to receive a portion of your estate, or not, it is important to put your wishes in writing. Planning allows you to determine what assets go to specific people, ministries, or to your church. Always discuss your options with your attorney as you prepare or update your will. Remember, your planning now will provide *new beginnings* for the “least of these” for years to come.

During some of my recent visits, a number of our supporters shared with me how they had remembered BCH in their wills. You have heard the old saying, “Where there is a will there is a way.” Yes! Where there is a will there is a way to provide *new beginnings* for those most vulnerable and in desperate need. Throughout the years, BCH has been blessed by many dear people who understood that all we have belongs to God. They believed in tithing and wanted to continue their tithe and gifts even after their passing. These gifts have helped to undergird our ministry for decades.

If you have remembered us in your will, we would appreciate your sharing this information with us by calling or emailing. If I can be of any service to you, call me at 336-689-4442 or email bbgray@bchfamily.org.

God will not forget the love you have shown Him as you have helped children and continue to help them in the coming new year. Thank you for providing *new beginnings* in Jesus name!



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- Write the quantity in the space provided beside each item(s).
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- Cut out the order form. Place the form and check in the enclosed pre-paid postage envelope. Please fill out the info on the envelope. If using your own envelope, the address is BCH, P.O. Box 338, Thomasville, NC 27361

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Group Celebration Trip	\$125		\$	GC003	Art Scholarship-Cottage	\$1,200		\$	GC026
Group Celebration Trip-Cottage	\$1,500		\$	GC004	Wheelchair Ramp	\$350		\$	GC027
College Care Package	\$50		\$	GC005	Birth Mom Retreat	\$500		\$	GC028
Christmas Sponsorship	\$50		\$	GC006	Family Start-Up Package	\$300		\$	GC029
Christmas Sponsorship-Cottage	\$600		\$	GC007	Counseling Session	\$100		\$	GC030
Christmas Meal	\$25		\$	GC008	Night of Safety	\$150		\$	GC031
Christmas Meal-Cottage	\$300		\$	GC009	Car Seat/Booster Seat	\$125		\$	GC032
Winter Coat	\$50		\$	GC010	Diapers & Wipes	\$100		\$	GC033
Shoes	\$75		\$	GC011	Formula	\$200		\$	GC034
Clothing Wardrobe	\$400		\$	GC012	Life Jacket-Camper	\$25		\$	GC035
Pair of Boots	\$100		\$	GC013	Life Jacket-Camp	\$250		\$	GC036
Medical Needs	\$50		\$	GC014	Canoe	\$1,500		\$	GC037
Medical Needs-Cottage	\$600		\$	GC015	Campership	\$250		\$	GC038
Welcome Care Package	\$35		\$	GC016	Chicken & Feed	\$50		\$	GC039
Bedding Basics	\$100		\$	GC017	Medical Emergencies	\$220		\$	GC040
Suitcase/Duffle Bag	\$50		\$	GC018	Meals for a Week-Guatemala	\$50		\$	GC041
Headphones	\$25		\$	GC019	Meals for a Month-Guatemala	\$200		\$	GC042
School Supplies	\$50		\$	GC020	Goat & Feed	\$100		\$	GC043
Fishing Pole	\$25		\$	GC021	Bible	\$10		\$	GC044
Fishing Pole-Cottage	\$300		\$	GC022	WHERE NEEDED MOST			\$	GC046
Sports Scholarship	\$100		\$	GC023	TOTAL DONATION AMOUNT			\$	

Refugee finds support needed to become citizen

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Sandra Buzangu was born in the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo and spent the first four years of her life amidst a war-torn people who had been subjected to years of extreme violence. Life in the central African country was marked by brutality and fear. Fleeing became her family's only option. With dreams of one day returning, they crossed over into Tanzania where a refugee camp became their new home for the next 14 years.

"These were dangerous years," Sandra says. "It was a dark time when just surviving became a daily task. This was my early childhood."

Sandra's refugee years were marked by an infirmity caused by an accident when she was one year old. Unable to be taken to a hospital, she never received proper treatment. The injury to her right leg healed in a constricted manner. Malformed, she could not straighten or move it. While other toddlers were learning to walk on two feet, Sandra learned to walk using only her left leg, bent over and using her right arm, crawling creature like. It did not go unnoticed, and she faced cruelty into her teen years.

"It is easy to be broken by things that happen in your life—to question 'why,'" Sandra confides. "I do not have answers, but God knows why everything happens, and that's enough for me."

The dream of returning home was slipping away like the familiar early morning valley fog dissolves into the day. The large number of refugees created shortages of food—competition was intense. Societal norms deteriorated and brutality crept back into their lives as rival groups reappeared. Domestic and sexual violence lurked in the shadows.

