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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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Issue 10

Volume 136

Every day is a victory for Tirrell.

With John and Erin Stuebe, his Baptist Children's Homes foster and soon-to-be adoptive parents surrounding him with love and support, the 14 year old is thriving in ways that would have been impossible earlier in his young life. Few could ever look past Tirrell's bright smile today and perceive the darkness that shrouded his childhood. *(Continued on page 6.)*



Christina puts past behind, thriving in hope and healing

Living in abuse can become normal. For most, it is unimaginable. But when a child lives day in and day out with abuse, it *becomes* normal. It is part of a weekly routine. It is something that is managed like other things in life. Besides, who will believe a daddy would hurt his little girl, Christina thought.

Christina began living with abuse at age ten. It was secret. The signs were easily overlooked. She was withdrawn—or “shy” as others described her. She was thin—but it was just a “phase” she was going through, concerned neighbors were told.

COVID struck and the now 15-year-old Christina did not have the refuge of going to school. What was once weekly abuse, now became almost

daily. There was no way to escape. The trauma was unbearable. It was like she was sinking in water and could not catch her breath.

“Jeanna is my friend,” says Christina. “I needed someone to hear me and she believed me.” *(Continued on page 7.)*



Christina

From BCH Board of Trustees Chair Gayla Freeman

As many of you are aware, Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) president/CEO Michael C. Blackwell took a voluntary leave of absence on May 26, 2023. At that time, the Executive Committee of the BCH Board of Trustees agreed to commission an independent financial review regarding issues that were raised about certain presidential expenditures. **After a nearly four-month process, BCH and Dr. Blackwell agreed to part ways on September 19 based on the findings of the financial review.** Our public press release, along with a link and QR code for a detailed summary of the financial review findings, is presented below.

Friends, we have arrived at the end of a season. It has been one of heaviness but it has also been one where God's faithfulness and provision have shone brilliantly. In the middle of this season, we have seen 16 boys and girls accept Christ as their Savior. There have already been more children adopted by caring, Christian couples than the entirety of last year. We have seen NC Baptists and friends like you continue to stand alongside the BCH ministry through your messages of encouragement, prayers, as well as volunteer and financial support. **God has used your dedication during this season to continue to change lives now and for all eternity. Thank you!**

As one season ends, a new one begins – it is ripe with hope and expectation because we serve a Heavenly Father who goes before us. The needs of children, and all those we serve, remain great. Please continue to support the BCH ministry as you are needed now more than ever.

BCH, Blackwell Part Ways After Financial Review

By Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) Communciations

A special meeting of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina (BCH) Board of Trustees was held on September 13 at Mills Home in Thomasville. During their meeting, trustees discussed a report on a financial review that was commissioned by the board's Executive Committee in the spring, and proceeded to consider the future of the organization. Following that meeting, the board adjourned until its regularly scheduled meeting on September 19 and directed legal counsel to continue working towards a resolution.

Based on the findings of the review, the board and BCH president/CEO Michael C. Blackwell finalized an agreement on September 19 for Blackwell to retire effective immediately. Both parties have agreed that moving in the direction of new leadership is in the best interest of the organization and its mission of "sharing hope...changing lives."

The independent review involved a forensic accountant's assessment of specific organizational expenditures by Blackwell. The findings substantiated multiple instances of misuse directly conflicting with both BCH policies and Blackwell's fiduciary duties. Blackwell has agreed to reimburse BCH in full for the funds that were identified. Additionally, he will pay the appropriate amount of applicable taxes. Blackwell's final compensation will only con-

sist of that which is required by law, and BCH policy regarding accrued vacation and sick time.

"While the outcome of this review was disappointing, the action taken by the trustees clearly prioritizes that the integrity of the BCH mission and, most importantly, our commitment to the children and families we serve comes first," Gayla Freeman, Chairman of the BCH Executive Committee, said in a statement. "It is our hope that this is the first step in rebuilding trust with our supporters, partners and NC Baptists who have faithfully stood with us to minister to the needs of the most vulnerable while showing them God's unconditional love."

The review determined that BCH's bylaws, as currently written, give the President/CEO position too wide a margin of financial authority.

"We have concluded from the review that the misuse of funds was isolated to the former President/CEO and was not systemic," Freeman stated.

Freeman also stated that the board is in process of developing a plan for updating and strengthening governing structures. The goal is to establish the degree of oversight that is essential for an organization of BCH's size and scope.

A search committee will be created in the coming weeks to identify a new executive leader for the almost 138-year-old ministry. BCH's Keith Henry and Brenda Gray, who have shared presidential responsibilities since Blackwell's voluntary leave of absence began on May 26, 2023, will continue to lead the organization in the interim.

"The ministry of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina is bigger than any one individual – it is God's ministry," Freeman stated. "We know that He is already going before us. We humbly ask for your prayers and for you to continue to stand alongside us as we minister to those we serve now and to those who will turn to us in the season ahead."

**READ THE DETAILED
FINANCIAL REVIEW
REPORT >>>**



SCAN THE QR CODE
OR TYPE THIS LINK:

BCHNC.HOPP.TO/REP

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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Mother of three credits God for family's miracles

By Jim Edminson, Editor

It is 7:30 in the morning. Sara is dressed and each of her children are dressed and ready for the day. There are a couple of chores left: sterilizing four-month-old Micah's bottles, putting the pink bow in 16-month-old Aria's hair, and packing four-year-old Ellie's backpack. Ellie is watching Paw Patrol, Aria scoots across the floor leaving the shoes her mother just put on her feet behind her, and Micah is attentive to his older sisters' movements, looking left to right as he sits in his carrier ready to be placed in the car.

The little family's routine each workday is the same. Sara works at a day care center in a nearby community. Her children attend as part of her employment. Getting the job was at the top of Sara's list of goals. Participating in the Family Care program and living in Culler Cottage at Mills Home in Thomasville provides what Sara needs to build a stable life for her children.

Family Care offers a supportive residential environment for committed hard-working single mothers and their children. The program is goal-focused, helping moms transition to a successful, independent life. Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) operates four homes at two locations: Thomasville and Kinston.

