

Charity & Children

The historic publication of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, first to tell the story for 135 years.






 @bchfamily

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Dana and Darren Murph's desire is to glorify God

By Jim Edminson, Editor

San Francisco is peppered with Starbucks. In fact, there are 90 in the nearly 47-square-mile city. And on the day in May when Whitney sat in despair on the curb outside one of the five Starbucks lining Market Street, Darren Murph was working for a San Francisco-based company across the street. His office was only 50 yards away.

The daughter of missionaries Susan and Garon Harris had rebelled against God and was caught up in a dangerous lifestyle that involved addictions to drugs and alcohol. Now in a Bay Area drug rehab facility, she learned she was pregnant. While sitting on the curb, her face in her hands, the 26-year-old was overcome with fear and called out, "God, I can't do this any longer." At what she says was the worst point in her life, Whitney gave her heart to Jesus and the most wonderful thing happened: God began regenerating her mind and heart.

"I was in San Francisco working for the week, Darren recalls. "And was walking to my office one morning when I felt a stirring in my heart and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to have a son?'"

In Dana and Darren Murph's kitchen in North Carolina, Dana received a word from the Lord during this same time. "The Holy Spirit told me, 'You are with child.' It was so clear, I knew God had spoken to me."

When Darren arrived home from San Francisco at the end of the week, the couple shared their stories and felt something big was happening. They believed God had a child for them and the baby would come to them through adoption.



Darren and Dana Murph have an open adoption, allowing their son Maverick's birth mom Whitney, right, to be a part of his life. The couple asserts open adoptions are not to be feared and are to be grounded in God's leadership. They believe an open adoption acknowledges that all involved in the adoption are needed and equal.

Intent on having her baby, Whitney searched online and reached out to Sheryl Naylor in North Carolina, Christian Adoption Service's (CAS) executive director for domestic adoptions. She was desperate to begin a new life and considered moving to the east coast to be closer to her family for the remainder of her pregnancy. Naylor contacted Shea and Lee Williamson who agreed to be a host family. The couple welcomed Whitney and offered her the love and support she desperately needed during this time.

"I was familiar with CAS, so I called and set up a meeting," Dana remembers.

Darren adds, "It all happened so quickly. We only needed to step into what God was doing. He led and affirmed us all along the way." From the first CAS contact to the adoption of their son Maverick took only seven months.

"The whole thing was miraculous," Dana says. "God was weaving together a beautiful tapestry for His glory."

(Continued on page 6.)



**"I have not forgotten you.
I have carved you on
the palms of my hands."**

MY THOUGHTS

Loving hands demonstrate care and hope

By **Michael C. Blackwell**, President/CEO
(Chief Encouragement Officer)

Looking at my hands, I ponder all the times I have held a pen or pecked away at a keyboard to write sermons, articles, and speeches. I think how these hands gently lowered new Christians into baptismal waters. These hands have held the hands of others who were traversing loss and grief. They have been used to softly cradle my youngest granddaughter born prematurely and weighing just a pound and a half. These hands, folded in prayer, beseeched God's loving care as she fought for her life in those first critical weeks. At age 15 now, she is a brilliant artist and uses her own hands in creativity and imagination.

I am reminded that Isaiah 49:16 reads: "I have not forgotten you. I have carved you on the palms of my hands." The apostle Mark recounts: "And He took the children in His arms and put His hands on them and blessed them" (10:12).



I am reminded of the "hear no evil; speak no evil; see no evil" monkey figurines that used to be so popular. The hands cover the ears to keep from hearing gossip and foul words, hands cover the mouth to keep from speaking unkind words, and hands cover the eyes to prevent temptation. So much is communicated just by moving one's hands.

Think about it: an open hand or a closed fist; a raised hand that says "stay away" or a hand waving to invite another closer; the offering of one's hand to help; a handshake to seal a deal; a hand extended in fellowship and greeting—all communicate much by the hand.

Scripture bears witness to the importance of hands. There are more than 1,700 references to hands in the Old Testament alone. In the New Testament, it is the laying on of hands that is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit and setting apart for service. Hands in the Old Testament can be used to emphasize the care and concern of God, the strength of God, and the protection of God, and at least in one notable passage, the promise of God to remember us in our struggles.

God's hands offer real care

The psalmist promised, "Though he stumbles, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Ps 37:24). With God's own hand, we are supported and comforted. Have you seen families in a time of crisis take one another's hand as a way of saying: "Don't worry, I am here. I want to help. Don't be afraid." This calls to mind images of God's care in real ways familiar to us all.

God's hands offer real protection

When you see a toddler heading down a dangerous road and a parent or caregiver reaches down and takes that tiny hand into their own,

you know immediately that someone stronger and wiser is protecting them. This, too, is identified in scripture as associated with God's hands. "I the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand and I will keep you (Ps 31:5). We are assured that God's protection is real.

God's hands offer real hope

Think about the Isaiah verse again. "I have not forgotten you. I have carved—"engraved"—you on the palms of my hands." You know if you have something on your hands, it is difficult to forget. Ever need to write something important down and you don't have a piece of paper? You wouldn't be the first person to walk around with a phone number written on your palm. In the context of this verse, God is promising Israel that even during their captivity and exile, God will not forget them. There is hope. Even when Israel was afraid that God had forgotten, God speaks as if to say, "No, I haven't forgotten you. See, I have your name written on my hand." God remembers you. God's knowledge of each of us offers real hope.

Lives are changed in God's hands

Jeremy was a young boy addicted to drugs when he came into care. At Baptist Children's Homes (BCH), Jeremy found a place of refuge away from drugs, away from fear, and away from abuse. While here, Jeremy asked Jesus into his heart. Today, he uses the strength found from his salvation to change his life's path.

Tessa came to live at BCH after her Mom died. Here she found a safe place to grieve. Loving cottage parents wiped her tears, held her hand, and offered comfort.

Children's pain, loneliness and hurt are real. Their needs are real, too. We are able to facilitate healing and hope because you put resources in our hands and together we become God's hands in action, changing lives. Thank you for showing loving hands, assuring those who come to BCH that God cares, protects, and gives hope.

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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Campers turn river obstacles into lessons learned

By Jason Sullivan, Assistant Director, Cameron Boys Camp; Education Director, Wilderness Camping

Eager to begin, the Cameron Boys Camp Rangers set off on their long-awaited journey. This 27-day trip was completely planned by them—food, equipment, toiletries, itinerary, budget, safety—every detail worked out meticulously. Their purpose was to build group unity, explore the *karst* (limestone eroded) topography and interesting geological formations, and have a ton of fun. The boys drove to Cherokee, NC, halfway to their destination, and spent the night. The smooth, clear Green River in Kentucky was in their sights.

The group chose this river for their 200-mile canoe trip because it was perfect to fulfill their goals. Mammoth Caves National Park, the largest cave system on the planet, is split North and South by the waters of the Green and is an ideal spot to resupply food and gear. At the end, the group planned to visit the Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter in Cincinnati.