But from this hardship, a new dream took root. Sandra's family would come to America. Aided by World Relief, a Christian humanitarian organization which helps refugees to immigrate, the family began the process to leave Africa. They would leave behind all they knew where generations of their family had lived. With only what could fit in their baggage, they came to Winston-Salem in June 2015. Sandra was 18.

"I do not remember a time in my life when there was no death," she says. "In America, I could go to sleep with no fear. I was happy."

For six months, her parents and siblings were



Above, Greater Vision Outreach (GVO) warehouse manger Victor Whitaker helps Sandra Buzangu select clothes for her three-year-old son Fidel. Sandra has successfully navigated many challenges with the help of GVO manager Sara Becker. Below, Sandra receives her U.S. Citizenship at an Oath of Allegiance ceremony in November.

under the watchcare of World Relief. They united with a community of immigrants and became involved with a fellowship of believers. One year after arriving in America, Sandra had surgery on her leg. The doctors were able to straighten it but could not bring back its mobility. It was fused at the knee so she could walk.

"I could stand upright, with my head up. It was something I never thought possible."

Her new life had its ups and downs. A failed romance and the birth of her son Fidel in 2020 made life overwhelming. The needs began to far outweigh her resources. She needed help. A friend referred her to Greater

Vision Outreach (GVO) in Thomasville.

"Sandra needed to know there was someone in her corner," GVO manager Sara Becker says. "She needed practical things like baby clothes and diapers, but she needed more. She needed resources and guidance—and that's what we do."

Sara supported her as she set goals, beginning

with earning a high school diploma. But her new education and learning to speak English fluently could not offset the challenges of finding a job. Despite the success of her surgery, she could not stand or sit very long because of nagging pain. A weaker person would have given up. To Sandra, it was just another challenge to overcome.

"Sandra is not a quitter," Sara says. "She set her sights on her next goal—becoming a U.S. citizen."

Sara encouraged Sandra, making sure she attended classes. She knew what passing the test and becoming a citizen of this country meant to her. Always positive, Sandra says, "I'm happy to be in America. Being a citizen of this country means everything to me."

This past November, Sandra checked this important goal from her list. She stood with others seeking citizenship and gave her oath of allegiance, pledging to renounce any prior citizenships, to support and defend the constitution, and to be true to her oath... "so help me God."

Sandra's Congolese name is Kapinga. In America, she chose an English name—Sandra. In her language, it is "Sango" which means strong. Her story is a testimony to her strength.

"Sandra has hopes and dreams," Sara asserts. "She is determined. She just needed a little help—and someone to believe in her."



River Hill Refuge welcomes inaugural foster family

By Jim Edminson, Editor

Brothers Wes and Jay Westmoreland have memories of running and playing as children in the pastures of the family's River Hill Angus Farm near Shelby in Cleveland County. Years later after the passings of their mother Pratt and their father Dr. Ted G. Westmoreland in 2017, the men began envisioning children returning to the farm.

In early 2021, the Westmoreland's donated a parcel of the farm to Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) and made a lead gift to construct three foster homes. Named River Hill Refuge (RHR), the Westmorelands' efforts provided the momentum to raise the monies and support required. RHR is part of BCH's growing foster care ministry where each of the three BCH-owned homes will have a set of Christian foster parents who will care for as many as five children at a time.

As construction neared completion this year, BCH began the recruiting process to secure Christian foster parents for each of the homes: The Westmoreland Family Home, Tucker Home, and Starlite Home. That search led to the Biggerstaffs—the inaugural RHR foster family.

Missy and Tripp are a praying couple. Missy began to pray for Tripp before they had even met. In 2011, desiring to be a wife again after her husband of 11 years left her and her daughter Gracie, she prayed for her new husband—the one she trusted God would bring her.

Tripp's life was immersed in drugs, but he wanted out. He came home in 2012, lived with his mom, and attended church with her. After the death of a close friend from an overdose in 2014, Tripp started seeking. "I was clean for two years and



The Biggerstaffs, (left to right) Missy, 18-year-old Gracie, nine-year-old Camden, and Tripp, are River Hill Refuge's inaugural foster family. Two additional foster families are needed.

my heart and mind turned to God. I remember getting down on the floor and surrendering everything to the Lord. I woke up the next morning to a whole new life."

Missy prayed for Tripp when he was incarcerated on drug charges. She prayed for him when he returned to North Carolina. She prayed for him when the Lord saved him. She prayed even though she had never met him.

"It was a long time," she confesses. "In 2015, I was done praying. If the Lord chose not to send someone—it would be no one."

Tripp was in the audience when the Southern gospel group for whom Missy played keyboard performed in the church he attended.

After the performance, a friend asked if Missy had noticed Tripp: "I saw your husband sitting on the front row."

A few ladies in the church made sure the couple had each other's phone

numbers. "It was the man I had been praying for. We courted from April 2016 until we said 'I do' on September 23, 2017."

Tripp felt called to be a pastor in June 2019 and became pastor of Lavonia Baptist Church in Mooresboro in August. The prayer life that was so important to Missy became the center of the couple's life together.

