

# Charity & Children

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

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## Birth mother's choice unites the love of two families

By Blake Ragsdale | Editor

The circumstances 15-year-old Amajha Slade was facing made it impossible for her to see the bright future that lay ahead. Amajha was unexpectedly pregnant. At the time, the uncertainty and choices in front of her were overwhelming.

"It was shocking not really knowing exactly what to do or how everything was going to work out," Amajha, who is now 27 years old, reflects "I was scared to tell my parents, and just to see how my life was going to change."

Amajha found the courage she needed to tell her mother and father, Tim and Cynthia. With her parents' support firmly in place, the three of them began figuring out how to put the best plan in place for everyone involved.

For Amajha and her family, there was only one choice regarding her pregnancy: adoption. While this was never in question, finding the right organization to lead them through the journey ahead was an unknown.

The answers would begin to fall in place once they discovered Christian Adoption Services (CAS). CAS is the adoption ministry of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina. The staff works closely with expectant parents and with those who are already parenting and have decided to place their unborn baby or child for adoption.

Amajha made a phone call and was able to connect with Sheryl Naylor, CAS Senior Director of Domestic Adoption.

"She was just so amazing, even though I was scared in my own little thoughts," Amajha recalls. "Ms. Sheryl held my hand and my family's hand."

That conversation gave Amajha and her family the comfort and confidence that they needed.

"They gave us the Word and gave me wisdom," she continues. "That's how I knew that this is exactly the agency where I wanted to place my baby."

*(Continue on page 6)*



Birth mother Amajha Slade her biological son, Dax, tightly in her arms. At age 15, Amajha was unexpectedly pregnant. Today, through Christian Adoption Services, the 27-year-old shares a wonderful relationship with her son and his adoptive family, Chad and Stacia. Note: Birth Mother's Day is Saturday, May 9, 2026.

# Saying "yes" is hard, but God will meet you there

By David Melber | BCH Chief Executive Officer



**W**hat will we choose this day?

That may seem like an unusual place to begin but it is a question of the greatest significance. Our choices reveal our beliefs. They expose what we truly love and what we actually

trust. And throughout Scripture, God calls His people to choose. In grace He even shares the outcomes of our choices to help us see what lies before us.

Satan, for his part, loves to complicate things. Doubt. Delay. Distraction. These are his tools designed to paralyze us right at the moment of decision. Even now, the fact that you are reading these words is itself a choice.

I remember sitting in church as a young boy before I knew Jesus as Lord and Savior hearing the invitation and telling myself, *maybe next week*. But the choice was always simple: say yes or, by saying nothing, say no. If we are honest, most of life's most important decisions come down to exactly that. A binary choice between two answers: yes or no. Even more perplexing is that many of the most significant choices are these binary decisions on seemingly small actions. We get hung up on wanting to make the right choice on large life altering decisions, yet I would propose that our choice in small daily decisions sets the pattern for us to choose wisely in the big decisions.

God set this same kind of choice before Israel. After delivering them from slavery and leading them to the land He had promised, He gave them covenant terms not to burden them, but for their good and His glory. Read Deuteronomy chapters 8 and 9 and you will see the pattern clearly: God sets boundaries for His people because He loves them. Those principles are just as alive today.

God calls us to live in a way that marks us as His—set apart, distinct, and belonging to Him for His purposes. What we do with our time, our

money, our relationships, and our days speak loudly to the world about what we truly believe. As Joshua declared to Israel in Joshua 24:14–15:

*“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* JOSHUA 24:14–15:

As you read those words, the Spirit may be gently stirring something in you right now or perhaps not so gently. Maybe it is the choice to receive salvation in Christ. **Choose Jesus today.** Maybe it is a relationship that needs reconciliation with a family member, a coworker, or a friend. **Choose to reach out today.** Perhaps it is a long-delayed decision to serve at your local church, held back by the quiet lie that you are not equipped or worthy enough. Do not believe it. God calls us in our weakness precisely so that His power can be made known through us.

For some of you, this may be a call to step into the work of serving vulnerable children and families like we do here at BCH. If so, I want to be honest with you: this is messy, and

hard. It will require you to unlearn assumptions about how to help children from hard places. It will demand that you protect them even from well-meaning actions that can do more harm than good. We are continually evaluating our practices at BCH to ensure all we do is in the best interest of the children we serve. We have such a short time with the children in our care, and we want to provide the most stable environment possible. God will break your heart when you see what they have endured. But He will also meet you there, and He will equip you as you walk in obedience just as He empowered Israel to take the Promised Land, one faithful step at a time.

Your journey begins with a single word: **YES.** As John 3:30 reminds us, the path forward is one of becoming less so that He becomes more.

## Say "Yes" today.

There are a number of opportunities where you can give God your "yes":

- Become a prayer partner with us
- Give the critical support that enables ministry to the vulnerable
- Take the next step toward supporting foster and adoptive families or become one

Whatever God is calling you to—**step out in faith and say "yes."** He will meet you there.

### 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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# Impact a life by celebrating your mom or dad

When you give a gift in honor or memory of your mother and/or father, you are changing the life of parent who is being impacted through the Baptist Children's Homes ministry.

Here's how you help us care for a mother or father:

- **Birth Mothers:** These are the brave women who make an adoption plan for their child through our Christian Adoption Services. From identifying the forever family for their child to staying connected after placement, we are there for these moms for life.
- **Family Care Moms:** Our residential program for vulnerable moms allows us to help them rebuild their lives and equip them for future independence and success while parenting their child(ren).
- **Dads & Moms of Children in Cottage Care:** We provide compassionate support to dads and moms of the boys and girls who live in our cottages as they hope to reunify with their children. We encourage them in their goals and model Christ's love to them.
- **Parents of Adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities:** For the parents of these special adults, they are able to maintain close connection with their children while having the peace of mind that their sons and daughters are being cared for well.