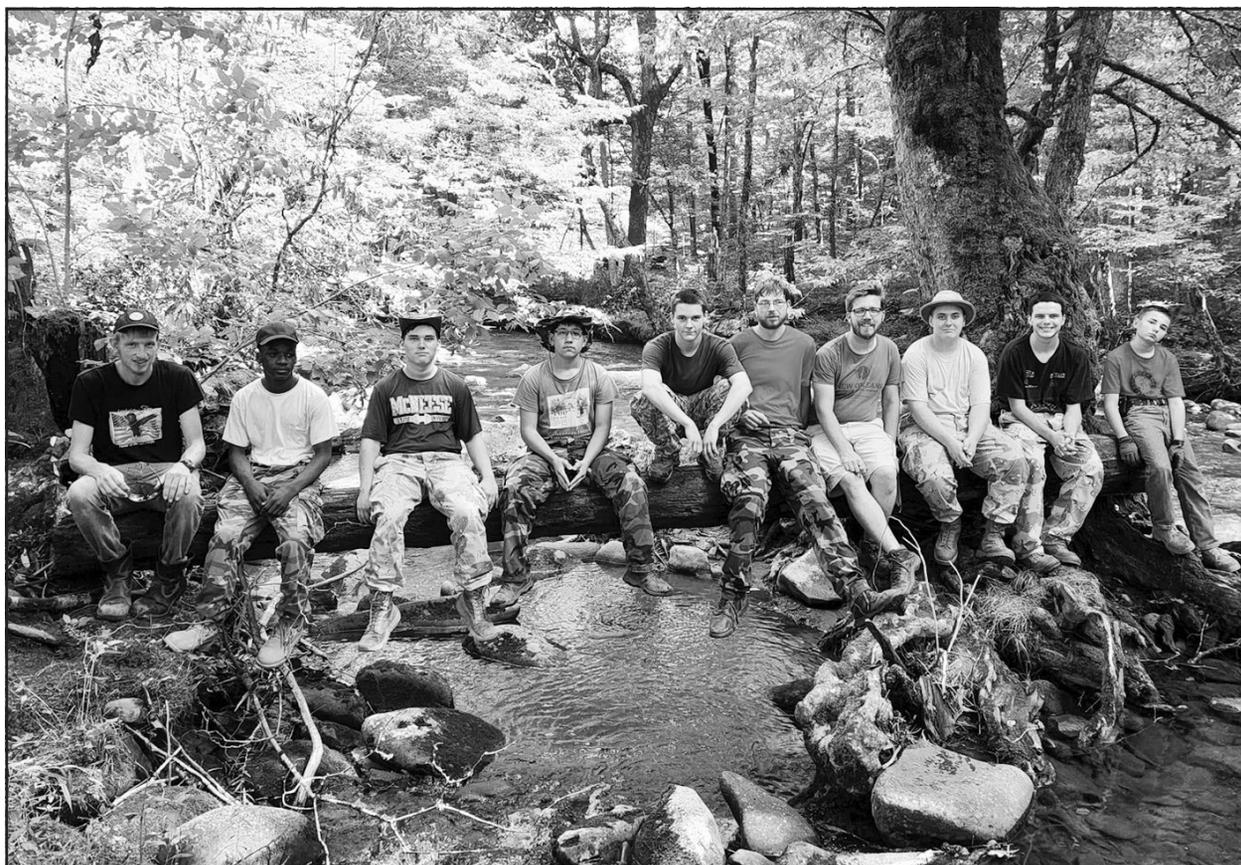
Recent flooding in Kentucky didn't directly affect the Green River but it did raise the Green River Lake directly above where they would put in the canoes. This prompted the Army Corps of Engineers to release water from the dam, causing the river to flow at a dangerous level, far too turbulent to canoe safely. The decision was made to open the floodgates the day the group left. The Rangers were unaware until they reached the park two days later.

Without missing a step, the group adjusted. Another river close by connected with Green River twenty-seven miles downstream, nearly the exact mileage they would have traveled.



The group was pleased that the length of their paddle trip was nearly the same. The only trouble was there was no adequate boat ramp to launch at this new site. Maneuvering the canoe trailer as close as possible to the new tributary meant it would be difficult unloading the gear.

As soon as the group began unloading, the heavens released a downpour. The counselors, privy to the chance of rain, prompted the boys to change into their swimsuits and water shoes before breakfast. Now donning rain jackets, some carried 40-pound water jugs in each hand over



The Rangers canoed a more than 200-mile journey on two rivers in Kentucky using skills they learned at Cameron Boys Camp. Despite the obstacles they encountered, the group pulled together to enjoy the success of teamwork and camaraderie. The wilderness residential program is designed to help boys and their families work out problems through a highly-structured outdoor program and accredited non-public school.

slippery mud. Others lugged waterproof boxes with food and sleeping bags while the warm August rain pummeled them.

Despite the rain and the far more difficult unloading process than anticipated, the boys' spirits never faltered. Spirits remained high. Unity and collaboration

were strong and smooth. In fact, the hardship may have been a catalyst for their positive attitudes. You see, true character is

revealed during challenging times and lessons are learned. These guys were prepared. Cameron Boys camp teaches boys to never give up and that through healthy interaction and teamwork great things can be accomplished.

As soon as the gear was tied into the canoes, the rain faded and the group discussed what had happened and described

what they had learned by using words like fortitude, compassion, patience, and selflessness—and decided they wouldn't change a thing. What could have been stumbling blocks, obstacles to a successful trip, the boys turned into stepping stones. Shoving their loaded canoes away from the mud and rocks along the bank, the boys lifted their heads high and their adventure continued.



Mills Home Alumni Columnist Lib Johnson honored
Charity & Children publisher Dr. Michael C. Blackwell recognized Johnson for her 30 years of service during the Mills Home Homecoming Worship Service on August 7. Pictured left to right are Alumni President Jane Brown, Dr. Blackwell, Johnson, and **C&C** Editor Jim Edminson.

Kicking down doors together...let's kick harder

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

Fall is our focused time to share our Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) story and promote what has been traditionally called our "Thanksgiving Offering." Since our earliest years, churches have gathered together and joined efforts to raise funds to care for the most vulnerable across our state. There have been very lean times throughout the years, but North Carolina Baptists have never wavered in their commitment to *their* children's homes.

The last three years have been a challenge in many ways, but your faithfulness sustained us. No matter the need, whether food, clothes, school supplies, or funds to keep our lights on, you were there. **Thank You!**

Prior to COVID we were in more than 1,000 churches every year sharing the BCH story. Since COVID we have not been able to be in as many churches. We are ready to get back to normal. We are ready to be in your church! We want to come and share the redemptive story of how God is using your church to bring hope and transformation, in and through this ministry.

This lawyer, speaker, and New York Times best-selling author Bob Goff's quote caught my attention. **"I used to think God guided us by opening and closing doors, but now I know sometimes God wants us to kick some doors down."** Let's not let COVID continue to impact our opportunity to tell the story. Let's kick some doors down for North Carolina's most vulnerable. All we need is an invite and we are there.

Last year, you and I as North Carolina Baptists cared for close to 157,000 people. But there are so many more in need. We are located in 35 communities across the state, two offices in South Carolina providing adoption services, and in three orphanages and a clinic in Guatemala. These nearly 157,000, and the thousands more, need you...need me. They need us to kick some doors down on their behalf. They need us to give them a voice. They need us to share their story.