Missy and Tripp felt the Lord stirring their hearts. They believed God was leading them to become foster parents. Then in 2020, Missy was diagnosed with breast cancer. The newlywed's prayer life was now as important as ever. Surgery, radiation and chemo, and a hysterectomy in 2021 hit them hard. But despite all the challenges, Missy and Tripp

trusted the One who answers prayers.

Connecting with Baptist Children's Homes through its Foster Care and Adoption Program was the beginning. After transferring their licensure from another agency, the couple discovered the support they needed to be successful. In 2022, Missy, Tripp, and Gracie welcomed their first foster child, Camden. The Biggerstaffs became Camden's forever family on August 14, 2023. This past year, three additional children have been placed in their care.

Missy learned about River Hill Refuge while serving on the administrative staff at Elizabeth Baptist Church in Shelby. The doors flew open for this praying family after calling about the new positions at RHR. On November 3, they spent their first night in The Westmoreland Family Home.

The Biggerstaffs take this new role seriously. Tripp asserts, "We know God is in this and we pray daily for the other two foster families that will come. We don't know them yet, but God does. Our hope in this ministry is firmly placed in the Lord. We trust Him."



The Westmoreland Family Home



Thank You!

Every photo you see below shows a child, a special needs adult, or even an entire family who has experienced transformation through the many ministries of Baptist Children's Home (BCH). In some instances, these are the faces of those who have answered the call to serve others through the ministry. Most importantly, these lives represent God's faithfulness to restore hope and bring families together for the sake of His kingdom. None of this would be possible without your unwavering dedication to pray, support, and be involved in the BCH mission. Thank you for allowing us the privilege of partnering with you and serving alongside of you as we minister together to the "least of these" through the grace, mercy, and providence of God.



There is a **Charity & Children** story behind every picture—every life—in this 2023 photo retrospective. If you missed an issue or want to revisit these amazing stories God is writing in the hearts and lives of those Baptist Children's Homes serves, you can read *Stories of Hope* at bchfamily.org or scan the QR code.



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Use the enclosed envelope if you would like to give by check.
The last day to have your gift doubled is January 31, 2024.

Irene hopes to stay on her feet and in her home

By **Carol Layton**, NCBAM Director of Communications and Administration

Irene Lamb recalls with an incredulous laugh, “I don’t know what on earth we were thinking when we got this huge tub. I guess we thought we would never grow old.”

Like many of North Carolina’s aging adults, Irene lives in her own version of a “Peter Pan” home—a home built without a thought for people with disabilities or for those growing older. Sunken living rooms, narrow doorways, stairs without handrails, or bathrooms without grab bars are just a few of the features of “Peter Pan” homes.

Irene and her late husband, Edwin, bought their home 57 years ago as newlyweds and raised their two children there. Aside from the glorious, deep tub of which they were once so proud and that now creates a substantial safety risk for Irene, her home is cozy and comfortable.



In the past year though, she has fallen 15 times getting in or out of the tub—all while attempting to hold onto a nearby windowsill.

On one occasion, Irene’s bathroom window happened to be open and a neighbor heard her cries for help. On another, she had her phone nearby and was able to call her son. He came quickly, but had to break the lock on the door to get inside.

With a costly bathroom renovation far out of reach for Irene or her children, they have tried to reduce the risk of falling as much as possible. “My daughter has me call her before I take a bath and if I don’t call her back within a set time, she’ll come check on me.” Irene has also learned that a “sink bath” can be as good as a soak—and a lot safer.

Irene’s future began to be a lot safer when Victorian Simmons, a Community Engagement Specialist with the Greensboro Fire Department, heard about the difficulties she had been having.

Victorian explains, “My heart went out to Irene because she had bruises on her arms and legs and had seen her doctor multiple times for falls and even had to go to the hospital because of falls. We partner with North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) in our Community Risk reduction programs—especially in the area of fall prevention. I knew of a grant the ministry had received to address fall prevention and I hoped they could help her. I called Brian (Brian Roberts, NCBAM Call Center Director) and was thrilled when he assured me, ‘At minimum, we can have some grab bars installed



After many falls, Irene Lamb is looking forward to having a new walk-in tub provided by a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act and administered by NC Baptist Aging Ministry. Below, NCBAM Call Center Director Brian Roberts reviews renovation options with Irene at her home in Randolph County.

for her. Let me make some calls.’”

The grant Victorian had heard of was a \$275,000 grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that NCBAM received for “home improvements or modifications to enhance the mobility and security of older adults within Alamance, Davidson, Guilford and Randolph Counties.”

Brian sent the required paperwork to Victorian who took it to Irene to fill out. Irene qualified for the renovations and NCBAM is now working with Nathaniel Medley of Polecat Remodeling. Medley is a ministry-minded contractor, who is eager to improve Irene’s safety and independence.