When you make your life-changing gift, fill out and include the form below with the enclosed envelope. **We will celebrate your loved one by publishing your parent's name(s) in the August edition of Charity & Children.** The deadline is July 1, 2026.

Your generosity makes a difference in the lives of moms, dads as well as the children we serve who are in need of hope. **Thank you!**

David Melber, BCH CEO



[bchfamily.org/momanddad](http://bchfamily.org/momanddad)



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To give by credit card: [bchfamily.org/momanddad](http://bchfamily.org/momanddad) or call 336.474.1312

# A mother's legacy

By Blake Ragsdale | Editor



**M**y mother took her last breath on the morning of August 4, 2025. Years earlier, in 2018, the medical team tasked with helping her fight liver cancer offered little hope that she would live to see the turn of the current decade.

But this invasive, nasty disease underestimated two things. The first is that my mother, Ruth Ann Owens, had always been an overcomer throughout any challenge. Most importantly, cancer could not contend with her Creator and the plans for her that He already had in place.

For years, Mom worked professionally as a job coach, using her God-given gifts to help individuals struggling to find employment gain the tools, confidence and resources they needed to succeed. At the start of 2021, she retired from her job for a greater purpose: trading a pay check for a volunteer opportunity with Baptist Children's Homes (BCH). God's post-cancer plans for Mom unfolded in extraordinary ways.

From working with BCH's older youth who were aging out of foster care to serving mothers through our Family Care and Birth Mother residential ministries, the Lord used my mother's experience and compassion to pour deeply into the lives of women who needed hope.

She met with these women in person, helping them build resumes, teaching interview skills, showing them how to properly navigate technology-based job searches, and sometimes simply being a listening ear. It wasn't uncommon for them to text or talk on the phone throughout the week or even after hours. Each of them knew Mom was there for them—walking alongside them and helping them soar.

She witnessed many go on to achieve their goals—finding the right jobs and healthy situations that allowed them to thrive. God used these "bonus years" after 2018 for my mother to pour every ounce of her heart into the lives of others and to watch them flourish.

Even on that summer day in 2025, when she entered the hospital because her cancer had returned, Mom was still serving others. She was still serving the Lord.

I am profoundly thankful for the legacy Ruth Ann Owens has left behind. I see it in the ways she shaped who I am today. I see it in my daughter as she completes her undergraduate degree in social work. And I see it in the lives of the mothers and young people she served as a BCH volunteer—individuals who have the opportunity to thrive because of the BCH ministry and the generosity of faithful supporters.

May we serve the Lord by serving others, carrying out a legacy that will, in turn, be carried onward by those He has allowed us to impact.

*"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" — GALATIANS 5:13-14*

# Sophie sees her faith and confidence start to soar

By Blake Ragsdale | Editor

The swing that sits in the yard at Laura's Home is a spot for the children to play, laugh, and simply have a good time. For 12-year-old Sophie\*, the swing has an altogether different purpose.

She finds a moment alone when the swing is unoccupied and the sounds of playtime have faded. Sophie rests herself in its familiar seat, pushes her feet against the ground beneath her, and starts swinging.

To her, the swing means safety, calmness, and an opportunity for some quiet time. At Laura's Home, which is comprised of two residential cottages at Baptist Children's Homes' (BCH) Shelby-based ministries, that sense of motion reflects something bigger—a momentum that is carrying her forward with purpose, hope, and joy.

"We're very proud of her.

Sophie is still working through things, but she's doing great," says Lori, one of Sophie's houseparents. "She's in this setting (at Laura's Home) and has been able to thrive. She's exceptional and she is absolutely worth it."

Sophie is in the custody of the state's foster care system and was placed with BCH a year ago. She lives in the cottage with her houseparents, Christian men and women who provide daily care and support as they model the love of Jesus.

A important goal for her cottage parents has been helping Sophie learn that it is okay for her to simply enjoy being a child. This has taken some time because of the delicate circumstances of her home life.

Sophie has a younger brother, who has been safely placed in a different care situation. Back home, she often found herself in the role of caregiver to her brother. Daily necessities were often scarce. The dynamics inadvertently created a need for the 12-year-old to carry extra responsibilities in the home.

"It is something we are walking through with



Twelve-year-old Sophie receives Christ-centered support from her caregivers and staff at Laura's Home. Above L to R: Bryan, Jill, Regina, Lori, and Hannah. Below: During at time of worship at the week-long "Mountain Camp" retreat, Sophie lifts her hand in praise as the worship team leads.

\*Note: Sophie's name has been changed for her privacy.

her," Lori shares. "We are teaching her that her job here is to be a kid."

Bryan, alongside his wife, Jill, also serves as Sophie's houseparents. He recalls a particular day when he stopped at the store to purchase snacks for the children.

"We were getting Sophie something and she said, 'that's too expensive. I don't want you

to spend that kind of money,'" Bryan remembers. "I told her, 'no, we're going to get this.' She's always looking out for not wanting to spend too much money. It comes out of her concern for others and what they need."

That care and consideration for others also includes the students at her school. Sophie, who is a straight-A student, is very conscientious of her classmates.

"She will tell us about standing up for a kid who somebody else was picking on," Lori says. "Her heart is for the underdog."

As time has passed, the houseparents have

watched the sixth grader become more settled and comfortable with life in the cottage. As those bonds with her caregivers have become stronger, they have watched Sophie start to blossom.

"We've seen her open up. She'll just sit and share her heart as she's learned to trust us," Jill says. "Now, she loves to give hugs—she just comes up randomly and gives them. And also for us to see her grow spiritually, too."

Houseparents are more than BCH employees—they are local missionaries. Living out their faith in front of the children they serve and introducing them to Jesus is the most rewarding aspect of doing life with them.