A birthmother enters the hospital to give birth to her precious baby girl. She realizes she is not in a position to provide her precious child a home and calls Christian Adoption Services (CAS). There she finds love and respect for the difficult and courageous decision she makes to place her child into a wonderful, Christian home. The care does not stop once she leaves the hospital but continues as she is given the support she needs to heal. Her journey at CAS leads her to a decision to ask Jesus to be her Lord and Savior. **You are kicking the doors down.**

As a young teen, she struggled to understand her family dynamics. No one seemed to be able to offer her the stability she needed. She lived in

a drug infested world and witnessed the horrible consequences of domestic violence. The trauma filled her with anger, rebellion, and hopelessness. She has lived at BCH now for more than a year. During that time, she has faced her circumstances with truth, truth that has been poured into her by her wonderful counselors. That *truth* has transformed her life. **You are kicking the doors down.**

A precious young boy who as a baby was left in a burning house. His burns were severe and, now at age six, he lives in a BCH cottage care home with his cottage parents. He is overcoming many obstacles, but he will be dealing with the trauma from his past for years to come. This summer he took a beach trip with his cottage where he gazed with awe when he saw the ocean for the very first time. You could see the special moment reflected in his big open eyes and sweet smile. **You are kicking the doors down.**

She is nine years old. She lives in our orphanage in Guatemala. She was severely abused as a baby and young toddler. She has epilepsy and struggles with being able to control aggressive impulses because of the challenges she faces. Prayers are greatly needed at this time. **You are kicking the doors down.**

This family lost everything they owned, including their beloved family pets, in a house fire. They are receiving food, household items, and counseling through the Bob and Carolyn Tucker Greater Vision Outreach Ministry. Staff and volunteers are encouraging, supporting, and guiding them through the ministry's self-sufficiency

program which helps them connect to the resources they need to ultimately support themselves once again. **You are kicking the doors down.**

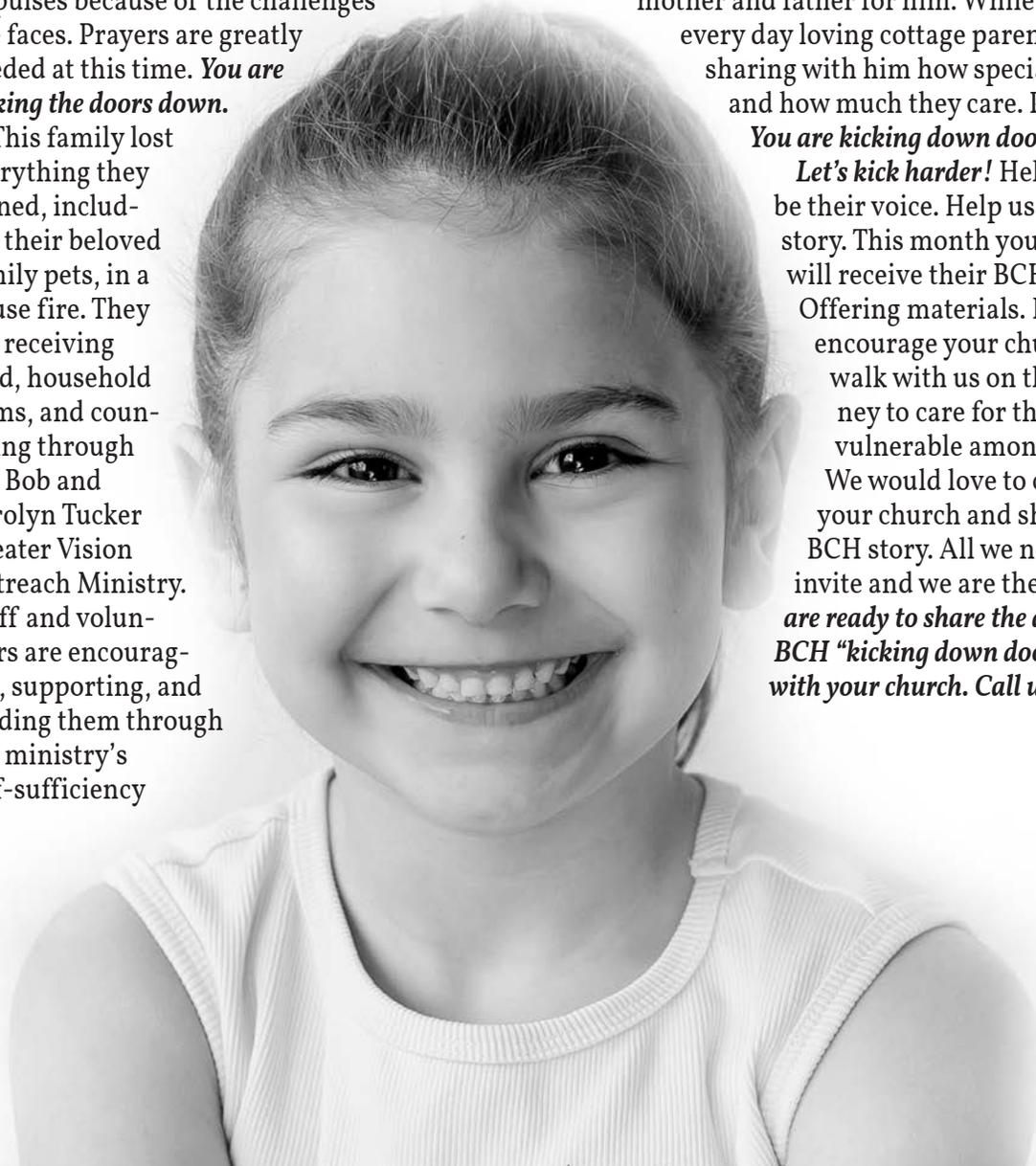
Two young boys were living in a condemned house with no running water or electricity. The youngest boy's first question about his new BCH home was: "Are there rats in this house?" His BCH cottage mom assured him there were none. He told her that at his old house rats crawled around his bed at night. Tonight, he will sleep in a safe (no rat zone) warm bed. **You are kicking the doors down.**

We are caring for several sibling groups. Separation among siblings can be traumatic—no child wants to be separated from brothers and sisters. We are so thankful to have the room in our statewide-locations to be able to keep siblings together and not separating them by distance. **You are kicking the doors down.**

He is now 13 years old. He was abandoned by his family at a young age and is still waiting to be adopted. He dreams of having a family who plays games, watches movies, eats pizza, and attends church together. He believes there is a mother and father for him. While he waits, every day loving cottage parents are sharing with him how special he is and how much they care. Pray!

You are kicking down doors.

Let's kick harder! Help us to be their voice. Help us tell their story. This month your church will receive their BCH Annual Offering materials. Please encourage your church to walk with us on this journey to care for the most vulnerable among us. We would love to come to your church and share the BCH story. All we need is an invite and we are there. **We are ready to share the amazing BCH "kicking down doors" story with your church. Call us!**



The Cook family answers God's call.

In 2018, the lives of Roger and Shanell Cook, along with biological son Jackson, completely changed when they became a licensed foster family with Baptist Children's Homes (BCH).

"Fostering is about doing God's work," Roger shares. "This may be the only chance a child gets to see a Christian family."

The boys and girls placed with the Cook family are among the approximately 17,000 children in NC foster care.

A BCH case manager supports the Cooks and works with them when a child needs a foster family. One of those children was seven-year-old Makala.

A little more than a year after fostering her, the Cook family adopted Makala. On August 1, 2019, Makala became a member of God's family when she accepted Christ.

One day while Roger was at work, Shanell received a call from BCH asking if the family would foster a seven-month-old named Harmony. It had been years since they cared for a baby. Shanell sent a text to Roger sharing concerns and asking for feedback. His response: "God is calling, are you going to answer or let it go to voice mail?"

The Cooks have answered the call time after time. Like Makala, they fostered and then adopted Harmony in July 2020. Just three months later, the Cooks fostered and adopted 17-year-old Ashley. The family still continues to foster.