Victorian is thrilled she was able to connect Irene to NCBAM. “Miss Irene is very deserving. This new walk-in tub will improve her quality of life and make the difference in her being able to stay at home and live independently.”

Growing old is not a fault nor a failing. As a natural part of life, aging is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. NCBAM believes the sanctity of life extends to old age and that aging adults deserve special honor according to Leviticus 19:32: “Rise up before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord.”

Providing “help for the journey” to aging adults to help them maintain their independence is at the heart of NCBAM’s mission. North Carolina residency and age (65 or older) are the only criteria for service. Individuals (or their caregivers) may contact NCBAM’s Call Center Monday-Friday, 9:00 am-5:00 pm at 877-506-2226 to request assistance. The Call Center connects callers with local resources and relies on grants and volunteers to meet other needs.



Karielle's eyes light up with the promise of her future

By Jim Edminson, Editor

When Karielle was a little girl, her mother and grandmother took her to church every time the door opened. People welcomed her every Sunday—hugged her and made her feel safe. She was loved. Church felt like home.

“It was the same feeling I felt when I came to Emmanuel Home,” she insists. “From the first person I met with Christian Adoption Services (CAS), I felt valued.”

Karielle was seven months pregnant when she contacted CAS. She had not planned to be in this situation: “I learned the father was not going to be there for me or the baby.” She knew she would need help.

CAS offers domestic and international adoption services in North and South Carolina. The agency works with Christian couples who desire to adopt and supports birth mothers by helping them make adoption plans and connecting them with adoptive parents.

Karielle felt she couldn't do it herself. She was frightened, not for herself—she was afraid for her son. She only wanted what was best for him. Adoption and CAS were her choices.

Karielle chose an open adoption. She was given information on families and looked through photo books they provided. Each photo was scrutinized. She wanted her son to live with a family who could provide not just necessities, but the stability she had craved as a child. She knew what it was like to feel alone, to want and not have. She needed his life to be better. She needed her child to be in a place where he could laugh and be happy.

The day her son went to be with his new family was a more difficult day than Karielle ever imagined. Although she tried, her tears were uncontrollable. She was confident with her decision, and she believed this “was” the family. They would send photos of milestones. She would have updates. But, she thought, what if the father had partnered with her? What if her mother who passed two years ago was still alive to support her and help her care for her son? What if she could parent him and provide for him the way she dreamed? And yet, she knew none of this could be. There was no one who could help her. Karielle was alone, again.

At Emmanuel Home in Thomasville, there



Emmanuel Home care worker Courtney Turner works helping Karielle transition to future success. Karielle is a Christian Adoption Services birth mom. She placed her son in an open adoption and receives regular updates and milestone photos from his adoptive family. Below, Karielle hold a Christmas ornament from Courtney commemorating the completion of her CNA training program.

was a Welcome Basket awaiting Karielle. There were new colorful towels and wash cloths, personal items and toiletries, a cozy blanket, and a Bible. Care worker Courtney Turner led Karielle to the second floor. “The room choice is yours.” Karielle looked at each room and placed her basket on the bed in the room with the large window overlooking the front yard.

More times than most could imagine, moms who place their children for adoption do not have the support they need post-placement. Emmanuel Home offers support and stability for up to five birth moms, offering a safe place to help them heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Most importantly, they are not alone. Caring staff provide

resources and help the women set and meet goals that lead to self-sufficiency and future success.

Karielle needed a fresh start. Within days, she set her first goals and secured a job. A needs assessment revealed she needed eye and dental care. She also had never learned to

drive. Courtney helped with lessons. Karielle received a learners permit, and the two women celebrated together when Karielle earned her drivers license.

The opportunity to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA) through a program offered by a continuing care retirement community was a dream come true. “I love working with older people. They have gone through so many things and are understanding, less judgmental. I sit by them to talk and encourage them, but I leave encouraged.”

Karielle completed the program only days ago and is studying for the state exam she will take in a few weeks. She already looks beyond this goal to her next dream of becoming a registered nurse.

According to Courtney, “Karielle has poured herself into every challenge—making the best use of every opportunity—and thrived. She is amazing. I only hope that every birth mom who comes to Emmanuel Home will soar like her.”

Karielle still lives with the scars of past hurts and disappointments. But being at Emmanuel Home helps. You can see the change. You see it in her eyes. They light up when she talks about the future—the life her son now has and the promise the coming days hold for her.



Ciara's journey is driven by hope and opportunity

By **Blake Ragsdale**, Managing Editor

(Continued from page 3.)

As pandemic restrictions subsided, Huffman continued to be home for Ciara whenever she was on college break. It now also serves as a transitional living cottage for other former Mills Home residents who are making preparations to become independent adults.

"I definitely believe we're very fortunate," Ciara explains. "It gives you adulting experience without having to go full throttle into it. We still have some guidance from our case managers and relationships that we've built with the cottage

parents and other adults here at Mills Home."