The cottage attends a local church and is regularly involved in its services and activities. In addition, houseparents lead devotional times in the cottage which can lead the children to wanting to learn even more about the gospel.

"They're usually good discussions which lead to a lot of deeper questions," Jill explains. "When we ask them what we've read about, Sophie can spit it out verbatim."

In addition, the children attend spiritual activities, retreats, and events. These include Bridge Camp, hosted by a foster care-focused nonprofit, as well as Mountain Camp, a week-long retreat for all BCH children in care, organized by a church in eastern North Carolina.

The Christ-centered care and discipleship Sophie was receiving led to a pivotal moment when she attended Vacation Bible School (VBS) last summer. Her BCH case manager, Hannah Hord, and her houseparents received a form Sophie filled out at the end of VBS. It was a bright indicator that the Lord was indeed at work in the 12-year-old's heart.

"It said she was interested in being saved," Hannah reveals. "All of these things and the camps she was able to go to had fueled her fire."

(Continued on page 7)



# BCH trains churches to help children impacted by trauma at NC Baptist Kid's Ministry Summit

By BCH Communications

Children's ministry leaders from across North Carolina gathered with a shared purpose—to best serve the next generation with wisdom, compassion, and gospel-centered care—at the Kid's Ministry Summit hosted by NC Baptists. Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina (BCH) was honored to be among the event sponsors, partnering with churches for a day of worship, training and encouragement focused on shaping the next generation for Christ.

The one-day summit on April 20 at Hopewell Baptist Church in Monroe was designed to refresh, equip, and inspire leaders through biblical teaching, practical workshops, and meaningful connections. BCH's involvement underscored its ongoing commitment not only to serve vulnerable children through its statewide ministries, but also to equip churches through its growing church mobilization initiative.

Through **Every Child | Every Church**, BCH comes alongside churches by sharing decades of experience in understanding and responding to the needs of children impacted by trauma, loss, and brokenness. The initiative complements BCH's residential care, foster care, adoption, and family services by equipping churches to extend thoughtful, gospel-centered care and wraparound services within their own communities.

As part of the Summit programming, BCH trainers Erica Spivey, Senior Director of Training and Church Mobilization, and Lorie Brinkley, Case Worker/Trainer, led three connected trauma-informed breakout sessions titled

*Seeing Through His Eyes*. The sessions focused on creating safe spaces for children, responding to challenging behaviors with wisdom and grace, and understanding how brokenness impacts the children churches serve. Rooted in biblical

truth and informed by trauma-aware practices, the training helped leaders better recognize the deeper stories behind children's behaviors and respond in ways that invite connection and discipleship.

"Our heart is to help churches say yes to children and families who are hurting," Spivey shared. "Many of them are already sitting in our pews."

Brinkley added that they have seen God use trainings to "transform classrooms into places where kids feel safe, known and ready to grow in their faith."

Sarah Mansfield, Children's Director at Hyde Park Baptist Church in Lumberton, attended one of the breakout sessions and said the training closely aligned with her church's current focus.

"Our church recently has been diving into the discipleship pathway of our church goals," Mansfield shared. "One of those goals is to come alongside foster families. And really, the area

where we're located is just heavily populated with the need for foster families."

Hyde Park's recovery ministry has also brought an increasing number of children with complex backgrounds into church.

"With that, we've had an influx of more

children that bring a lot of things with them," Mansfield said, reinforcing the need for volunteers who are equipped to respond with understanding rather than reaction. Hearing about stress responses vulnerable children can exhibit



Above: For practice, attendees discuss a need they might encounter in children's ministry and how to best respond using trauma-informed practices. Left: The group lists behaviors a child might display that could signal to a children's ministry leader or volunteer that the child has been impacted by trauma.

caught Sarah's attention immediately.

"One of the big takeaways was understanding what those stress responses are and what signals to look for," she said.

Mansfield emphasized that children's ministry is ultimately about discipleship, not behavior modification.

"We're not trying to modify behavior when they're in our classrooms," she said. "We're trying to help lead them to Jesus, and sometimes we have to do a little digging in order to do that."

A quote shared during the breakout also resonated deeply with her: "Trauma distorts how people see God, themselves and others." Mansfield said the insight reinforced the church's role in gently removing barriers while trusting the Lord to bring healing.

Note: More trauma-informed trainings will be scheduled in the near future. Stay up to date at [bchfamily.org](http://bchfamily.org).



BCH's Lorie Brinkley and Erica Spivey lead the "Seeing through His eyes" trauma-informed training. she has been impacted by trauma as a part of the NC Baptist Kids Ministry Summit in April.



# Birth mother's choice unites the love of two families

By Blake Ragsdale | Editor

(Continued from page 1)

Fifteen-year-old Amajha and her parents were encouraged by their connection with CAS and conversation with Sheryl. Part of CAS's compassionate process is to walk alongside the expectant mother and empower her to have input in the adoption plan.

Having that input means expectant mothers, like Amajha, can choose the adoptive family for their unborn child from CAS's pool of thoroughly vetted prospective adoptive families.

CAS team members work with the prospective Christian husbands and wives who desire to adopt and provide a Christ-centered home to a child or children. These "waiting families", as they're known, create profiles—a collection of information and photos about themselves—that are available to expectant mothers and families.

Among the many profiles Amajha saw, one family in particular stood out—the Eisengas.

The Eisengas were one of the few out-of-state families CAS was working with at the time. Chad and Stacia lived in Iowa with their biological son and daughter.

"With the distance between us, we had the opportunity to meet Amajha and her parents through FaceTime." Stacia recalls about their first conversation in 2017. "The match between us was complete."

As Amajha's July 2, 2017 due date approached, Chad and Stacia flew into NC to be close. When Amajha went past the date, it gave them all time together.