Sara and the children drive away from the cottage on time. She feels successful and is hopeful. It is much different from last fall when she felt like her life was spiraling out of control. She was pregnant with Micah and doctors told her that there was a mass on one of his lungs. What had seemed like a normal pregnancy became high risk. There was heartache when the relationship with Aria's and Micah's father ended. Uncertainty became a part of every area of her life. There were more questions than answers. Where would she and her children live? How could she care for her children alone? Would her unborn son be okay? She needed a safe place to regroup. She needed help.

"I was told that I couldn't be a good mom to three children," says Sara. "I needed to prove everyone wrong."

Bobbie Heilig is the Family Care manager at Culler Cottage. She works closely with the moms and manages the day-to-day life in the cottage. She connects the mother and family with the necessary resources and community services needed to help bring stability to her life.

"Sara's case was a little different," says Heilig.



Sara



Sara is determined to be the best mom she can be. She and her three children are part of BCH's Family Care program and live in Culler Cottage at Mills Home in Thomasville. The family moved in January when Sara was pregnant with Micah. Sara was told he had a large mass in his lung, but when he was born the mass was gone.

"We were unsure whether we could help her. She was unable to work while carrying Micah and his needs and future were unknown."

Heilig struggled. The program wasn't designed to meet such unique needs. She made it a matter of prayer and came to believe BCH could not turn Sara away. With her supervisor's approval, she called Sara with the good news. The 28-year-old mom moved her family to Culler Cottage in January of this year.

"I was nervous—you think it might be like a homeless shelter," confides Sara. "I couldn't have imagined the cottage would be this wonderful. You walk through the door and it is home. It is a place where you feel God's arms wrap around you."

In the Family Care program, moms learn parenting, budgeting, and job skills. Mothers commit to work and/or attend school at least 30 hours per week, save a percent of their income, and provide appropriate care for their children. Each family is responsible for cottage chores. Fostering spiritual growth is part of daily life.

"I always say it is God," says Sara. "There is no other way to explain this year—it is God."

As Micah's due date approached, there were more and more doctor appointments. It was scary as Sara went for ultrasounds every week. Micah was born on May 6 and the doctor said the mass was gone. There was no medical explanation.

"My faith is important to me," declares Sara. "I know God does miraculous things. He is mindful of me and my children. We are here for His purpose and I'm very thankful."

Sara is doing everything she needs to do on her path toward independence. She works hard and BCH is committed to walking with her.

She stays on top of everything. She is attentive to her children's needs and never complains. She supports the other moms at Culler Cottage, understanding them and offering dignity and grace to their families.

"It has been great to see God's faithfulness," says Heilig. "I believed Sara was supposed to be here—and God has affirmed it."

Sara's future is not completely mapped out, but she knows what she wants. She desires to keep her family together and give them the best life possible. It is her prayer.

Children are God's treasures

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

Cody was a precious beautiful treasure, and I was blessed to be a part of his life if only for a brief time. He captured my heart from the moment I saw him. At the time I was working and volunteering at a program called "Home of the Innocents." The program provided emergency care for children from seven counties and a convalescent center for medically fragile children.

Cody was a precious baby boy. Cody's mom had a drug addiction. Cody suffered a number of medical problems due to her addiction and his lack of pre-natal care. After Cody was born, his mom made a choice to never see him again. The nurses called for someone to give Cody that extra care—that extra touch every child needs.

I would go to work around 7:00 to spend time with Cody—coaxing him to eat, rubbing his tiny arms and legs and holding him tight when he would quiver and shake. He was a beautiful child, a precious gift from God, a treasure.

For ten month's I would go to Cody's crib and love on him. I would rock and hold this special baby boy. When I left for the day, I always stopped by his crib to touch him—to feel his tiny hand grip my finger.

We knew the end was near and it was difficult to let him go. My heart was broken the day he passed, but at the same time my heart rejoiced that Cody had been a part of my life. I had given him lots of loving touches—and he had given so much more right back to me.

It was not long before God sent me another child to hold, and then another, and another. Each one was a treasure to hold. Years later, God is still placing children in my life through the ministry of Baptist Children's Homes (BCH), children who need His special touch.

In Mark 10:16 we read about a special kind of touch. A loving touch! In an instant, Jesus' action defined our priority and our mission—for our families and for our churches.

"And He took them in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them." Jesus touches the children and He blesses them. He acknowledged their presence and their importance to Him. But his touch does something else as well, His touch blesses, His touch transforms.

What the world sees as worthless, God sees as treasure. In this issue of *Charity & Children* (C&C), you will read stories of two children who had not been treasured. Both are stories of children who so desperately needed to be held, to be touched by God's love—to be transformed by his blessing.

Through BCH's ministry, God gives us so many opportunities to offer children a loving

touch. We cannot do it without you. Your prayerful support makes it possible for us to be here each day to touch, to hold, to treasure.

In just a few short weeks, you will be asked to join us in treasuring the life of each baby (born and unborn), each child who feels hopeless without a family, each family that feels like giving up, each mom and dad fighting the demon called addiction, each person hungry and alone who walks through our doors in need by giving through your Thanksgiving Offering. I know over the next two months you will feel like you are getting a lot of mail from us. You will receive a Christmas Gift catalog, two issues of C&C, a Christmas mailing, etc.

Why? Because I know you want to be informed of our needs and because we need your help. The task before us can sometimes feel daunting and overwhelming. But we face each day knowing God has gone before us and will provide. We face each day knowing God has placed the needs of those we serve on your heart. So many children walk through our doors struggling from abuse, neglect, and crisis. It is my prayer that we can be a part of sharing with them how God's sees them as treasure, His treasure.

When Jesse first came to BCH, he would not talk. He had closed everyone and everything out. Jesse's cottage parents loved him until the walls he built around him crumbled. Jesse learned he was not the mistake he had been told he was all his life. Jesse found love at BCH. Jesse found hope at BCH. Jesse learned that he is God's treasure at BCH.