"Whether it's one hour, one day, one week, one month, one year — every child will know what love is and know who Jesus is," Shanell says.



Scan the code to watch the Cook's video or visit www.bit.ly/22cook



THE ANNUAL OFFERING is one of many ways NC Baptists answer the call to care for "the least of these" at Baptist Children's Homes (BCH). Your giving brings hope and healing to children, families and individuals served through BCH ministries across NC, SC and Guatemala. Because of the offering, the gospel is shared as more than 80% of those BCH serves come to us unchurched and unreached for Jesus. *Through NC Baptists, BCH impacted 156,508 lives in 2021. In the past five years there have been 691 professions of faith.*

DIGITAL RESOURCES

From slides and social media posts to videos and a step-by-step leaders guide, bchoffering.org has all the digital resources your church needs in order to collect its best offering.



INVITE A SPEAKER

Invite a speaker to share with your congregation how lives are changed through their offering. To invite a speaker, call 336.474.1209 or go to bchoffering.org/speaker.



ANNUAL OFFERING

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

BCHOFFERING.ORG | OFFERING GOAL \$1.5 MILLION | WEEK OF PRAYER: NOV. 6-13 |



Dana, Maverick, and Darren

Maverick reminds how God makes all things new

By **Jim Edminson**, Editor
(Continued from page 1.)

Things were moving so quickly in the Murph's adoption process that when the couple received a call from Sheryl Naylor saying there was an expectant mom, they felt they weren't ready. Dana had not finished the photo book used in helping select adoptive parents and Darren had concerns, wondering if he would be a good dad or not. The couple once again were reminded that God was in control. Sheryl met with Whitney and she wanted to meet the Murphs.

"We agreed to meet in a park," Darren recalls. "Dana and I saw Whitney for the first time walking over a hill and we both thought, 'She's beaming.'"

Darren's worry left and he remembers thinking as she came closer, "That's our family. This is our future."

It takes great courage for a birth mom to surrender her child for adoption. The Murphs understood this and have always thought of Whitney as a hero.

"I was overwhelmed with emotion the first time I saw Whitney," Dana says. "I looked at her that day, her love for the Lord was so evident, and I thought, here is a redeemed child

of our Heavenly Father."

Darren says they were no longer just adopting a baby. The couple felt God calling them to be one as a family, and that included Whitney.

"It was God's sovereignty," Dana says. "Not only would we love and care for Whitney's baby, but Whitney and her family would become part of our family. We believed this was God's plan all along. It is His tapestry of redemption, regeneration, and restoration, woven perfectly together. God redefined family for us as only He can do—immersed in unconditional love. And we have never looked back."



Darren and Dana Murph chose an open adoption. The couple have embraced their son's birth mom, Whitney, and Whitney's family as their own. Pictured, left to right, are Whitney's mom Susan, Whitney, her sister Chelsea, Maverick, and Maverick's dad, Darren.

the selection of their new son's name. Dana also hoped to find a name that would add meaning for him as he grew. During worship one Sunday, the words "ocean" and "wave" came to her mind. When she asked Darren if

it made sense to him, he said it did.

Located near San Francisco is Mavericks Beach. It is a legendary location known by serious big-wave surfers, the site of one of the most renowned surfing contests in the world. Mavericks Beach is on the Pacific Ocean, has some of the best waves, and is near the place where Whitney began her journey to the Murphs. The couple chose Maverick for their son's name.

Whitney delivered Maverick early on New Years Eve. Dana and Darren stood by Whitney's hospital bed as she reached her arms out, giving the couple their son. There was incredible peace and unity. Hours later as the day waned, the lights of fireworks illuminated the darkness outside the room's window. Maverick's birth reminded the Murphs, Whitney, Susan and Garon, and the entire Harris family that God makes all things new and restores the broken. As the new year dawned, there was new life and hope to this adoptive family God created.

Darren says people are interested in their story, especially about the open adoption. He says the story "gives people chills" as he testifies that it is God who has done what others believe to be impossible. He says it is God's sacrificial, unconditional love shown one for another that captures the minds of believers and unbelievers alike.

"Maverick is God's own," Darren says. "Dana and I are just thrilled to be the stewards of his life. We cannot wait to see what God has in store next, to see how He will continue to use Maverick to bring Him glory."

Editor's Note: In the December issue of *C&C*, Susan and Garon Harris will share their family's story of restoration.

Dana says that it was Whitney who first exhibited the peace that they all came to feel.

"It was a glimpse of Heaven," she says. "It was the healing power of love and the unity of the Holy Spirit that was evident to us all."

The couple wanted to honor Whitney with

A month of prayer

We know prayer changes things, and Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) needs your prayers every day. By using this four-week prayer guide, your church, Sunday School class, small group or youth group can pray everyday for a different need. The guide gives you insight into the heartache and struggles of those we care for 24/7. Download the digital guide at bchfamily.org/prayer



SUNDAY Please be in prayer for the young boy who, as a baby, was left in a burning house. His burns were severe, but now, at age six, lives in a Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) cottage care home. He is overcoming many obstacles but will be dealing with the trauma from his situation for years to come.

MONDAY Pray for God to work in the lives of boys from Cameron Boys Camp, girls from Camp Duncan and their counselors/teachers as they undertake canoe and backpacking trips. They are often gone for days canoeing or hiking dozens of miles daily and learning team-building and social skills.

TUESDAY Pray for God to fill the staffing vacancies that are open at all of BCH's ministries. BCH needs cottage parents, case managers, counselors/teachers at the 24/7 wilderness camps, Weekday Education teachers, adoption services staff and others. Pray the right people will answer His call to apply.

WEDNESDAY Pray for the children that attend our community Weekday Education classes. Many of them, as well as their families, are having a challenging time readjusting to life in the aftermath of COVID and isolating at home. Pray wisdom and strength for our teachers.

THURSDAY Pray for a sibling group of children ages 14, 11, and 10 who have been waiting to be adopted. Over the years, they have watched their friends be placed with forever families while continuing to wait. Pray for God to use our Christian Adoption Services to connect these with a loving family.

FRIDAY Pray for BCH case managers across the state who are ministering to foster care families, biological families and county social workers who work for NC Department of Social Services (DSS). Pray for our case managers to have the strength and perseverance to be great advocates and role models.

SATURDAY Pray for several mothers in our Family Care cottage care homes at Kennedy Home in Kinston who are having a difficult time locating safe and affordable housing for themselves and their children. Family Care is a residential ministry helping mothers transition to safe, independent living.

SUNDAY Pray for two young brothers who came into our cottage care home. They were living in a condemned house with no running water or electricity. One boy told his BCH cottage mother that rats crawled in his bed at night at his old house. Pray for their healing as cottage parents care for them daily.

MONDAY Pray for women throughout our state and nation who have become unexpectedly pregnant and are facing decisions. Pray that God uses churches and others to connect them with our Christian Adoption Services where we can counsel with them and put an adoption plan in place for their babies.

TUESDAY Pray for our EVERY CHILD foster families. Remember them as they open their homes – and their hearts – to children from our NC foster care system. Most of these boys and girls have been removed from their homes for their safety – many have experienced neglect and/or some form of abuse.

WEDNESDAY Pray for our nine-year-old girl at Good Shepherd Ministries in Guatemala who struggles with ongoing challenges due to fetal alcohol exposure, severe malnutrition, and physical and emotional abuse. While we know she faces overwhelming odds, we also know that we serve a God of hope.