One of the other Huffman residents is Erica, who is not far behind her sister in completing her college education. Once Erica graduates in Spring 2024, she and Ciara will be the first two college graduates in their family.

"I'm just very proud of her," Ciara says of her sister.

"She's so smart. Her GPA in school is higher than mine. She has an internship and she's applying for jobs."

"She's just great – I love her to death."

Ciara graduated on December 17, 2023 with a

B.A. in Management and Society and a minor in Education. Her degree opens up a variety of opportunities for Ciara including an employment option she plans to pursue at the Carolina College Advising Corps (CCAC) with UNC Chapel Hill. Through the program, recent graduates serve as college advisors and are placed in underprivileged or underrepresented high schools in the area.



Above, Ciara and younger sister Erica (left) both live at Mills Home's Huffman Cottage. Below, Ciara speaks at the Baptist State Convention of NC Annual Meeting in 2018.

"I've always enjoyed helping others and helping them figure out things," Ciara explains. "It's why I've done things like tutor the kids (at Mills Home) when I'm back or serve as a tour guide at college telling others about the school based on my personal experiences."

Ciara is excited and poised for a future she originally could not foresee. She divulges that the Ciara who grew up in the small Tennessee community a decade ago did not expect to flourish as she has today.

"I grew up in an area where no one had any hope of getting out of," she reflects. "When I look at my mother's friends there, because I am still in contact with some of them, our lives are so different."

What could have been a dead-end road if she had remained in the rural town off that highway exit has turned into a life driven by hope.

"I don't want to say I'm glad for the events that happened that caused me to move to North Carolina and come to Baptist Children's Homes, but I'm so appreciative of all the opportunities I've been given," Ciara shares. "It's ironic because so many people think, 'oh, a group home is the lowest of the low – there's not much you can get from there.'" That's where they're wrong."



Growing up at Mills Home shaped adult lives — Former staff remembered as role models

By **Lib Johnson** (336) 299-7412 libsjohnson@triad.rr.com

We try to say our goodbyes to deceased Mills Home (MH) alumni and workers because of the respect and love we have for them. We do that two ways, one being by each year's reading of the list of deceased persons at the Associational Meeting followed by a moment of silent prayer. The other way is by coverage in the Alumni Column. Because we are having so many deaths in recent years and the column does not hold enough space for more news from letters and update sheets, we are adopting a new practice of limiting death commentaries to around 280 words.

We are sorry to report that **Eileen Williams** (1942- 1954) passed away at her home on September 3, 2023 under the loving care of her family and Centrica Care. Surviving are her husband of 59 years, **Tom Williams**; sons, **Warren and Roger**; and grandson, **Robert**. Eileen worked for Consumers Energy starting in the mail room and moving into payroll department where everyone just loved her. A celebration of Stella's life was held September 17, 2023 at Concord Community Center in Concord, MI. She was a "stand out" kid at Mills Home, partly because she had brilliant red hair and three vivacious brothers named **Harry, James and Art**. She was notable also for her very outgoing personality and her active participation in the many and varied activities about campus, notably sports and church activities such as the choir. She will be sorely missed.

We are saddened for **Keith Yow** whose wife **Mary Alice** died on November 18 after several years of care in nursing homes. He was faithful to visit her as often as possible and he chose to have her funeral service at the Mills Home Church and her inurnment in the God's Acre Columbarium. Both

events took place on December 2. Friends may send condolences to Keith at 215 High Knoll Dr., Walkertown, NC 27051.

When **Sharon DeHart Stiles** became the business manager of the God's Acre Columbarium, she was also officially put on the Alumni Council again by a by-law amendment in 2022. She first served on the Council as a council member, as first vice-president for two years, and finally as president from 2018-2020. By the by-laws, she will serve on the council as long as she chooses to remain the manager of the Columbarium. It is a job that requires great knowledge and strict attention and she does a great job. Sharon entered MH with siblings **Johnny, Tancey, and Steve** in 1963 and graduated in 1969. She credits campus nurse **Ms. Fanny Miller** with teaching her so much about taking care of children and building the resulting compassion that comes with that. It is notable that Sharon has those special qualities that made her succeed in a 42-year career as the executive director of a nursing home and assisted living center. Now retired, Sharon works for the Foster Home System of Gastonia as a guardian ad litem, monitoring and being the voice for children in foster care. She says "It is my way of giving back to society what I learned at Mills Home. I am thankful to God for my life at Mills Home because it made me what I am today." Now widowed (**Parks Stiles**), she enjoys her church life and spending time with family, especially beach trips and excursions to places like New York with her two offspring and eight grandchildren.