When you give, you touch a heart. But let me warn you—get out your tissues. Your heart will be touched as well.

"His Treasure" by Jesse

In a junk yard to stay,
Abandoned by all around.
Life's storms leave their marks.
I'm rusted inside and out.

All those others,
With their temporary shine.
Jealousy taints me inside.
Its venom destroying life.

Like locusts swarming in a field,
My very existence fades.
Like a morning mist,
How can life go on?

Then the horizon broadens,
It's a day like no other.
One comes to buy some junk.
He sets his eyes on me.

Humbly he says, "This one's mine."
He reaches for me, takes me in His arms.
The salesman says, "That one stays."
Then He says, "But I paid full price."

He brings me home.
When all hope seemed lost,
He sprays me with WD40.
The rust and tarnish dissolves.

I begin to shine,
Shine like no other.
The shine never fades.
Nor ceases to be bright.

People wonder
About the change.
I was junk, discarded.
Now I'm His treasure!

Today, Jesse has a family of his own. He has broken the cycle of abuse. He treasures and is treasured by his family and loves being a husband and father. Jesse will tell you he is so thankful for the way God is enriching and growing his family. Jesse is the owner of a small business and loves giving back to his community.

Thank you for giving to the Lord! So many lives are being changed. We are so grateful. You are treasured, too!





Tirrell's life was **RESCUED!** Watch his video.



FOR A DECADE, TIRRELL WAS ISOLATED & ALONE WITHIN HIS NC CHILDHOOD HOME. HE WAS FED RICE. HE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO ATTEND SCHOOL.

When Tirrell's circumstances were discovered, his family told a judge they did not take him to school because *"he wasn't worth the gas money."* Today, Tirrell is thriving with his Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) foster parents John and Erin Stuebe who will soon adopt the young teen. Since being with them, he's experienced his first birthday cake, his first day of school, his first Christmas, and his first time hearing the Gospel. **Through your church's Annual Offering, Tirrell not only has the caring, Christian family he needs, but he accepted Christ as his Savior on June 16, 2023.** Your offering empowered Erin and John to become licensed foster parents through our **EVERY CHILD** partnership with NC Baptists. *Tirrell is one example of the 167,619 lives impacted in 2022 because churches participated in the Annual Offering.*



CHANGE LIVES LIKE TIRRELL'S: PREPARE FOR THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL OFFERING:

Order Materials:



From posters to bulletin inserts to envelopes, order resources for your church at bchoffering.org/order

Invite a Speaker:



Schedule a speaker to share the ministry with your church. Call 336.474.1218 or go to bchoffering.org/speaker

Share Tirrell's Video:



Show your church. There are three different lengths. Download them at bchoffering.org/videos



Week of Prayer: November 5-12, 2023
Offering Goal: \$1.5 million
[BCHOFFERING.ORG](https://bchoffering.org)

SHARING HOPE...CHANGING LIVES
Baptist Children's Homes
of NORTH CAROLINA

Tirrell finds freedom and family after life of neglect

By **Blake Ragsdale**, Managing Editor

(Continued from page 1.)

Erin Stuebe's voice becomes solemn, "Tirrell's past basically has been defined by neglect."

Erin and her husband John live in Jacksonville, NC where Tirrell grew up. It is in this same community where the boy, for a decade of his life, was kept isolated within the bedroom of his childhood home. His family members rarely took him outside. He was not allowed to go to school. They fed him rice for every meal. Not even the people who lived near him knew what the child was enduring.

Tirrell's entire world could be measured within the space between his bedroom walls.

"The only toys we know about were a set of blocks," John says, his voice swelling with emotion. "He had nothing."

This continued for years until one day Tirrell began to develop sores on his legs and feet. The condition became so extreme that a family member in the home had him admitted to the hospital. It took his physicians several days, with the help of wound care specialists, to successfully treat him.

When he was ready to be discharged, his family could not be found. A staff member at the hospital called his family to let them know he was well enough to return home. Their response: "We don't want him."

The hospital contacted the Department of Social Services (DSS) who removed Tirrell from the family's custody and placed him in the foster care system. Because he was so far behind relationally and academically, DSS was finding it a challenge to identify a home that could meet Tirrell's needs.

Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) foster care supervisor Jessie Chilson felt the weight of that challenge when she first became aware of Tirrell's case. Jessie is one of the many BCH foster care staff members across the state responsible for connecting children with EVERY CHILD foster families. EVERY CHILD is a partnership with NC Baptists where BCH comes alongside churches to train and license couples in their congregations to be foster parents. The mission is to provide NC foster care children with caring, Christian homes.



Above, this year's Annual Offering story features Tirrell and his Baptist Children's Homes foster family John and Erin Stuebe. For a decade, the boy was severely neglected and isolated within his childhood home. Today, Tirrell is thriving with the Stuebes who will soon adopt him. Since coming to live with Erin and John, Tirrell has accepted Christ.

Below, fishing on John's boat is one of Tirrell's favorite activities. [Learn more at bchoffering.org](https://bchoffering.org).

Feeling like she could not find him an appropriate family, Jessie passed over his file on two different occasions. The third time, however, the Stuebes came to Jessie's mind because of Erin's previous experience as a teacher. Plus, the couple were already actively fostering through BCH.

"I don't think we could do this without Baptist Children's Home. The support we get is unbelievable," John shares.

When Jessie called them about Tirrell and shared the traumatic details of his childhood, the couple's hearts were deeply moved.

"We learned that when Tirrell's family members were asked why they didn't send him to school, they said it was because he wasn't worth the gas money to take him," Erin tearfully shares. "As a previous teacher, I just really wanted to see Tirrell grow up and have an opportunity at life."

That opportunity began when Jessie drove Tirrell to the Stuebe's home.

"I'll never forget when that car door opened,"

John recalls. "He got out and gave us hugs. His feet were wrapped up because he had wounds, and they gave him a walker. He walked into our front door, put his walker down, and never used it again."