THURSDAY Pray for God to send young men and women who have a heart for children, serving the Lord, and a love of the outdoors to be counselors/teachers (also known as "chiefs") at Cameron Boys Camp and Camp Duncan for girls. Our camps want to serve even more at-risk children and their families.

FRIDAY Pray for three siblings who live in our cottage care homes at Kennedy Home in Kinston. We are so thankful to have the room at our statewide locations to be able to keep siblings together. Pray for the future of these siblings that whether they are with us long or short term that they can remain together.

SATURDAY Pray for our maintenance and information/technology staff members who are vital behind-the-scenes workers. Pray for safety as they travel and work to maintain our many ministries and ensure everything is working properly so our caregivers and staff can provide the best possible care.

SUNDAY Pray for the nine-year-old girl in the care of our Good Shepherd Ministries in Guatemala. She was severely physically abused as a baby and young toddler and has epilepsy. Pray for healing and that the caregivers at Good Shepherd Ministries and the courts would have great wisdom in helping her.

MONDAY Pray for God to inspire more churches to be a part of the EVERY CHILD Foster & Adoption Ministry, the partnership between BCH and NC Baptists to equip Christian couples and churches to care for the approximately 17,000 children in the NC foster care system.

TUESDAY Pray for one of our girls at Camp Duncan who is graduating from the program. She has worked hard to overcome a poor self-image brought on by past trauma from the effect of substance abuse within her family. Pray that she will rely on her relationship with God to help her to persevere.

WEDNESDAY Pray for Roger and Vicki Grossman and Mike and Arwen Elders, the missionaries and staff at Good Shepherd Ministries who serve the K'iche' children and families in Guatemala. Pray for the ministry's cottage parents, staff and the missionary work teams that travel from the states to help.

THURSDAY Pray for the caregivers at our nine cottage homes throughout NC for adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities. Also specifically pray for caregivers Jan and Cathy – pray for healing as they both deal with the loss of their sons. Jan's father has terminal cancer and a son who is deployed.

FRIDAY Pray for a family that our Bob and Carolyn Tucker Greater Vision Outreach Ministry counsels. This community family lost everything they owned – including their beloved family pets – in a house fire. Pray for our staff and volunteers who are guiding them through Greater Vision's self-sufficiency program.

SATURDAY Pray for a grandmother who can no longer care for her two grandsons because of her health. The NC Department of Social Services placed them in cottage care at Broyhill Home in Clyde and she is able to visit the boys often. BCH locations across NC can assist grandparents when needs arise.

SUNDAY Pray for a 13-year-old boy who was abandoned by his family at a young age and is still waiting to be adopted. Pray a family will answer God's call to step forward and adopt this boy who faithfully believes there is a mother and father for him.

MONDAY Pray for one of our Camp Duncan girls who is battling the effects of a traumatic childhood. When she was very young, her family severely neglected her often leaving her alone in cars for such long periods that she never knew if her family would ever return.

TUESDAY Pray for the future success of 11 students who graduated from Western Carolina University in Cullowhee with the assistance of our HOMEBASE College Ministry. Pray for those incoming students who will turn to HOMEBASE for support. The ministry helps students with little or no family support.

WEDNESDAY Pray for the single parents in our communities that Greater Vision counsels: A mother struggling with mental health issues while raising her two daughters, one with special needs. A father who is raising two children by himself while continuing his recovery. A mother diagnosed with cancer.

THURSDAY Pray for families who are seeking God about adopting international children through our Christian Adoption Services. There are hundreds of boys and girls that we represent in the Philippines and Czech Republic who need adopting – there are more children than there are families.

FRIDAY Pray for the five-year-old boy living in a cottage care home at Broyhill Home in Clyde. Recently, the little boy asked his BCH cottage mother to pray for his mom who is in jail. Regardless of what their family members have done, the boys and girls in our care love them dearly.

SATURDAY Pray God will be glorified in every one of BCH's many ministries that takes place throughout the 35 communities across NC, SC and Guatemala where we are located. Pray for God to open up opportunities for the gospel to be shared and for those we minister to come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Video shares four years of story in a few minutes

By **Blake Ragsdale**, Managing Editor

How do you tell the story of the Cook family who has fostered 19 children and adopted three of them in a video that can only be a few minutes long?

It was difficult to compress the four-year journey of this Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) foster care family, in a short video, however, BCH director of communications Blake Ragsdale and his team accomplished the goal. The Cook family is the focus of BCH's Annual Offering that is collected by NC Baptists throughout the state.

"It's always a joyful, but humbling challenge anytime someone entrusts their story to you," Ragsdale admitted. "When sharing it, you want to do your best to honor what God is doing in their lives within the allotted time and space."

The stories of BCH children and families featured for the Annual Offering change from year to year but this challenge always remains.

Ragsdale, BCH communications associate Kourtney Dye and Credence Pictures, the video production team led by longtime partner Randy Durham, spent two days going between the Cooks' home, Mills Home Baptist Church and Fellowship Baptist, the family's home church in Winston-Salem, in order to film their story.



"We captured hour and hours of footage and inspirational testimony from the family



Above, the baptism of Makala, a former NC foster child now adopted by the Cook family, is recreated for the Annual Offering video. The video features the Cooks, a Baptist Children's Homes foster care family. Left, videographer Warren Gentry shows footage to Ashley Cook. Download the videos at bchoffering.org.



members," Ragsdale explained. "In the end, we used less than 10 minutes of footage for three different versions of the video."

The feature video is just over five minutes while a shorter promotion version is two minutes. Finally, there is a one-and-a-half minute feature that focuses on their first adopted daughter, Makala, and her decision to accept Jesus as Savior.

"We are so thankful to NC Baptists who make it possible for lives to be forever changed by collecting an Annual Offering," Ragsdale

said. "The Cook's story is the result of Baptists' faithful efforts. It's important our videos are short enough that there is time for churches to show them in their services and be watched on social media."

Ragsdale encourages churches to share the new as they prepare to collect their offerings.

"Their story is the evidence of how God is bringing hope and healing to NC children through the Annual Offering," Ragsdale said. "We want NC Baptists to see what's accomplished when they give sacrificially."



Watch the Cook family's video



The family shares how NC Baptists' support of the Annual Offering makes their story possible. Share the video with your church. Watch at bit.ly/22cook or scan the QR code.

EVENTS

Friends of Children Saturday Missions
One-day projects for all ages & free meal.
Register at bchfamily.org/foc.

- Sept 10 - Cameron Boys Camp, Cameron
- Sept 17 - Odum Home, Pembroke Kennedy Home, Kinston Camp Duncan, Aberdeen
- Sept 24 - Mills Home, Thomasville

NCBAM Field of Makers | Sept. 23-24 at Denton Farm Park in Denton
A fundraiser benefiting seniors
Register: ncbam.org/field-of-makers.

Western Area Conference at Broyhill Home in Clyde | Sept. 8
Gospel music, free meal, meet the children
Register: bchfamily.org/wac or 828.627.9254

Christian Adoption Services (CAS) Golf Tourney | Sept 12
Cedar Wood Country Club in Charlotte
Register at christianadopt.org/events.

CAS Rocky Mount Banquet | Oct 20
Rose Hill Estate in Rocky Mount
Dinner and program benefiting adoption
Register at christianadopt.org/events.

CAS Spartanburg, SC Banquet | Nov 3
First Baptist Boiling Springs, SC
Dinner and program benefiting adoption
Register at christianadopt.org/events.