A recent update sheet from **Harold Walls** shows that he entered MH with brothers **Nathan and Harry** in 1954 and graduated in 1967. In retrospect, he realizes being placed at MH was really a good thing for him, although

there were times when he was not extremely happy. He very much hated that he could not see his brothers very often and that was hard to take because some of the youngsters were able live in the same cottage as their siblings. But he did enjoy the summer months when he was able to go to the gym, pool, or valley and run into his brothers. He also admits that sometimes he was also just as interested in running into a pretty girl. He had the usual campus duties such as working on the farm, in the dairy, and cutting hair of other kids. He said that getting up to milk cows was hard and on the occasion when he failed to awaken at the clock's alarm, he would be awakened by **Mr. Raper** pelting rocks at his bedroom window. Later, he liked working when he got a job in a jewelry store through his high school Decca program. That experience laid the groundwork for working toward his owning several jewelry stores where he could be his own boss. After high school, Harold served his country for seven years in the Marine Corps and served in the Vietnam War. Today he makes his home in Charlotte to be near his sweet friend, **Barbara**.

Rich Lewis is pleased that he is again serving on the Mills Home Alumni Council. He likes that fact that the alumni are responsible for most of the events of Homecoming weekend, that the Council leads the group in doing special things for the MH children like the special fall Halloween party, and that the Council leads the association in planning and executing large projects such as the lately installed columbarium. He also enjoys being reconnected with the alumni who were on the campus when he was there in the 1970s, many of them now on the Council. Some of them are **Lisa Carter Lancaster, Mike Clay, and Martha**

Berndt Fisher. He also enjoys having the older alumni as part of his extended family.

Rich entered MH in 1972 and got along very well up to 1978 when his father whisked him away. The next three years were rough but fortunately Rich was returned to MH where he had security. He could take part in things like scouting that could build positive qualities. He especially appreciated all he was able to learn working with **Mr. Lee Hoyle** and enjoying scout life with other scouts like **Stan and John Hoyle**. He also liked the life he had at Bright Brown Cottage with **Lee and Imogene Hoyle** serving as houseparents and the **Caudles** in another cottage later. His life was vibrant with other positive things such as church activities, duties on campus like life guarding, and playing on the Mills Home Basketball team. Thomasville High School provided him the opportunity for playing in the band and being part of the marching band, jazz band, and pep band. He excelled enough to be named to the "All County Band." It is still being said that he also made the band uniform look outstanding.

Rich's brother **Michael Hazzard** also lived at MH and they were the best of buddies always. As adults, they remain close and Rich dearly loves Michael's daughter **Brianna** and her son **Hadin**.

Please contact me at **Libs Johnson@triad.rr.com** or call 336-299-7412 if you wish to add or correct an address for your **Charity & Children** subscription. Contact Sharon DeHart Stiles to discuss use of the God's Acre Columbarium at 704-685-2443 or by mailing to 1588 Elkhart Circle, Gastonia, NC, 28054.



Lib Johnson was a resident of Mills Home from 1946 to 1957. Johnson began writing the Mills Home alumni column in 1992.



Canipe family bless special adults

Jeremy and Robin Canipe, friends of BCH's children and special adults, provided lunch and gifts that they had collected for each resident living at Joy Cove in Zionville.



Bikers bring Christmas joy to children

Bikers in Eastern NC and Central NC kick off the Christmas season for children each year. On November 26, Temple Church and Law Tigers Motorcycle Lawyers brought together the 31st annual Bikers Toy Run for Kennedy Home in Kinston. The Randolph County Concerned Bikers in cooperation with Cox's Harley-Davidson organized their 37th annual ride to Mills Home on December 3. Both groups raised thousands of dollars and provided hundreds of presents.



Party remembers Chuck Sutton

Organized by Cape Carteret Baptist, the party is a day of holiday joy at Broyhill Home in Clyde. It is in memory of Chuck Sutton, the church member who first began the party.



Camps host friends for Thanksgiving

Cameron Boys Camp and Camp Duncan for girls hosted friends and supporters at their respective sites. Also known as "Turkey in the Hole", the boys and girls, at their own camp locations, literally dig huge holes, bury the tinfoil wrapped turkeys in the ground, collect the wood and create a huge bonfire that cooks the turkeys to perfection. The events offer a unique opportunity for friends to see BCH's 24/7 year-round wilderness ministry.



Boys help decorate cottage tree

Broyhill Home boys help cottage parent Mr. Will get the tree ready for decorating.



EVERY CHILD family adopts sisters

The Moncada family celebrated adopting three sisters through the EVERY CHILD initiative.



Youth bless Laura's Homes in Shelby

Youth from Adaville Baptist Church served at BCH's Laura's Homes tackling work projects.



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Because of your gift last year...

41

Children were placed into loving, Christian homes through domestic adoption

255+

Expectant mothers received the counseling they needed

8

Birth mothers made decisions for Christ or made decisions to draw closer to Him

36

Families are currently being served as they pursue international adoptions in the Philippines



You can be a part of connecting more children with Christian families as well as helping expectant mothers choose life for their babies in the coming year. Make your life-changing gift at christianadopt.org/angel-fund or scan the QR code.