"When he walked in this house, there was no looking back—he owned it," John continues. "He just walked in and became part of the house."

"They were just as eager and excited for him to come as he was to be going," Jessie remembers. "God had prepared them for such a time as this, and they embraced what He was doing head on."

This included doing whatever it took to help the boy who had never attended school begin to learn and grow academically. It also meant teaching him many of life's basic fundamentals.

"When he first came, his verbal skills were lacking. He mostly pointed and said only a word or two," Erin explains. "In every aspect of his life, we've had to train him. He didn't know emotions when he arrived."

John and Erin both worked jobs but were able to tutor Tirrell with the help of John's mother. Erin finished out her responsibilities to her employer and left her career to homeschool Tirrell. He recently completed his second grade studies and is working on third grade.

(Continued on page 7.)

Odum Home becomes Christina's haven of hope

By Jim Edminson, Editor

(Continued from page 1.)

Christina and Jeanna had been friends since middle school. Even during the pandemic they stayed in touch. Now that they were back in the classroom together, Christina had to tell her secret of abuse to someone. Stepping out from the shadows, she approached Jeanna. Jeanna not only believed Christina, she confided to her mom—a social worker with the department of social services, about Christina's nightmare. Her mom took action, and while Christina was applying for a learners permit at the department of motor vehicles, deputies came to her rescue, removing her from her parent's custody. That night, she slept for the first time in so long without fear.

In January 2021, Christina entered the foster care system and was sent to a therapeutic foster family home. She was sheltered and removed from the abuse. Her past normal now became absurd as she came to terms with what had been happening.

"I couldn't talk much about me or what my life had been like," she confides. "It was a very deep, dark time."

She was sent to another foster home in July. The family was kind but it was not working. Life was a struggle. The next year, Christina was sent to Odum Home in Pembroke.

"It was like a switch had been turned on," says Christina. "I was suddenly with other kids who had gone through bad things, too. The group home was what I needed—I wasn't alone anymore. I felt comfortable and I began to be happy—a new happy—something I had not experienced before. I finally felt safe."

Living at Odum Home transformed Christina in only months. It was a haven. She became more confident, worked hard succeeding in school, and began to dream of a future.

"It's been a little over a year and I'm a totally different person," says Christina. "I went from being quiet and feeling alone to feeling hopeful."

The 18-year-old graduated Early College in



Eighteen-year-old Christina found new hope while living at Odum Home. She is now a freshman at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

June, earning an associate of arts degree. She and Jeanna decided to attend the University of North Carolina at Pembroke together. The freshmen are roommates.

The "Saved to Serve" Sunday school class from The Village Baptist Church in Fayetteville organized a party for Christina to equip her dorm and provide for her needs to start college.

When Jeanna and the other students go home for the weekend, Christina leaves her dorm on campus and crosses North Odum Street, walking to her cottage at Odum Home. Miss Dee and Miss Sylvia always have a good meal cooking on the stove. There are movie nights with the other girls in the cottage and there are times when the Bible is opened as the cottage moms share devotions. "Odum Home—the staff here are my family. This is my home."

The most significant first Tirrell has experienced is hearing the Gospel. Through the discipling of the Stuebes and the family's involvement in church, Tirrell has been learning about the hope of Jesus while also memorizing scripture. On June 16, 2023, Tirrell asked Christ to be his Savior.

"Tirrell's excited about life," John says. "The other day, he came up to my wife and said, 'I feel like I have my life now.' The direction of Tirrell's life has changed because of the people that have

Christina neither believed nor disbelieved in God before arriving at Odum Home. It was difficult for her to look beyond what she was dealing with every day. It is different now.

"I learned God loves me," says Christina. "God is concerned about me and knows my hurt. Problems are not mine to carry alone."

While attending a youth worship service, Christina gave her heart to God. She turned her life toward God, placing her trust in Him.

"I thought being a Christian meant putting the burden on me," she confides. "But I learned I can leave my past behind. I can give God everything and I do not have to do life by myself."

Christina's faith has brought healing. She believes God has a plan for her and boldly steps into a bright future with new hope.

given to Baptist Children's Homes."

Erin agrees. "And that is multiplied greatly because there are so many other children that Baptist Children's home ministers to—it's touching so many lives and those lives are being pointed to Jesus."

The Week of Prayer is November 6-12, 2023. Learn about the BCH's Annual Offering at bchoffering.org and watch Tirrell's video at bit.ly/worthy23.



(Continued from page 6.)

One of the greatest joys for the family has been making memories. Tirrell already has several photo albums filled with snapshots of the many "firsts" he has experienced with the Stuebes: first fish caught, first bicycle ride, and even his first birthday party.

"Foster parents struggle with not getting to experience the earlier stages of life with their children," John explains. "We're getting to experience all of that, and it's awesome."

Foster sister celebrates family's wonderful life

By **Ashlee Welch**, Foster Sister

INTRODUCTION: This is the final installment of a three-part series telling the first-person account of 20-year-old foster sister Ashlee Welch.

Mom took Israel to the Emergency room and he was airlifted to a hospital two hours away. Israel stayed in the hospital for more than 30 days with Mom by his side. They had to pull his childhood medical records and figure out exactly what happened to cause abdominal problems. When he was younger, he had a series of surgeries (which he does not remember) and the scarring ripped a hole in his intestines. Doctors had to go in and cut out a few inches of his intestines to fix the issue. He lost a ton of weight and most of his body muscle. The doctors weren't sure about his future. Football might be out of the question, weightlifting might be done, and all your typical guy things could be over. (But we will come back to that later.)

Dad works running his automotive shop. With more children in the house to take to soccer, ballet, swim, band, school, and church—he quickly became overwhelmed. I had my driver's license



Ashlee Welch

and I was a halfway decent cook, so I did as much as I could to help.

Israel's illness, surgery, and recovery led to the hardest decision. Dad called the little girls' caseworker. The girls needed to be placed somewhere else for the time being. Change is sometimes the most

difficult part of being a foster sister.