"The night before she was induced, we got to all have dinner together which was beautiful," Stacia says.

The following day, Stacia was invited to be in the delivery room when Amajha gave birth to son, Dax.

"To be able to support her during the delivery as well as just to see Dax take his first breath was priceless," Stacia shares. "I don't think there was anything that could prepare me for the beauty of that moment. And then, to give her the time—just the two of them—so they could bond was so important."

The families agreed to an open adoption plan. This is an adoption arrangement in which the birth parent(s) and adoptive family have an agreed-upon level of communication and rela-



Above: In a photo from several years ago, Chad and Stacia Eisenga are with biological son and daughter, Teagan and Taya, and adopted son Dax. Amajha Slade, Dax's birth Mother, sits alongside them. Below: Amajha is with her biological son Dax (to her right), parents Tim and Cynthia, and Dekker (front), the Eisenga's other adopted son.

tionship with one another after the adoption is finalized. This can include things such as exchanging letters, photos, or updates, phone or video calls, and—when everyone agrees— in-person visits.

Since then, the Eisengas have returned to Iowa with Dax and settled into their life. The two families have not only remained in contact, but Chad and Stacia flew Amajha to Iowa for Dax's first birthday.

"He was obviously very young, but when she came to visit you saw that they just had this bond," Chad shares. "They hadn't seen each other in person since Dax was born, but they had this immediate connection. You could see his heart understood their bond."

Since that visit, Amajha and her parents have traveled to Iowa and the Eisenga family has visited them in North Carolina. The distance between the Slades and Eisengas may present a unique challenge, but there is a more meaningful dynamic that has risen to the surface.

"We are an African American family, and I placed my son with a white family," Amajha says. "We are so grateful for this open adop-

tion because you learn that you really don't see color—they took in my son and gave him a life that I could not give him."

Tim admits that he was initially against open adoption. Sheryl, with CAS, was able to alleviate his concerns and help Tim understand why it was important for his daughter to make the decision. Today, Tim's perspective is completely different.

"I consider them like blood family," he says. "We've spent time together—both when they came here and when we went up there—and we have become family."

Sheryl has stayed in contact with the families, and Amajha has attended many of the CAS Birth Mothers Retreats, a special weekend that offers birth mothers a time of encouragement especially spiritually. Throughout the years, Sheryl has seen Amajha graduate college and become a young professional.

"I've seen her come out of her shell and tell her story," Sheryl beams. "The retreat has really helped her, and she wants to share her story in order to help the next girl who needs to hear it and experience her own healing."

Today, Amajha clearly sees that the Lord was walking before her from the very beginning.

"That 15-year-old didn't know the plan God had for her life," Amajha concludes. "God has been at work in my life and in this journey. It's put me in a place of gratitude knowing that all of this has been His doing."



# Sophie sees her faith and confidence start to soar

By Blake Ragsdale | Editor

(Continued from page 4)

Sophie met with the family pastor at their church. Their time together affirmed that Sophie wanted to follow Jesus.

"He told us, 'she's ready,'" Hannah says. "And the very next Sunday, she was baptized at the church."

Youth leaders at church have seen Sophie's faith in Jesus and knowledge of the bible blossom. Makayla, a church member and volunteer, remembers one Wednesday night in particular.

"At youth, they were playing a game on stage. When it was her turn to respond, her answer was straight from the bible," Makaya shares. "It warms my heart to know that they are getting spiritual support both at Laura's Home and the church. We want to come alongside it and encourage it."

Sophie enjoys worshiping when the cottage attends Sunday services. As the worship team leads the songs from the stage, it's not unusual to see Sophie raise her hand in praise.

"When she's in the service, she is praising," Jill says. "You can tell with her it's from the heart and very real."

That change is evident in the cottage. Her faith shines through her desire to pray for the other children she lives with at Laura's Home.

"To hear her pray, oh my goodness, she is in the throne room. I mean, she is talking to her Savior and is evident her heart is in it," Jill shares. "When we pray over kids who are leaving our care, Sophie is right there. She'll drop to her knees as we come around somebody and pray for them."

Sophie's spiritual growth has also given her a newfound confidence in who she is and in discovering her own talents and interests which includes performing in a local theater.

Hannah discovered that the theater was hold-



Sophie has seen her confidence and faith grow during her time living at Laura's Home. Above: Sophie helps cook at the cottage. Below left: Houseparents make memories with the children during a day of hiking, pausing at a scenic mountain overlook. Below right: Sophie gives a piggyback ride to a houseparent's child.

ing auditions for "Alice in Wonderland." Despite having no experience, Sophie was eager to participate. She prepared for her audition by learning a monologue for the role of the pigeon.

"She was nervous so we prayed on the way to the audition. Her prayer was, 'Lord, I know this is a very small thing if this is the path you have for me,'" Lori says. "There was just this incredible humbleness in her prayer and in leaning on God to direct her steps."

The news of her successful casting came on the day the cottage was arriving for a snow tubing trip.

"I was able to go tell her and this huge smile just lit up her face," Hannah says. "She immediately said, 'I've got to go tell Ms. Jill! She ran over to Jill and Bryan and told them. I mean, she was so excited.'"

Theater has been another avenue that has helped Sophie be a normal child who is developing her interests and discovering who she is and who she is becoming. They have seen her self-esteem continue to rise.

"She's just had a real confidence these past few months. She is growing," Hannah says. "And

she has just really taken her walk with Christ seriously. I think that's a lot of where she's gotten her confidence."

Sophie, her family, Laura's Home staff, and her state social worker are all working together for Sophie's immediate care as well as her future. Her family is working on goals to help them navigate the challenges that are keeping them apart. She does have visits with her grandparents, parents and her little brother.