Founders Day, Camp Duncan | Sept. 24
Tour campsites, meet the girls, free meal
Register: bchfamily.org/founders-day or 336.474.1209

Homecoming packed with memory-making moments, joyful reunions, and historic Columbarium dedication

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

Each Homecoming, we hear a lot of laughter, squeals of joy, and do a lot of hugging. It is a heart-warming and exciting weekend, though we miss folks who were unable to attend. My hope each year is to convey the joy we all have in being together again. And I think we all pray that the conditions which kept folks away will improve and allow more of our siblings to return next year.

Our President, **Jane Helms Brown**, sends her heartfelt thanks for the generous efforts of **Dr. Michael Blackwell**, the Mills Home (MH) staff, and the BCH staff for their preparation for a wonderful Homecoming. The work of the Alumni is much easier because of the gracious welcome to a beautiful campus, church, and helpful campus workers. So, thanks again to all who helped with Homecoming in any way: **Andy Snovak, Julieta Sentilan, Regina Keener, Melinda Helsabeck, Crystal Saunders, Hannah Smith, Patricia Carroll, Linda Taylor, John Mullin, Kevin McPherson, Larry Morris, Rusty Bunker, Dana Hartman, Andrea Walker, five MH residents, and of course, Jim Edminson and Dr. Blackwell.**

Each year, it is amazing to see council members arriving on campus on Wednesday and Thursday carrying supplies into the gym and beginning the tasks of the weekend: decorating and setting up tables and chairs, preparing, cooking, and serving Friday and Saturday meals, setting up equipment for Saturday's activities, manning the registration tables and auction tables, holding the Association's meeting, and finally cleaning up. As the "homecomers" arrive, council members (with friends and family) continue work non-stop until 11:00 pm. As the weekend ends, they disassemble everything and clean up. Though they love providing a memorable Homecoming, one can see that it is a grueling weekend for them. Jane Brown hopes folks will take time to thank the Alumni Council members and friends who give so much time, money, and hard effort to make

Homecoming such a success: **former MH pastor Randy Stewart, Pete Knight, Flora Hicks Patton, Mark and Cecelia Townsend Wilkerson, Danny Brown, Jimmy and Linda Rochelle, Mike Clay, Ruth Berndt Hodges, Martha Berndt Fisher, Jackie Elliott Walker, Juanita White Messervey, Ron and Lisa Carter Lancaster, Janice King Anderson, Joe Knight, Sharon DeHart Stiles, and Lib Johnson.**

Friday evening of Homecoming was bittersweet as we shared a meal with the **Stewart Family** to honor Randy and Diane. The Alumni Council first honored **Diane** with a posthumous Oscar award for her devoted partnership with Randy in service to the MH children and for her support of the alumni Association for 30 years. We presented to Randy a beautiful plaque "in sincere appreciation" for his service to MH children and support of the Alumni Association for 30 years.

Early Saturday morning, alumni were treated to a meal of delicious breakfast sandwiches, fruit, and various breakfast beverages, compliments of **Charles and Clifton Lambreth**. Everyone loved the meal.

Besides visiting with each other, "homecomers" had the opportunity to participate in these activities: registration, viewing and bidding at the auction display, playing checkers, bingo, corn board challenge, and joining a new event this year, the cake-walk. Thanks to the willing bakers, we had a plethora of cakes and desserts as prizes. The cake walk was a big hit.

Thanks to outgoing President **Jane Helms Brown** for leading us with confident poise through two difficult years. With her presiding at the annual meeting, we covered the usual business items such as minutes and committee reports. We voted affirmatively for the two by-law amendments pertaining to the God's Acre and Columbarium Committees publicized in the Homecoming letter. In the Columbarium update, **Sharon DeHart Stiles** reminded us that last year we had voted to purchase a columbarium

to place at God's Acre, free to alumni, BCH workers, and their spouses. She further reported that the necessary funds had been raised quickly, the structure bought and installed, and the surrounding area beautifully landscaped for a dedication on August 6, 2022. She now sends a hearty thank you to all who made donations and helped with the Dedication of the Columbarium at God's Acre. The ashes of **Burl Moss, Ed Doherty (husband of Janice Lewis Doherty), Tommy Brackett, and Ellis (Bill) Powell** now fill four niches of the unit.

The Association also rediscussed a main guideline pertaining to availability of the Columbarium niches for resting places for the ashes of alumni, former BCH workers, and their spouses. The original ruling allowed for the "placement" of any of the persons named above as the deaths occurred with the understanding that the family would have taken care of the cremation costs and paid for inscription of death information on the niche door. By official vote, the new ruling now allows for people to make a pre-arrangement for burial in the unknown future but again with the families being responsible for the payment for the cremation and the inscription of the death information on the niche door. In short, the only thing free will be the niche for placement of the ashes, but folks may still make donations toward upkeep expenses and purchase of a second unit. Questions regarding use of the Columbarium should be directed to committee chairperson, **Sharon DeHart Stiles**, 704-685-2443.

The Oscar Committee was happy to present the Oscar Award for 2022 to **Rusty Bunker**, Mills Home employee. He was absent because of COVID, so **Martha Berndt Fisher** delivered it to his home after the meeting. He was extremely pleased. Rusty has a long history of helping alumni with many things, especially Homecoming, and he is now serving as MH representative on the Alumni Council.

The Sunday morning worship ser-

vice opened with a warm welcome from BCH President/CEO **Dr. Blackwell** who assured us that the "light will always be on for alumni." With **Charity & Children** editor **Jim Edminson** and Alumni President **Jane Helms Brown** assisting, Blackwell also recognized **Lib Johnson** for 30 years of service as the alumni columnist for the 135-year-old publication. **Pete Knight** then presided over an inspiring military presentation of all branches of service and their respective flags. Participants included **Pastor Randy Stewart** tying it all together with military music and appropriate hymns; **Danny Brown, soloist; Bob Mayton, Bucky Clark, Jim Rochelle, Pat Jolly, Felix Martinez, Nikki Martinez, Mike Clay, Keith Campbell, and Johnny Shields**, "Posting the Colors;" **Johnny Connolly, Joe Knight, Ron Lancaster, and Charles and Clifton Lambreth** ushering; **Sharon Stiles**, leading the choir; and **Geneva Martinez Bourgeois**, sharing her personal "story" of God guiding her life.

Cecelia Townsend Wilkerson and her husband **Mark** send their deep appreciation for all the donations to the auction and all who helped. The auction netted a profit of \$2,000.00 this year. Efficiency of the Auction was much improved by displaying items in the teen room and letting people pay and pickup outside the teen room.

We were deeply saddened to learn of the deaths of **Earl Mills (1959)** and **Dr. John W. Chandler, (1941)**. Information on them will be covered next month, and they will be added to the Memorial listing in that issue.

Congratulations to **Ruth Berndt Hodges(1980)** who is now our President! Her email is roosterhodges@aol.com. Our other officers and other aspects of Homecoming will be covered in next month's column.



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



Mills Home in Thomasville
Alumni honor military at Homecoming
 Mills Home alumni Pete Knight leads a time of recognition for alumni who served in the military during the Homecoming worship service at Mills Home Baptist on Sunday, August 7.



Bob & Carolyn Tucker Greater Vision Ministry
Single mom hits goals, finds success
 Susan is moving towards self-sufficiency with support from Greater Vision. Through her hard work, Greater Vision presented her with the dependable transportation she needed.