The girls helped me pack up their stuff and we said the hardest goodbyes of a my lifetime—hugging Kimberly and Addison (names were changed) as they were crying and being taken to yet another home was hard. But we remain close. My family attends their ballet recitals and soccer games. We share big dinners together as often as possible. The girls have been adopted



Tanner and Israel graduated high school in June. They attend college now and Ashlee is a junior working toward an elementary education degree. Parents John and Lisa are dedicated to their three children and hope to once again welcome foster children into their home in the days ahead.

and are thriving.

Israel endured a handful of surgeries and remained restricted to bed rest, eating small portions of protein, and drinking lots of liquids. We were all hopeful.

A big part of any family is understanding that there will be ups and downs. Israel had a handful of hardships, but he also experienced some great monumental moments—like excelling in football and being named Lineman of the Year for 2022. He was awarded two player-of-the-game awards his senior season, attended prom, learned how to drive, graduated, and was accepted into a college.

Israel and Tanner are college freshmen and I'm a junior. Having three in college has been a struggle for Mom and Dad. They tell us that it is not a challenge they cannot handle, but what an unexpected curve ball.

To bring this roller coaster to the end of the tracks, I want to discuss my biggest takeaways of being a foster sister and one of three siblings in my family. You always hear people say that 'communication is key'—it is true. I don't think that my family could have handled some of these ups and downs, twists and turns without sitting down and talking through everything. Making a house a home is a team effort.

I've learned that foster care can be a genuinely scary thing. In her book "Three Little Words: A Memoir," Ashley Rhodes-Courter writes about being born to a teenage mother and then spend-

ing her early childhood in foster care. Her mother was not able to take care of her and her brother, but all the time Ashley believed she would move back home with her mother. Ashley was placed into 14 different foster homes and finally is placed at the Children's Home of Tampa and met Phil and Gay Courter at an adoption picnic and they became her adopted parents. It was a long journey for her. She truly understands the struggles of foster children because she has experienced the struggles and trauma foster children sometimes go through.

If you look around, you might meet a caring foster family—there are many. Now don't get me wrong, there will always be a few bad apples on every

tree. But at the end of the day, the reason foster families do this is because while you sit here reading this article there are children in need of not only roofs over their heads and food on the table, but the security of a loving family. Some of these children live right in your neighborhood—maybe next door. Nobody is asking you to go across the world, they're all around—even if sometimes we don't see them.

Recently, I watched Israel and Tanner have a great senior prom, graduate, and move into the real world. As for the girls, I am lucky enough to see them often. They are growing as fast as a blink of the eye. I continue to attend their ballet recitals and soccer games. I am committed to being there for them—to be as close as I can and for as long as they want me to be. I am so glad they have their forever home and a family who welcomes my family as part of these precious girls' lives.

It is crazy how time flies. When I began to write this article, I never imagined how it would help bring my wonderful life into focus.

Ashlee Welch works full time as a first-grade teacher's assistant and is a junior enrolled at Liberty University pursuing an online degree in elementary education with an art minor. She hopes to either teach kindergarten or art to elementary-age children. She is passionate about creating a safe and positive place for children.

Alumni lose dear orphan brothers and sisters — Alumni Council slated to meet in October

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

Please keep the Alumni Council in your prayers as they begin a new year working for you. **President Ruth Berndt Hodges** will hold the first meeting in October to assess our recent Homecoming and start another year's work. She is always eager to hear suggestions from our alumni whether or not you are actually a dues paying alumnus. You are welcome to contact President Ruth to share your ideas. She can be reached at this email address: roosterhodges@aol.com. In addition to the dedicated officers listed in last month's column, Ruth can be comfortable knowing she will have great help in running the association from the following council members: **Rusty Bunker, Keith Campbell, Lib Johnson, Rich Lewis, Jimmy Rochelle, John Shields, Sharon DeHart Stiles, Bobby Weber, and Cecelia Townsend Wilkerson.**

Our hearts go out to **Tina Teodoro Morrison** for the loss of her family's home and all their possessions by arson. Alumni are coming to the rescue by accepting donations of any sort to help Tina's family reestablish their home. Money may be contributed to a GoFundMe page set up by **Rich Lewis** on his Facebook page. Checks, money orders, or gift cards may be mailed directly to Tina at this address: 1814 East Broad St., Statesville, NC 28625. Donations of items such as dishes, flatware, sheets, towels, kitchenware, and furniture may be taken to the alumni picnic on Sept. 23. It will be at the Dan Nicholas Park, located at 6800 Bringle Ferry Rd. in Salisbury at Shelter 6. **Lisa and Ron Lancaster** will collect those goods at the picnic and deliver them to Tina. Tina and her three sons send their deep appreciation for all the efforts being made on their behalf.

We were saddened to learn of the March 17 death of **Martha Culler Alley**, sister to **Estie and Jimmy.**

She was a special breed of alumni. After rearing her family, she sought work at Mills Home (MH) to fulfill a long-time yearning to care for other children in the way she was cared for at MH. She served as a houseparent at Alumni Cottage from 1999 to 2003 and dearly loved that work. Her childhood years at MH began in 1958 and she graduated in 1968, having built a reputation of which to be proud. She had created a perfect balance of lively social interaction, organized athletics, serious concentration on scholarly matters, and spiritual study and enrichment. Not only did she engage in the campus sports activities, she went out for the organized sport of basketball. No one was surprised when she was chosen as a forward for the Thomasville High School (THS) basketball team. Likewise in regard to scholarship, her grades and citizenship propelled her to membership in that school's National Honor Society. From church related activities, Martha developed a strong faith and lived accordingly. She sang in the choir and rose to the highest rank of "Queen" in the Girls' Auxiliary. She was also called upon sometimes to write articles for *Charity & Children*. In school, she was an editor on the newspaper staff and at graduation time she was voted the Best Sport superlative. She married not long after high school and reared two offspring, **James and Dawn**, who survive her. She loved spending time with them and grandchildren **Jacob, Joshua, and Kyleigh**. A memorial service was held for Martha on March 24 at Mills Home Baptist Church (MHBC). Inurnment followed in the columbarium at God's Acre. Condolences may be sent to Estie Culler at 1003 Oak Marsh Lane, North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582 and to Jimmy at jemile-evanzandt@yahoo.com. The family suggests that people wishing to memorialize Martha donate to the

Baptist Children's Homes of NC, PO Box 338, Thomasville, NC 27361.