Laura's Home is here for Sophie as long as she needs a caring place to live and thrive while the team around her helps with future plans that are in everybody's best interests.

In the meantime, all of her caregivers at Laura's Home have been overjoyed at watching Sophie flourish.

"Sophie has gone through everything as gracefully as any child I've seen," Lori concludes. "I mean, what an honor we have to see the journey and the growth as these experiences shape and mold her and all of our kids."

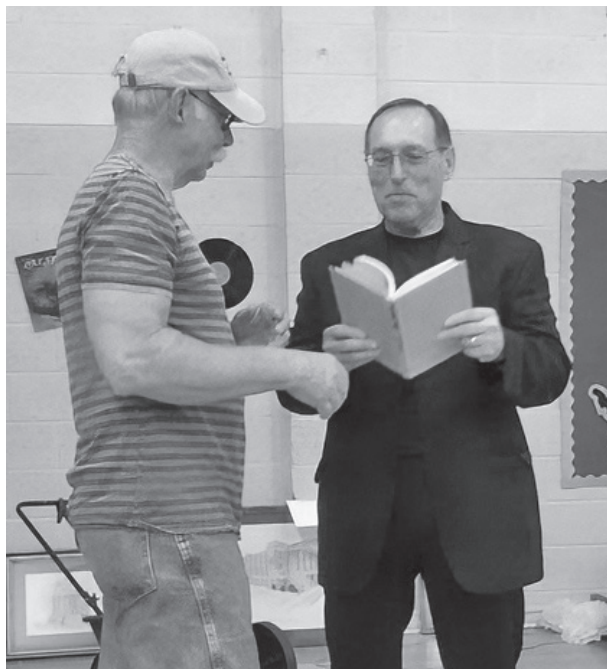
"There are obstacles and there are challenges, but overall all of this will be a huge part of her whole story—her whole God story."



# Doug's story: Growing up "rich" at Mills Home

By Douglas Michael Jones | Kennedy Home Alumnus

*Editor's Note: BCH alumnus Doug Michael Jones (known as Doug Tolbert when he was in care from 1959–1963) reflects on his childhood at Mills Home and the foundational care that helped shape his life. After leaving Mills Home, Doug went on to build a successful career in mortgages and residential real estate, founding Mortgage Magic. He built community service into the company's culture giving back by supporting local charities through creative outreach for children such as performing magic shows. All of this is rooted in values Doug learned at Mills Home and inspired by Matthew 25:35–40. He and his wife, Trudy, raised two children, and now have two grandchildren. Doug's inspirational story reminds us that stability, structure, and consistent support are not just lessons from the past—they are enduring essentials for helping the vulnerable children we serve today discover hope as we show them the love of Christ and equip them for a successful future.*



Above left: Alumni Harry Walls gifts a book to Doug Jones before a magic show Jones is performing for the children at Mills Home. Above right: During a show, Jones invites a child from the audience on stage to assist him with a magic trick. Below: Jones' sister is on the right in this historic photo under the archway entrance in Thomasville.



mentioned in a blog that I spent part of my childhood in an orphanage and a friend suggested I write about how that influenced my business life. It has taken me a long time to feel comfortable about writing about this part of my life.

I was never a complete orphan. I knew my mother and two brothers and two sisters. I never knew my dad and we were poor mentally and financially. I entered the orphanage (Mills Home, Thomasville, NC) at the age of 10 and left when I was 15. My mom had married and was finally financially free enough to house and feed us. Her husband was a hard-working man who worked at General Motors in Fremont which is now the site for Tesla. My mom, I think, was bright but only attended school to the 3rd grade. My new stepdad went through the 8th grade.

I was born in the Appalachian Mountains and that is the first home I remember. We took baths in a galvanized tub and used an outhouse. Some of the places we lived had electricity. I am not completely sure but don't think this house had electricity. One time we lived in an apartment above a chicken store in Mount Airy, NC (or Mayberry really for you Andy Griffith fans). When we knew we would be going to the orphanage we were living in a small isolated house in near Suffolk, VA at the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp. I say at the edge but we were surrounded by swamp land, snakes and sometimes smaller alligators.

I was the oldest of five children and my mom worked as a waitress at Howard Johnson restaurant. We were unsupervised. My mom did not have money for any child care. We were living in the swamp when mom told us about Mills Home in NC and we needed to live in NC for six months before we could be accepted to the orphanage. So we moved to Thomasville, NC.

I remember being in Thomasville Elementary School and I was walking down the stairs. A teacher looked at me and said, "Boy, you need a haircut." I replied: "My momma says I will get one this week even if we don't eat." The next day that teacher took me to a barber shop and paid for my haircut.

When we entered Mills Home we became rich kids. My brother and I were placed in the Chowan Cottage with 18 or so boys our age and my sisters were placed in the cottage for the youngest girls. A younger brother who was only two was put into a foster home.

How were we rich? We had showers, shoes, clean clothes, meals at meal times, and lived in a beautiful safe environment. We had church three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. We had support. Every child had a case worker who was a professional in child care. I had Boy Scouts, and we

camped out one time each month rain or snow. I also had sports. At Mills Home, I played on the Little League Baseball team, the Pony League Baseball team, and the Little League football team—the Mills Home Redskins. I would never have had these in my life if I had not gone to Mills Home. In the area where we had lived, we were the poorest of the poor.

We learned discipline. With 400 children on campus they had to be kept busy. Every child worked and we pretty much got to apply for our jobs. I worked in the print shop where we printed 50,000 copies a month of *Charity & Children*, the newspaper about the orphanage. I cut hair and worked on the farm. As I got older my interest was sports and I worked in the gym, was a lifeguard (each kid got an hour to swim each summer day and could also swim in the evening) I also helped coach the Little League teams. I could not have done any of this if I did not live at the orphanage.