Christian Adoption Services
Angelika finds her family
 Terry and Charmie recently finalized their adoption of daughter Angelika. Despite delays in the process, they persevered and are now a permanent family.



Camp Duncan for Girls in Aberdeen
Church group shows Christ's love
 The Pioneers group at Camp Duncan had a great time of fellowship and making jewelry and crafts with ladies from Christ Community Church who spent time with them recently.



Children helping children
Aspen asks for gifts for BCH children
 For her birthday, community child Aspen asked her friends to buy needed items for children at Broyhill Home. She delivered yard games, sports equipment and book bags.



Rocky Hock Baptist in Edenton
Golf tourney nets more than \$10k
 Rocky Hock's annual golf tournament saw 20 teams, 79 participants and volunteers came together to raise more than \$10,000 to minister to those BCH serves.



Motorcyclist Community
Bikers raise back-to-school funds
 A group of bikers from Friendship Baptist in Belmont and First Baptist Hickory raised in excess of \$5,100 to help with school supplies for children living at Broyhill Home in Clyde.



Baptist Children's Homes Staff
Program leaders train to be their best
 BCH's statewide program leaders gathered for training to ensure they are always ready to provide the highest quality care at the cottage homes and 24/7 wilderness ministries.



Community Support
Ministers assist with school supplies
 Pastor Kelvin Sellers representing Ministers United for Christ in Thomasville presents BCH's Jodi Steed with a donation from the group. They are helping with back-to-school supplies.

Can we help? Many ministries beating with one heart.

- Western Area Family Services**
Linda Morgan, Lead Dir., 828-627-9254
- Central Area Family Services**
Regina Keener, Dir., 336-474-1200
- Eastern Area Family Services**
Christopher Allabaugh, Dir., 252-522-0811
www.kennedyhome.org
- Odum Home**
Kathy Locklear, Res. Mgr., 910-521-3433
www.odumhome.org
- Cameron Boys Camp**
Drew Scott, Dir., 910-245-4034
www.cameronboyscamp.org
- Camp Duncan for Girls**
Brad Gearhart, Dir., 910-944-3077
www.campduncanNC.org
- Family Foster Care**
Bob McCleary, 828-627-9254
www.bchfostercare.org
- Christian Adoption Services**
Kevin Qualls, Dir., 704-847-0038
www.christianadopt.org
- Weekday Education**
Brooke Child, Dir., 336-474-1201
- Tucker Greater Vision Ministry**
Sara Becker, Mgr., 336-687-6384
- HOMEBASE** at W. Carolina University
Jim Dean, Dir., 828-293-4660
- Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities**
Tara Sessoms, Dir., 336-474-1259
www.hereismyhome.org
- NC Baptist Aging Ministry**
Sandy Gregory, Dir., 336-474-1221
www.ncbam.org
- Good Shepherd Children's Home**
in Guatemala Keith Henry, COO,
336-474-1215



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 or call him at 336-474-1224

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Mark your calendar with upcoming event dates— Alumna credits KH with instilling strong work ethic

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

There are 16 signed up for the Beach Retreat and you still have time to add your name to the list. As we get closer to the retreat, we will let you know what our cost will be. This will include two nights at the beach plus five or six meals. The more people we have, the cheaper it will be for everyone. We are asking that you bring 2-liter drinks plus some homemade or store-bought desserts. **Debbie Caulder** and I will be preparing the meals. The menu Friday night is ham, potato salad, string beans, sweet potato casserole, peaches, and rolls. Saturday breakfast will be oven cooked bacon, grits, eggs, toast, orange juice, milk, and coffee. That day's lunch is make your own sandwiches—ham, pimento cheese, chicken salad. Supper will be spaghetti, salad, and bread. Sunday breakfast is slated to be sausage, grits, eggs, toast, orange juice, milk, and coffee. Lunch on Sunday is left-overs.

The Christmas party will be December 3. We will let you know the location and cost a little later.

Next year's Homecoming will be June 3 and 4. This past Homecoming had one of the largest crowd we have had in many years. Let's try our best to attend the next one and bring your whole family.

Thank you **Kathy Bridges** for putting so many pictures on the Kennedy Home (KH) Facebook page of the old buildings. Many of them are gone and it is important to remember our history.

At least once a year, I like to include a history lesson. New people get **Charity & Children** and I think that it is important they know a little about our beginnings.

Kennedy Home is located between Kinston and LaGrange in a large agricultural area. The campus was a gift of love. It was originally the home of the Kennedy family and their residence, Cedar Dell, stands as it was in 1832. It was

the residence of **William Lafayette and Emily Hardee Kennedy** who gave the property. The first three residences were three very large white brick buildings named Biggs, Hardee, and Lenoir.

The ministry has served children and families on the 1,245 acres farm since KH's beginning. In the early years, children participated in life on a working farm, seeing food grown and livestock raised. The opportunity built character, and brought hope.

At KH, children find care, Christian guidance, and needed understanding. They receive the best in both proven and creative approaches to the needs of today's troubled youth.

Everyone involved at KH are appreciative to all the kind and wonderful people in our Baptist churches for reaching out and helping all these years. Some ways you can help today are: sponsoring a child for Christmas, bringing paper products to the campus, providing cans of delicious vegetables for the children to eat. You might even purchase food gift cards to a local grocery store so cottage parents can purchase meats and other perishables. You might even choose to send a birthday card and gift for a child. There are so many ways you can help.

I am always writing about my youngins but I was thinking that we need to recognize some of the houseparents and their children. I know that it has been very hard for houseparent's children to adjust living in a cottage with 12 other children and sharing their parents. So in the next few columns, I will be talking about KH children plus the children of the houseparents and other staff members. I want all former workers to send me information about their children and what they have been doing since leaving KH.

Being a proud father, I want to begin this by telling you about my

two sons. When **Becky** and I moved to KH in 1972, our boys **Johnny and Scott** were preschoolers. After we left, we moved to New Bern where Becky and I served at Tabernacle Baptist Church. The boys both graduated from New Bern High School. Johnny trained to be an activities director at assisted living facilities and then he attended Gupton Jones School of Mortuary Science in Atlanta, Ga. He has worked in several funeral homes and is presently the assistant director for Munden Funeral Home of Morehead City and Havelock. He has always been active in church ministry and is presently serving as a minister of music at the Centerview Baptist Church in Jacksonville. He is a past president of Rotary in Morehead City and has served twice as president of the N. C. Funeral Directors Association, serving now as the head of the first district. He is married to **Kris** who is a vice principal at West Craven High.

Scott received his four year RN degree from East Carolina University and worked in the hospital in New Bern before working in hospice and home health. He is presently the Wellness Director of Brookdale Assisted Living and Memory Care in Morehead City. He just received recognition from the NCALA. His district director of clinical services, **Amy Costin**, informed him he was being recognized as a "Hero of the Year." Only three people receive this recognition by the North Carolina Assisted Living Association. In October, he will travel to Winston-Salem to receive the award from **Governor Cooper**. Scott is very active in the Park View Baptist Church in Morehead City, serving as a deacon and Sunday school teacher. He is married to **Melisa Guy** who is principal of the Arthur Edwards Elementary School in Havelock. Both sons have two wonderful children.