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Christmas Party brings largest crowd together — Alum remembers joys of eight transistor radio

By JOHN THOMPSON, 102 Maritime Court, Havelock, NC 28532 (252) 671-3515 jthompson117@ec.rr.com

The Kennedy Home (KH) Annual Christmas Party was a huge success on the first Saturday of December at the King's Restaurant in Kinston. Many are saying this was the largest crowd we ever had at a Christmas Party. We want to thank the owners of King's restaurant for being so kind to us all. The food was delicious as usual and those waiting on us did a splendid job of serving us. Thank you King's Restaurant for hiring so many of the Kennedy Home high seniors to work for you over these many, many years.

When I served at KH, children got an allowance and then when they became teens they could have a job on the campus making some money to call their own. I had four youngins working at the church with me every day. *They kept that place sparkling!* The highest paid money was for those who worked in the "pig parlor" or the "cow barn." When someone made it to the 12th grade, we found them jobs off campus. This is all in preparation of getting them ready to go out in the world after being in care.

Brenda Gilliam, wife of Alumni President **Larry Gilliam**, writes: "I married the love of my life from Kennedy Home. If I learned anything from him, it was how to dust. He corrected me when we were cleaning one day that I did not know how to dust. He said if he dusted the way I did he would have to dust it again—meaning the house parents would check and if there was dust, he would have to do it all again. I told him since I did not know how to dust that he could continue all the time. Lol. We have been married for more than 21 years and we go to all Homecomings. The Kennedy Home alumni make me feel a big part of their one big happy family. I enjoy all the events we go to and I have found out early they do love to eat. The church services we have on Sun-

day morning of Homecoming are so special. I am sure it brings back memories to those big kids. I see what the Home did for Larry. He said he was a mean little boy there. It is hard to believe—but I can believe he was a stubborn one. That came along with him. All in a nutshell, he was truly blessed to have been raised at Kennedy Home. And I am truly blessed to have him as my sweet hubby. I know you can't believe I said sweet, but he truly is. He is a good father. He is always telling the stories when he was a child. One other thing to you, John, Kennedy Home was very fortunate to have you as their choir leader. You do an amazing job at Homecoming. We are all blessed by you and your work. Thanks for it all. Love in Christ."

Here is a note from **Alice Rusalem**: "Oh my goodness! What fun it is getting together with the folks I grew up with. This is the first time if have ever been to the Christmas party at King's. I usually come to Homecoming and the Beach Retreat. When I lived at Kennedy Home, I was worked at King's Restaurant. The Kings have always been so nice to Kennedy Home children."

Donna Wade had a quilt at the Christmas party with pictures of the different buildings at Kennedy Home. It was beautiful. She has shared all these pictures with the Facebook group for you to enjoy. If you are not a part, look up the page and join. This is how we all keep in touch with each other.

Robert Bickle adds a note: "I opened my front door and had an Amazon gift box sitting there (I thought it was an order for a prayer book) and discovered it was a gift from some of my Kennedy Home friends from back in the day. The package had a blue suede blanket in it. I had lost a tan blanket like it in hurricane Florence that I missed very much over time. When I discovered the papers, the tears began

to roll down my face. I treasured growing up at Kennedy Home—even though I was only there for 10 months. I fell in love with it and **Mr. and Mrs. Moore**, my houseparents. I was one of those youngins who learned to clean the tile floors in the Canady Cottage. On November 9, 2023, I discovered that my little brother Timothy, who had been rescued through adoption, had passed away on January 2, 2017 at 50. I found out how much I appreciated the family who adopted my little brother. The *Bickle* boys were placed into foster care with the **Herbert Huthmacher** family."

At the present time, there is a need many more couples to come to work at Kennedy Home as houseparents. Please pray about this and maybe the Lord will send someone you know. Pick up your telephone and share the need with your family and friends. If you know of someone interested, have them call KH main office. They will receive many blessings from answering this *call*.

Donald Wetherington writes: "Going back in the day of precious memories! Let me tell you about my little eight transistor radio I got one Christmas at Kennedy Home located outside of Kinston. Some how I got one of those little radios—they called it a eight transistor. I could only pick up one radio station—WISP in Kinston. I can tell you that was the day I fell in love with music. It was about the time that the Beatles came out with the song 'I Want to Hold Your hand.' I spent all the money I could rake and scrap and find to buy batteries for that little radio. Carefree days! Let the good times roll!"

Let's focus on this Scripture. Psalms 23:1 reads: "The Lord is my shepherd..." Many of you can probably quote this whole scripture passage. It is such an important passage in our Christian faith. Notice that the shepherds have a staff with a crook in it. This is used

to pull sheep who have gone astray back into the fold. All these years I hope many of you have felt the *pull of that staff* when a Kennedy Home houseparent, worker, teacher, cook, nurse pulled you out of some kind of trouble. If your houseparents are living, give them a phone call and wish them a Merry Christmas this year. If not, whisper a prayer of thanksgiving for them.