I left the orphanage when I was 15 but this article is already too long. I learned to work. We went to our jobs on time and did our jobs. I learned to keep going always. During my five years at the orphanage I never missed a school day (none of us did). I learned to play fair. I had approximately 400 brothers and sisters I needed to learn to get along with people. I learned to look in people's eyes and see pain and, looking further, to see the hope for joy.



# Reflecting on cherished lives and friendships across the years: May Mills Home alumni updates

By Lib Johnson, (336) 299-7412 [libsjohnson@triad.rr.com](mailto:libsjohnson@triad.rr.com)

**W**e were saddened to learn that **Patricia Newell Holland** passed away on Dec. 31, 2025. The family honored her with a floating visitation for friends and family to honor her life on Jan. 10 at 1241 Carlton Ave. Burlington, NC. I remember meeting Patti back in the days when the alumni held Arts and Crafts shows as the main event during homecoming. Patti was one of our very talented alumni who contributed greatly. Her main skill was making needlepoint cross-stitch designs of all sorts. She was able to write up enough directions for cross-stitching many designs that she printed an instruction guide. Besides cross-stitching, Patti also loved simple pleasures through scrapbooking, but especially through family gatherings at the beach. And she loved having laughter and stories over the game table. She will be sorely missed.

Patti lived at MH from 1960 to 1966. She adjusted well to campus life and developed close relationships with the other campus youngsters and workers at Mills Home. Those early experiences there shaped her compassionate nature and deep sense of community. Her participation in church activities laid the foundation of her strong faith and fostered the belief in Jesus.

Patti and her husband **Robert Holland** shared 56 years of a happy marriage and ran a successful printing business. They reared two daughters, **Wendy and Bobbi Jean**, and doted on four grandchildren and one great grandson. Patti was survived by her mother Mimi, and husband Robert.

I love visiting Facebook because I know I will be reading posts from alumni and they will be putting out heart-warming positive messages. The first post I found one recent day included a picture of beautiful lilac flowers and an admonition to "Make everyday a masterpiece." It was from **Betty Mull Carney**, class of 1956, always

first to start us off with a very positive point. Betty and good friend **Carolyn McCarrson** began their 14-year Mills home history at the Miles Durham Nursery building in 1942. **Leonard Kornegay** and **Allen Carroll** also lived there. (Betty's two brothers **Charles and Robert** ("Chunny" and "Bob") and Carolyn's siblings, **Ruth, Betty and Donald**, also lived at MH for a few years.)

The MH life Betty and Carolyn began there in the Miles Durham building, was a life they came to cherish: adjusting to life with a new "mother," learning things about Jesus and the Bible, learning how to sit quietly in church directly in front of the huge picture of Jesus with the children, listening to the preacher, and in general learning about life, Mills Home style.

They ate meals at a very low table with all the big people eating at a higher table. Their bedroom was a large room with two rows of beds for 12 preschool girls across the hall from another large room just like theirs for 12 preschool boys. These preschool children had a lovely play room where there were tables at which to sit to play with blocks, dolls, paper dolls, stuffed animals, cars, trucks, etc., coloring in coloring books, or listen to an adult read to them. Downstairs was another playroom that allowed for more active play. Out back was a huge play yard that had a small play house, a very shallow swimming pool, a sliding board, a sand box, and out front was a huge ocean wave—many things to keep children entertained. Once they reached school age, they were moved across the road to the Fleming Cottage and started schooling there on campus at the school built at the back of the beautiful Greek style church called Little Auditorium. The boys moved a few hundred yards further away to the Simmons Cottage. As they all progressed in school, they were kept mov-

ing from cottage to cottage to be with other youngsters their age. So in progressing from grade 1 to grade 12, Betty also lived in the Mitchell, Aydlett, Downing, and back to Aydlett to live with classmate **Joyce Shuler** and 10 other girls quite a bit younger. Carolyn lived at Mitchell, Biggs, Downing, and back to Biggs where she lived with **Judy Buckner** and 10 or so younger girls. They lived in those two cottages until they graduated in 1956. The boys likewise moved through a set of cottages grade by grade until they landed at the Watson for older boys. A good thing for Betty in those last years was that the lovable housemother they had had at the Fleming (**Miss Mary Hedgecock**) had been made housemother at the Aydlett. And Carolyn had a sweet housemother at the Biggs, **Miss Imogene Wilson** and her sister **Sirena Walker** who was the dietitian. Likewise the boys had caring housemothers.

In all the cottages where Betty and Carolyn lived, there was usually a dietitian serving with the housemother. Sometime during their lives in that cottage, they had kitchen duty and house duty in which they learned cooking and cleaning chores. They learned school subjects by spending two quiet hours daily in study hall preparing school assignments (afternoon or after supper.)

For entertainment, they listened to the radio, watched TV (when it finally appeared around 1954,) went swimming or to the gym or valley (depending on the season) for social time with some of the other 500 or so kids on campus. (Church or the valley were the only two places where all campus children came together.) On Sunday mornings they both sang in the choir, Betty as soprano and Carolyn as alto. At about age 13, Betty had sewing room duty and proudly wore an outfit she had made to church on Easter Sunday. About the same age, Carolyn had kitchen duty at the Biggs and learned

many things including making the best corn bread ever. Two vastly important things they participated in later years were basketball and cheerleading: Betty was chief cheerleader their senior year and Carolyn was captain of the basketball team. Though they attended Thomasville High School, they played and cheered for the Mills Home team that was still intact. Their last few years of schooling were at Colonial Dr. and Thomasville High School. Betty remembers that she cried so hard on the evening she graduated from high school, knowing she would be leaving Mills Home forever. Carolyn cried a little but she was a little more ready to face a new world outside Mills Home.