We were saddened to learn from **Susan Lewis** that **Richard David Triff** passed away on June 12. David entered MH in 1970 with twin brothers **Larry and Gary**, older brother **Danny**, and sisters **Lynn and Debbie**. He left in 1971. A celebration of David's life was held under the Revival Tent next to Stuart Auditorium in Lake Junaluska on June 29. He is survived by his wife **Kathy McQueen Triff**, all siblings listed above, and sisters **Anna and Kelly**. His family originated near Brevard, NC and as adults most of them settled in that area.

Sadly, we learned from **Sandy Penley** on Facebook that **Thomas Whitt** passed away on July 26 in Maple Falls, Washington. Thomas was at MH from 1955 to 1959. In Recent years, MH alumni have been able to reconnect with Thomas through Facebook where we learned much about his keen interest in politics as well as the cancer problems he endured. We also learned Thomas was a very devout Christian. He is survived by his wife **Olene** and daughter **Amber**. Friends may send condolences to them at this address: 6171 Cedar Lane, Maple Falls, Washington 98266.

Another great loss this year was **Luther Woodrow Shields**, known affectionately by his MH friends as Woody. Woody entered MH in 1952 and graduated in 1959. Siblings with him at MH were **Clara Sue, Sandra, and John**. Quite the popular young man about campus, Woody played basketball and baseball for MH before the days when students joined the THS teams. When the MHBC held its "Youth Week" in 1959, Woody served as Pastor. He enjoyed his four years learning the printing trade as he did "duty" at the Idol Print shop. When the MH youngsters gathered for social or athletic activities at the gym, pool, or valley, Woody was there. Like most youngsters,

Woody thrived mightily at MH. A few years ago, he told his brother **Johnny** they would be going to Homecoming just so they could tell **Mr. Quin** that growing up at MH was the best thing that ever happened to them. And that is what they did. **Mr. Quinn** was among the wonderful workers he very much admired.

After high school, Woody entered the Air Force and was selected to enter the Officer Training Corps. He became an officer and served his country for 37 years, taking his family abroad as he served in many foreign countries for 30 years. He died July 2. Friends can send condolences to John Shields at 220 Williamson St., Burlington, NC 27215 and to Clara Sue at 4424 Hidden Hollow Trail, Hillsborough, NC 27278.

We are sorry also to hear that **Deborah Lou Smith Ratliff** passed away August 12 in Wentworth, NC. A graveside service was held for her on August 25 at Lawson Cemetery in Eden. Visitation was held after the service at the home of her daughter **Tatia (Robbie) Patterson**. Deborah was preceded in death by her husband **Jerry Ratliff** and daughter **Shana Ratliff**. She is survived by daughter **Tatia Patterson**; grandchildren **Wesley Patterson, Macy Patterson, and Alec Branch**; brother **Jim Smith**; and sister **Janet Burnworth**. Condolences may be sent to Janet Smith Burnworth, 6414 Bones Acres Rd., Elm City, NC 27822.

Please contact me at libsjohnson@triad.rr.com or 336-299-7412 if you wish to add or correct an address for your C&C subscription. Contact Sharon DeHart Stiles to discuss use of the Columbarium at 704-685-2443.



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

Center Stage: Spotlighting the Latest in News and Events



Children shine on stage at Hope in Style

After a four-year absence, the **Hope in Style Children's Fashion Show & Silent Auction** made its return. The Greensboro Country Club ballroom was filled to capacity with friends who spent their Saturday supporting the boys and girls served at Baptist Children's Homes' (BCH) Mills Home in Thomasville.

Children took to the runway to model their new back-to-school outfits as guests cheered and encouraged them. Tanya Rivera, news reporter from WFMY Channel 2 in Greensboro, returned as the event's emcee. Parker Webb from the Christian band Guilford performed during the program. Lead sponsor Vanguard Ministries along with dozens of other sponsors helped make the day a success.

Friends recognized at Western Conference

The 62nd annual Western Area Conference was held on September 7 at Broyhill Home in Clyde. The event invited area churches and supporters to celebrate the BCH ministry in Western NC, meet the children and special needs adults, and recognize this year's "Friends of Children" recipients for their exceptional support.

Recognized with awards this year were

Larry and Phyllis Bryson, Deborah Palmer, Penny Justice, Barbara Reynolds, Rebecca Williams, and Bill Worley—affectionately known as the "Georgia Group." This is because supporter Penny Justice, a resident of Otto,



NC introduced her sister Phyllis Bryson, a resident of Georgia, to Broyhill Home. This connection led to many friends and churches in Georgia giving generously to BCH, especially through the Food Roundup.

Prayer Garden honors Morgan's 50 Years

As a part of Western Area Conference, the "Linda Morgan Prayer Garden" was unveiled in recognition of Linda's 50th anniversary at BCH. This special place located at Broyhill



Home is beautifully-constructed from rocks, creating a mini-waterfall with a sitting area overlooking the mountains. Much of the project and labor were donated. Linda serves as

BCH Statewide Director, Cottage Care Homes/Foster Care as well as Western Area Regional Director of Family Services. A visitor to the garden can scan a QR code located at the entrance of the space and listen using a smart phone to Linda reading scripture while sitting in the tranquil place.

Field of Makers raises support for NCBAM

The second annual Field of MAKERS, a juried artisan show, was held September 9 at Mills Home in Thomasville. In addition to some of North Carolina's finest crafters,



the event included the area's most popular food vendors, live Gospel music, and a roving magician who entertained the crowd.

Field of MAKERS is a fundraiser for North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) where all proceeds benefit aging adults served by the ministry. The event will make it possible to purchase lumber for wheelchair ramps, and for safety needs such as minor home repair, grab bars, or smoke alarms for aging adults in need.

