

Home for Christmas: Siblings find forever family

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SHEPHERDSVILLE, Ky. (BP)—Stephanie and Sam Patterson's long and emotional quest to become parents finally was realized one year ago when they adopted four siblings through foster care.

"It feels like the greatest Christmas present we could have ever received," she said of her family's journey.

Marking the anniversary

Dec. 18 marks the first anniversary of the adoption of Carrie, now 12; Carissa, 8; Austin, 4; and 3-year-old Kali. The children lived in the Pattersons' home more than a year while waiting for the Commonwealth of Kentucky to make it official.

"We will celebrate that day (Dec. 18) every year in some way," said Stephanie Patterson, a music ministry associate at Little Flock Baptist Church in Shepherdsville, Ky. "It's the day they became Pattersons, the day they became part of our forever family and everything was final."

The Pattersons' pursuit of parenthood was rocky; the couple struggled 10 years with infertility.

An open heart

Sam Patterson sensed God opening his heart to adoption in watching "the compassion my brother had with his two adopted sons," he said.

"The challenges are there, yes, but the rewards are beyond compare," he insisted.

Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services has more than 6,800 children in state care. Only about 700 were adopted last year.

"My biggest fear was the transition," Stephanie Patterson said, after the couple decided to fast-track the adoption process by going through Kentucky's foster program.

Making the match

With the ink barely dry on the paperwork, she recalled, their caseworker announced a match had been made—three sisters and a brother, ages 1 to 10. The children were in foster care due to parental neglect.

"We were literally speechless," she said. "But we didn't say, 'no.'"

For the next 30 days, the couple prayed and talked, then prayed and talked some more.

Only after agreeing to take the sibling group did they finally look at the children's photograph. What they saw instantly captured their hearts—three smiling children decked out in Christmas pajamas. The oldest held a cherubic infant in a peppermint-striped onesie.

"I would just sit and stare at it," she said. "They were the most beautiful children I had ever seen. Who would neglect these children?"

From abandonment to acceptance

Within days of formalizing their status as foster parents, the Pattersons met the children—each with varying levels of understanding what was going on around them.

Kali and Austin were little more than babies. The older girls, however, were aware the Pattersons' home was the third they had lived in during the three years after their birth parents abandoned them.

"All we could say was, 'We're so glad you are here in our home,' and, 'We're going to take care of you,'" Stephanie Patterson recalled.

Support from church

Members at Little Flock were a key source of prayer and practical help when the children arrived Oct. 15, 2013, her husband said.

"We wouldn't have made it through that first year without our church, our family and friends," he said.

With little time to prepare, the Pattersons only had what the state requires—a room, one bed and a dresser for every two children.

Thanks to their Little Flock family, the children's rooms quickly filled with everything they could need or want—clothes, toys, diapers and a crib. They even had a double stroller.

"It was unbelievable how much was provided," she said. "My house was like a revolving door. People would call and ask if they could drop off dinner on our porch."

God at work

The initial chaos soon gave way to routine and, 14 months later, with the flourish of a judge's pen, the Pattersons officially became a family of six last December. Family and friends joined to celebrate the adoption proceedings, as did Carrie's entire sixth-grade class from Little Flock Academy.

"God's hand of sovereignty is all over this," Sam Patterson said, from the completion of their new home to his new job at an insurance agency that allows him to be home each evening.

God also has been at work in the hearts of the children, the Pattersons

insisted. Carrie and Carissa were baptized as new Christians last fall.

Picture of grace

Stephanie Patterson advised anyone who wants to become a foster and adoptive parent to start by establishing a solid support system.

“Through this experience, God has shown us such a picture of grace,” she said. “I want to encourage families. Yes, you really can do this. You really can bring someone into your home and love them as if you have given birth to them.”