Both ladies have been extremely loyal alumni by being members of the Alumni Association and serving on the Alumni Council. Both have also been loyal and regular attendants on homecoming weekend and both have been very connected with alumni in supporting many projects that benefited both Kennedy Home and Mills Home.

As do most Mills Home Alumni, Betty and Carolyn cherish their many fond memories and wonderful friendships they built at Mills Home. And the places where those memories and friendships were built—the gym, the valley, and the church,—still hold a sacred place in their hearts.

Reminder: Please send corrections or additions of addresses for **Charity and Children to Flora Hicks Patton** at [florapatton06@gmail.com](mailto:florapatton06@gmail.com) or 704-795-0017. To learn about a resting place in the God's Acre Columbarium, contact **Sharon DeHart Stiles** at 704-685-2443 or email her at [Sharondstiles51@yahoo.com](mailto:Sharondstiles51@yahoo.com).



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

# Foster Care: Hard and Heartbreaking—Yet Worth It

By Nancy Osborne | Chief Program Officer



## 4 ways to faithfully engage Foster care



**W**hen we consider instead the perspective of a child who has been removed from his or her family of origin—and most likely from their siblings—without their consent or understanding, does that change

how we approach this situation? As Christians, do we always play the pivotal role in seeing someone's life changed by the gospel, or do we sometimes only have a temporary, finite amount of time to speak into their lives?

Foster parents have an incredible opportunity to change the story in a child's life, to have impact on that child's siblings and parents, and to build trusting relationships with overworked and overburdened state caseworkers. And they absolutely do become attached. They absolutely walk through the heartbreak of learning more about a child's story as trust begins to build. They must balance the chaos of broken systems (so many systems!) within the greater context of our broken world. And they often journey through the emotional reality of reunification plans, sudden kinship placements, or unexpected legal decisions. It's part of the journey. It's the emotional roller coaster of serving the Lord in a very specific way.

As we consider many of the hard or difficult things that come our way as believers, we should remember the ultimate perspective. When serving the Lord and walking in obedience to His calling, we can confidently say that it is worth it. There are seasons in our lives that are heartbreaking, yet vital to endure—and ultimately to give the Lord His due for how He worked in and through us. Ministry is rarely easy. It is often

heartbreaking. *But living out the gospel is always worth it.*

Similar to missionaries, foster parents require specialized training and ongoing support. They are asked to walk into unknown—and sometimes hostile—situations, all while representing Christ within secular worlds and systems. Foster parents are local missionaries, called to have a lasting impact on their neighbors and communities for the sake of Jesus. The lives of gospel-driven foster parents reflect mission work lived out inside their homes.

As we highlight National Foster Care Month, here are some practical ways to engage:

### Four ways to faithfully engage foster care:

#### 1. Encourage the Foster Parents

**Around You.** There are many ways to encourage and care for foster parents in your circle. Some are simple: encouraging texts, prayer support, or virtual gift cards for meals or essentials. Even though foster parents receive board rates, payments from the county or state to help the family cover basic costs for caring for a child placed in their home, those funds are truly never enough. You might offer help with laundry or lawn care. Find a way that works for you or leverages your God-given gifts to be a blessing.

#### 2. Ask God to Give You Clarity About Becoming a Foster Family.

If you are praying through the possibility of becoming a foster parent but still facing fears—including the fear of attachment—begin seeking the Lord and adopting a new perspective about this calling. Jason Johnson, in *Reframing Foster Care*, calls it missional discipleship. In *Chosen*, Andrew Hopper writes that “foster parents are not doing a ‘side ministry’ of

the church—they are living on mission in ordinary life.” This is an incredible mission field with countless opportunities to serve the Lord.

#### 3. Foster Parent, Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help.

For foster families who feel overburdened and overwhelmed, remain steadfast—we need you on the mission field if you are able. Foster homes are declining across the U.S., while the needs continue to grow. Asking for help can be difficult, but often other believers are simply waiting to be asked. Many would be honored to support you if you allow space and make your needs known. Reach out to your church's foster care or orphan care ministry. If your church does not have one, contact Baptist Children's Homes. We can connect you to resources in your area and help equip your church. (Connect with us below.)

#### 4. Be a Voice and Share the Need.

Be a champion for foster care in your circles of influence. Help reframe language, dispel myths, and communicate the urgency of the needs. Spread the word. Convey the reality. There are roughly 11,000 children in care in this state, with only about 5,500 licensed foster homes. BCH is ready to partner with many more local missionaries.



# Celebrating stories, the completion of the arch, and sharing prayer request: Alumni updates for May

By James Clayton Pate, (910) 358-0992, 3894 Hwy 41 West, Trenton NC 28585

The Kennedy Home alumni community continues to shine, fostering lasting connections and celebrating the unique journeys of its members. From cherished memories of shared experiences to exciting new milestones, alumni are the heart of our legacy. In this column, we highlight recent achievements, reunions, and stories that inspire us all.

This month, we recognize alumni for their achievements and community contributions. Whether launching new ventures, volunteering locally, or reconnecting with fellow Kennedy Home graduates, every story strengthens our network. We invite all alumni to share updates, photos, and memories—your contributions ensure our community remains vibrant.

**Share Your Story:** If you have news or would like to be featured, please reach out. Together, we continue to build a tradition of excellence and friendship that extends beyond the Kennedy Home doors.

**Debbie Connie Daniels (1968–1973)** celebrated 50 years of marriage on March 23, 1976. We know a fulfilling partnership is built on enduring commitment, not grand gestures. We got married after work, in our work clothes—the groom in his dusty farm pants and the bride in her waitress uniform. Coming from single-parent households, we have learned perseverance. We have navigated through tough times, but our love for each other and three wonderful children has kept us strong. Our advice: stand firm when necessary, let go when possible, keep moving forward, and trust that better days are ahead. Also, remember a prayer a day keeps the troubles at bay.