Field of MAKERS was made possible by NCBAM's generous sponsors: Fancy Finds Resale Store, The Mill: Coffee and Community, Triad Baptist Church, ThriveMore at Home, and Tristan and Mia Roberts.

Editor's Note: Center Stage is a new feature highlighting the latest news and events of BCH's ever-expanding ministries.

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Splash, splash—Beach Retreat on Oct. 27, 28, & 29 Christmas Party at King's on Dec. 2, Noon-3:00

By **JOHN THOMPSON**, 104 Village Court, Havelock, NC 28532 (252) 671-3515 jthompson117@ec.rr.com

The Kennedy Home Alumni will be having our "Annual Beach Retreat" down at the beach cottage. Come on down on Friday night for supper at 7:00 pm. It's a great deal! Your cost for the weekend, two nights at the cottage, your meals, Christian fellowship, and a lot of talking about times you were at Kennedy Home (KH) cost only \$30 for the weekend. As I said last month: *Where can you go, have a bed for two nights, lots of delicious food to eat, and a whole lot of sharing memories from the past?*

We need to have a head count, so write on the KH Facebook page if you plan to attend. Do this when you finish reading this newsletter.

Joyce Surbaugh, our Alumni secretary, writes to let us know that the KH Alumni Christmas Party will be Saturday, December 2 at King's Restaurant in Kinston from noon until 3 pm. Please bring a \$15 gift for games. There will also be door prizes. **Yvonne** got us a Senior Citizen's discount so your meal will only be \$12.95 each plus tax. If you have not responded yet, sign up on the KH Facebook page and let us know you will be coming. We need a head count as soon as possible.

Charles Butler wrote a very nice note that you won't want to miss. Read it carefully. Charles writes to let us know that he and his wife **Patricia** attended the 65th. Wedding Anniversary of **Pastor David Leary** and his wife **Bonita** on August 6 at First Baptist Church in Morganton. Rev. Leary was pastor at KH from 1961-1969. Mrs. Leary played the organ and piano. This occasion was of course attended by their three children. Oldest daughter **Emma** was about one and a half when they came. She now resides in Philadelphia, PA. Son, **Stanley**, was born in 1962 and now resides in Atlanta. **Hanna**,

their youngest child, was born in 1969 after Rev. Leary became pastor at Spillman Baptist Church in Kinston. Hanna is married to **Greg Poe** who is from Kinston and attended Spillman Baptist, also. They reside in Forest City near Morganton.

My oldest sister, **Wanda Butler Ziedler**, was at KH from 1962-1967 when she graduated from North Lenoir. She babysat Emma

Larry E. Gilliam wrote me a note to tell me about when he was at KH. "My older brother **James Thomas Gilliam** (known as J.T. Gilliam) went to KH in the spring of 1957. We were placed in the Brokenhurst Building, which at that time was a boy's cottage. I had just turned six years old. We stayed there for a year until they finished building the Bunker Cottage, Canady Cottage, Williams Cottage, and Bryant Cottage. I had so many house parents that I couldn't name them all. Some were the **Moores, Harpers, Speights, Littles, Walkers, and Simmons**—to name just a few. The jobs I had at KH were so many. We did housework, kitchen duty, farm duty, trash collection, campus work, and working in the locker room delivering food to the cottages. I left KH in 1971 after high school and started working with the Raleigh Police Dept. as a cadet. I was sworn in as a police officer in 1972. I stayed with the police department for 15 years until I hurt my back and had surgery. Later, I went to work with K-Mart as a security manager for nine years. I then went to work for the DMV with the driver license section. In 2010, I was doing a road test for a 18-year-old girl. She was pressing her brakes and her gas at the same time turning into the DMV parking lot at approximately 35 mph and hit two parked vehicles. I ended up

having two neck surgeries and two back surgeries. I have a metal plate and four screws in the front of my neck. I have a metal plate with screws and bars in my back. Due to the injuries, I had to go ahead and retire early. My wife, **Brenda Billiam** and I were living in Ayden. We decided to down size our home and are now living in Chocowinity, which is outside of Washington, NC. Between us, we have two daughters, one son, two granddaughters, one grandson, a great granddaughter, and one great grandson. Love in Christ."

Thanks so much for sharing. I wish many more people would do the same thing. It would really help me.

Wooten H. Taylor writes: "Hello **Mr. Thompson**, I distinctly remember the day **Wayne Jackson** joined our 6th grade class. We continued through school together in the college prep tract and he visited me at NC State when he was at Campbell. We exchanged Christmas cards, birth announcements, etc. over the years. We kept in touch until just a few years ago. I knew he was in the Raleigh area close to his twin sons and their families. We were never boyfriend/girlfriend but just good friends. I would like to reconnect with him. My dad was in the Woodmen of the World and as a child I helped make the fruit, nuts, and candy bags for the children at the KH's Christmas party. I helped deliver them. My sister **Caroline** was good friends with **Patsy Hensley** and **Wayne** was my best friend from KH. I have supported KH in past years and I eagerly read *Charity & Children* beginning with your column when it arrives. You have impacted so many lives!" - **Wooten Herring Taylor**, NLHS, Class of 1976.

Donna Duty lets us know that she (1967-1974) really enjoyed

having **Rev. David Leary** for her pastor and taking piano lessons from **Mrs. Bonita Leary**. Mrs. Leary was also a great choir director. The Rev. Leary and his wife made a great impact on her life. Donna writes to tell us about where she and Dave live now. "Hello, KH Family and Friends, Dave and I sold our home in Cary in February, moved to the Shallotte/Bolivia area, and bought a new home near the beach! It has always been our retirement dream to retire and live near a North Carolina beach. So, God blessed us and allowed that dream to happen. We found a home in a new subdivision in Bolivia, which is near Shallotte. The closest beach to us is Oak Island and we frequent it often to get some R&R and feel that ocean breeze. We are getting more and more settled in our new community here and have found us a great church home. The church has a very active foster care ministry, so we both are getting involved, volunteering with that ministry. As soon as we moved into our new home, we had an ice cream social to meet some of our new neighbors. Everyone here in our neighborhood is friendly and many are recently retired like us. The saying is really true: 'Life is better at the beach!' If any of you are ever in the Shallotte/Bolivia, or Myrtle Beach area, please contact us and plan to come by for a visit. **Donna (Weeks) Duty**, 1706 Ament Way SE, Box 194, Bolivia, NC 28422. Phone: 919-244-0920."