What is in a candy cane? Someone shared this with me and I want to close by sharing it with you. It is a great message. Now just picture a red and white candy cane: the shape is like the letter "J"—it is for Jesus. It is also the shape of a shepherd's staff. The color red is for the blood our Savior shed for us. The color white reminds us that He washed our sins away and made us white as snow. The stripes remind us that it is by His stripes that we are healed. And the fact that it is candy? It reminds us that He grows sweeter every day.

As we close this year let us remember in MEMORIAM those of our Kennedy Home family who are now in their "new" home: **Jimmy Moore** (1949-January 7, 2019), **Gail Sisk Steidley** (1953-July 7, 2019), **Carol Lowdermilk** (??-2021), **Vance Russ** (1934-February 2, 2022), **Shelia Bradley Suggs** (1946-2022), **Jamie Mursewich** (??-August 15, 2022), **Horace Hawes** (1938-Nov. 26, 2022), **Donn Sisk Nunemacher** (1950-2022), **Ruben McNeil** (??-Dec. 16, 2022), **Edgar Warren** (??-Dec. 2023), **Bobby Ray Moore** (1945-May 25 2023), **Edward Riggs** (1936-June 2023), and **Danny Kaye Stallings** (1954-Sept. 2023).

I need your help every month to keep my column going. Send me articles! Happy New Year! And come see me! Love ya!—jt



John Thompson served at Kennedy Home from 1972-1977. Today, he enjoys an active retirement.

New year brings new season of miraculous stories

By Jim Edminson, Editor

From escaping the ravages of war-torn Congo to being given new life in Guatemala, from a family experiencing the joy of Christmas in Kinston to a birth mother finding new hope in Thomasville—stories that are remarkably different and incredibly alike. Each starts with the frailty of humankind and proceeds to the intersection of God's grace and finally stops at the point of ministry. It is truly humbling to be part of covering these modern-day miracles through the pages of *Charity & Children*.

The SAT word is raconteur, the recount-er, narrator, relater—the storyteller. My wife, a high school literature teacher, calls me by this name, and it seems to fit. Images form in my mind as I listen to personal stories. I scribble notes to remind me, and later I recall the pictures and write the words. Slowly, the story unfolds in these pages and comes to its conclusion with you, the reader, completing the task. Your response propels the mission forward and, again, makes the stories worth telling for the glory of God...

Granddaughter Emmalie was a shepherd in Gospel Baptist Church's Christmas drama. "I don't have lines this year, but my job is important," she assured me. She is right, of course. The shepherds followed the angel's urging and went to Bethlehem to see the power of God at work among them.

"Remember, Papa? I was a sheep last year, and now I am the keeper of the sheep," she continued. Her words bring

to mind the gospel message. In stories and parables, Jesus likened us to sheep in need of a shepherd. By weaving those details into the Christmas pageant, my granddaughter is a reminder of my own condition and the Good Shepherd's intervention on my behalf.

In my mind's eye, I see it: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). I envision the individual parts we play in God's plan: "Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying, Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave; Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save" (Fanny Crosby, "Rescue the Perishing"). We no longer walk in darkness but follow the Savior in goodness and light. What a terrific message. It is a story worth telling and retelling.

In homes across our state, observances of the holiday season took place. Traditions were center stage as we embarked on a journey through Advent to Christmas day to the New Year. In our churches, worship leaders told the story in myriad ways to draw us all closer to the Lord God who demonstrates love in miraculous and practical ways. We acknowledged the gift offered and gratefully received it.

I, and you, are the raconteurs, the witnesses and proclaimers of God's redemptive love from heaven come down to earth. Look anywhere, and you will see;

listen everywhere, and you will hear. As partakers in this mission of ministry, we join together in cooperation to be the extension of that love and grace. We acknowledge, individually and collectively, that our response makes an eternal difference, and we say with the prophet: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

We anticipate the coming year with hope, believing in a new season of miracles. We lift our hearts and sing the hymns of redemption, we recount the Bible stories of God's faithfulness, and we walk with assurance in awe of the Father's great love in sending His Son into this world as the way to salvation—if we only believe.

This year, you will find even more stories in *Charity & Children* as we expand each issue from 12 pages to 16 pages. To reach this goal, we will go from printing 11 issues to 10. *C&C* continues to be like a beloved letter—the one you eagerly look forward coming into your home.

Read His story. Read these stories. Rejoice and be glad. And then join us in this new year as we serve as the hands and feet of Jesus, sharing His love to all those we meet.



Edminson encourages others through the Good News of Jesus. Invite him to speak to your church or organization. You can email him at wjedminson@bchfamily.org.

Your gift brings children hope!

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