Sandra Williams Locastro recently wrote that she lived at KH from

1972-1975 in the Biggs Cottage. She says she was 12 when she arrived and left at age 15 to return home. She writes: "I enjoyed my time at KH. It helped me gain a good work ethic which has stayed with me to this day. I had several sets of houseparents while I lived there and they all brought something different to the table. **Mr. and Mrs. Norris** were my first family, and while they were older, they were quite nurturing to a person afraid of a new place—that was really good for me. They eventually went to work at the infirmary. I also had the **Lee Family**, the **Duprees**, and the **Koblinsky Family**. I enjoyed working at the canteen, swimming in the pool, and skating on the gym floor. I completed high school with honors, graduated from Johnson Community College with a AAS in advertising and graphic design. I am married to my best friend and we have been married for 38 years. I was married at 19, but knew he was "the one" from the day we met. My husband and I fostered 22 children over the years and adopted one girl at age 12. She is now 33. I am currently a real estate agent and own Mountain Charm Realty in Asheville. I also worked for a small newspaper and the department of social services. I also own a photography studio and sell photography of the area on prints, canvas, metal, and greeting cards. We also do portraits and pet portraits. My husband and I have a small mini-farm with four goats, four dogs, and two rabbits. We love our life here. I believe I can achieve anything I put my mind to and try to make each day count by learning something new."

Remember, you are welcome to stop by my home in Havelock anytime. And I encourage my youngins

to send me some news.—jt

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

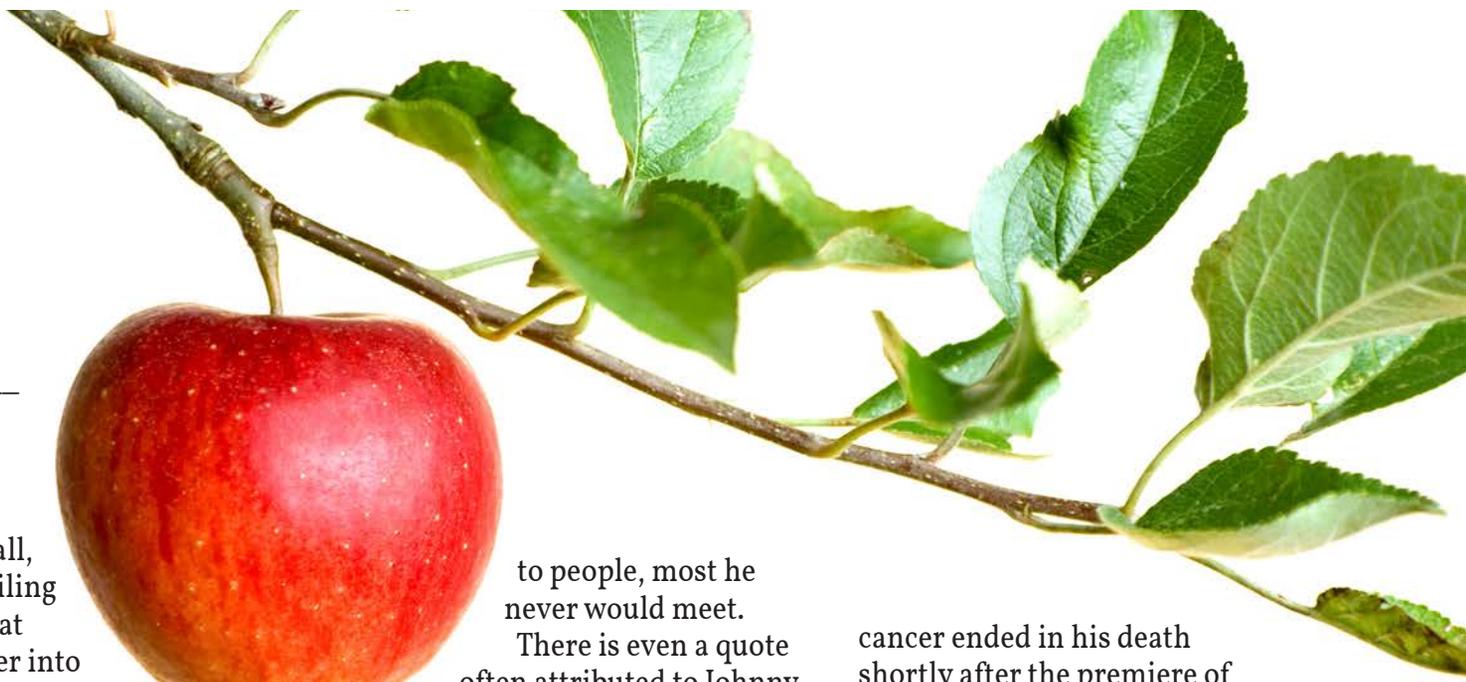


Hope is always in season

By Jim Edminson, Editor

The apple has been depicted as dark and sinister. After all, it is the fruit credited with beguiling Adam and Eve. It is the apple that poisons Snow White, sending her into a “sleeping death.” And everyone knows that “one bad apple spoils the whole barrel.” But maybe the apple gets a bum rap. The notion of the wicked “bad apple” found a champion in teen heart-throb Donnie Osmond who sang to his would-be girlfriend: “One bad apple don’t spoil the whole bunch girl. Oh, give it one more try before you give up on love.” The Osmond’s 1971 hit toppled the villain apple, reinforcing Walt’s depiction of Prince Charming’s love prevailing. In fact, the apple need not be held suspect at all, for if eaten daily, it is powerful enough to keep the doctor away. The once impugned apple steps from the shadows of shame to share stature in the hearts of most Americans with the wholesome and highly respected icons: Mom and pie.

Johnny Appleseed, according to folklore, valued this fruit so much that he went along his life’s path spreading seeds and seedlings, dreaming of a future harvest he would not reap. He made this task his life mission, giving generously to all he encountered. So much was his passion that it earned him his nickname. He planted seeds which would become the fruit; he did not *spread* the fruit itself. He understood that every seed had the potential to grow and become something so satisfying



to people, most he never would meet.

There is even a quote often attributed to Johnny Appleseed: “If I knew without a doubt that the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant my apple trees.” Now, this saying could have been uttered by other people, but the sentiment is a powerful expression of hope. Imagine believing in a mission so greatly that even if it would prove worthless, one would still be busy to accomplish that mission. This kind of diligence, this type of passion, must be admired. It is likened to a gospel passion.

Recently, I heard an unfamiliar hymn, and its words stunned me with their simple message. The first verse reads: “In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise; butterflies will soon be free! In the cold and snow of winter there’s a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.”

As the congregation sang the words, I grabbed my smartphone to snap a picture of the hymnal page, intent on learning the backstory. What I found added to the power of the hymn’s message.

Organist and hymn writer Natalie Sleeth wrote and dedicated these words to her husband, Dr. Ronald Sleeth, a minister and professor of homiletics whose struggle with

cancer ended in his death shortly after the premiere of the music penned in his honor. Like so many of our anthems, the author composed inspiring music and lyrics in the depths of her heartache, expressing hope that comes from walking with the Lord through the valleys of life. The revelation of the hidden promise, the hope we all count on, often remains hidden, seen only by the Lord God. The beauty is that within the smallness of the seed lies the potential that will come in the fullness of time. Our faith demands that we hold fast to what God reveals regardless of what we see.

God’s Word says it this way: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). You and I walk by faith, trusting in the One who offers hope for the day. He does not expect any of us to be unfailingly strong. Our strength is a gift from God. Paul the Apostle reminds us that God promises sufficient grace and His “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

What pleases God is the faith we place in Him. We accomplish nothing through our own strength. We rest in His word, his promises, every time and in every circumstance.

The title of this great anthem is “Hymn of Promise.” Wonderful, don’t you agree?

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