I know I'm getting old, turning 80 in September, but I still want to keep being your friend. Love ya very much! - jt



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

I didn't see that one coming

By **Jim Edminson**, Editor

I enjoy an occasional game of Spades or UNO, but for the most part I avoid games. It is not that I do not like games. I do. I like the children's board game with the chutes and ladders; the classic brightly colored Candy Land that I loved to play as a small child; Operation and the not-so-lucky patient "Cavity Sam" who awaits me to remove his funny bone; and the now wildly popular octagon-shaped "settlers" board game Catan. And despite playing only a few card games, I collect playing cards for the wonderful graphics on the cards and the card boxes.

I avoid *playing* games. I avoid playing because I become lost in the frenzy of sinking a battleship. Trying to decide whether the death in the kitchen using the fireplace poker was committed by Miss Green or Professor Plum consumes me. Playing Monopoly leads to lengthy battles over Park Avenue, struggles to compile rows of rent houses, and obsessing to possess Reading Railroad.

I am fond of simpler games—games like marbles, pick-up sticks, and checkers. My mom was an only child and had fond memories playing checkers for hours with her uncles. She was a quick learner and after more than her share of losing, she learned to be a formidable opponent. She is the one who taught me how to play.

Although most southerners believe checkers were invented on their momma's kitchen tables along with making sweet tea and biscuits, the game is ancient with roots that go back 3,000 years, before Jesus walked along the Jordan River—in Abraham's hometown of Ur. In between then and now, the game of moving small discs across a board marked by contrasting square blocks captured the interest of young and old and remains

a gaming mainstay. Checkers are played internationally with major tournaments held in places like Ireland and Italy. But to me, checkers are a part of Americana where this year's U.S. Nationals held in Branson, Missouri attracted the best players with nearly \$33,000 in prize money awarded.

Eight-year-old Maggie plays checkers. She picked up the rudimentary skills from her older brothers and is always looking for a willing playmate. As her Papa, I qualify. Maggie and I place the checkers—she's black and I'm red. Since I'm the papa, the lady goes first. She has worked hard to improve and furrows her brow in contemplation of her first move. Move after move, Maggie displays her learned skills. There are times I overlook a possible jump—as I should. After all, she is a novice. (Mom endured some games

as she taught me the finer points.) She makes a couple of jumps, taking my checkers. I make a jump and retrieve my spoils.

We play game after game. She wins a few and I win a few. And then it happens. The checkers perfectly line up. I reason that it is a "teachable moment." Right? (Did I mention I avoid playing games?) I take my checker and jump—one, two, three times.

Maggie sits back in her chair. "I didn't see that one coming."

Checkers is about anticipating your own and your opponent's next move. You can anticipate, but life doesn't always cooperate. Uncertainty and surprise are as assured as the rising and setting sun.

I'm sure Goliath was flummoxed, uncertain with the shepherd David standing before him—and found it staggering after the boy flung a single, smooth river



Maggie

stone in his direction.

The disciple Peter was taken back after heroically swinging his sword in defense of the Master—only to see Jesus reattach the high priest's servant's ear with a rebuke to the well-intentioned, one-time fisherman.

Both were teachable moments—for Goliath, the lesson came too late. But Peter learned from the surprises God afforded him.

What seemed to be Peter's failures—sinking into the waves after stepping out onto the waters, arguing with the other disciples "which one of us is the greatest," and denying to know Jesus when Jesus needed him the most, only to be reminded of his failure when the rooster crowed thrice—all became teachable moments, tempering Peter into the one God used in mighty ways.

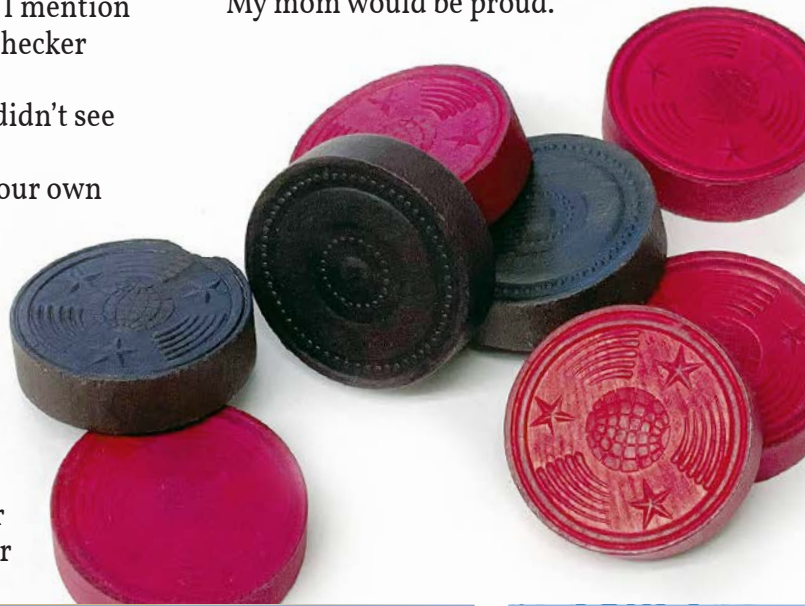
It was Peter who declares at Caesarea Philippi, concerning Jesus: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus affirms Peter, asserting, "Blessed are you... for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

After lessons learned, Peter gets it!

Maggie resets the checkers and we begin again. And then it happens. The checkers perfectly line up. Maggie takes her checker and jumps—one, two, three, *four* checkers.

I smile and happily declare, "I didn't see that one coming."

My mom would be proud.



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