Debbie has done an excellent job with the Alumni cookbooks. Thank you, Debbie, along with your sister-in-law, **Cyndi Sessoms**, for all the time spent and hard work put-

ting the Kennedy Home cookbooks together. Great job! My wife **Joyce Pate** and I have lots of cookbooks. I even had the pleasure of helping put one together while working with the Comfort Fire Department as a volunteer. They shared Kennedy Home's history and the Kennedys' care for the children. It is the best cookbook we own, in my opinion. Thank you, Debbie and Cyndi!

Also, a huge thank you to everyone who purchased one—or two—or three. There are 38 left, so if you'd like to own one of these amazing cookbooks, you'd better hurry before they are gone. My wife Joyce and I plan to purchase a few more to give out for Christmas. Just message Debbie on Facebook Messenger if you don't have her number to buy a few more for your friends and family. The money earned from the cookbooks goes into a fund to help Kennedy Home. There were 300 copies, with only 38 left.

Cyndi is the wife of **Buck Sessoms**, who is Joyce and Debbie's brother. He and brother **Jerry** lived at Kennedy Home for about a year.

Today, I contacted **Donald Ray Wetherington (1958–1968)** to convey a message from **Joyce Connie** regarding his request for Sunday School to be held from 9:30 to 10:30 during Homecoming. This request has been approved, and choir practice will take place immediately afterward. Donald wants everyone to be ready.

We had a really good conversation. He had a really good idea to do some work on and paint the Skeeter hut. The Kennedy Home graveyard also needs some work done as well. If anyone else has ideas, please let us know. We will take a vote on it at Homecoming this year. Take time to reflect on it and pray about it, and then we can consult with the superintendent to determine what might be necessary. It has been three

years since the alumni have worked on anything at the Kennedy Home campus.

Donald had an uncle named **Colon Wetherington** who worked at Camp Lejeune at the steam plant and never missed a day's work. He left home from Stella heading to work with a storm on the way, and by the time he got off work heading home, the old wood bridge was flooded. He left his car at the Camp Lejeune side of the river and swam the river to get back home. I worked with Colon, and I believe he could do it! I am voting for Donald this year for the tall tale award. If anyone has a better one than this, let me know and we'll put it to a vote.

Donald Ray said to me, "The Lord has blessed me with seventy-four years. There are some of you who know that I went to Kennedy Home from Fallen Creek when I was six years old. I was the youngest of eight children my parents had. I am grateful to my parents that they chose life for me and that I was not aborted. I thank the Lord for such a place for kids to call home as Kennedy Home and Mills Home. I also thank the Lord for the foster homes they have in operation there now. Jesus has led me through all the adversities and good times I've had in the past 74 years. I am blessed with a loving wife who stands by me through thick and thin. I love you, Joy, with all my heart. I'd like to thank everyone who wished me well on my birthday. And thank you, Jesus, for saving a wretch like me. I love you, Jesus!"

Thank you, Brother Donald.

The Baptist Children's Homes arch at Kennedy Home has been completed! Praise the Lord! I received the text from Joyce Connie today after she had spoken to Sam, the man in charge of restoring it to its original glory. I did a little research, and the arch is believed to have been constructed in 1914—112

years ago! It needed attention, love, and care. The Lord sent us the right man for the job! Thank you, Lord, for answering our prayers. Forgive me for my little faith. I did not believe I would see the arch finished in my life. I am 73, and believe me when I say our Lord is faithful, merciful and is always listening to the prayers of His children.

**Kenneth Grant (1966–1973)** had a big surprise on his 73rd birthday! **Joyce Connie and Avon Nelson**, along with her daughter **Amanda Nelson**, went to visit Kenneth at his home in Little Baltimore. Avon had made him a chocolate cake for his birthday. Joyce had stopped at Ken's Grill to pick up some food, which is Kenneth's favorite. Ken's Grill is famous for their barbecue. They threw him the best birthday party he has had in years! They talked about the good old days at Kennedy Home. They all enjoyed their day of caring and sharing with Kenneth on his special day. Lots of fun and new memories were made.

*This month's prayer list is as follows:*

Don Pate (eyes), Franky Grant, Kenneth Grant, John Thompson (health concerns), Ed Pait, Avon (health concerns), Carl's recovery, Larry Gilliam (eyes), Trisha Jones (knee pain and possible surgery), David Bradley, David Manor, Ronnie Mathews, Stanley Mathews, Paul Stone, Joyce and Debbie Connie, my son James and his son Andrew, Janet Pate Simpson, Homecoming along with our car and truck show, and please remember our president and our deployed troops.

Check in on our Kennedy Home brothers and sisters from time to time for tomorrow is never promised



James Clayton Pate was a child in care at Kennedy Home from 1958 to 1972. He and his wife Joyce live in Comfort, NC.

# Ministry Moments



## Servant Hands

Volunteers from Pleasant City Church in Shelby invested their time at the Spring "Friends of Children" workday on April 25. Serving with other area churches, groups helped beautify the campus both outside and indoors tackling a number of service projects through the Saturday missions opportunity.



## God's Goodness

Devin (center) is ready for his first prom through the love and care of his foster family, the Bradys, and the kindness of supporters. Together, they gave Devin a night that he'll always remember. Dressed in his tuxedo, Devin stands proudly with his brothers, Ezra and Gabe.



## A Changed Life

Years ago, Bennett was adopted through Christian Adoption Services. Recently, in Hawaii, he chose to be baptized, celebrating his adoption into God's family. God is continuing to write a beautiful story in Bennett's heart and life as his adoptive family models the love of Christ to their son.

## Not just a job. A mission field.

As Cottage Parents, husband-and-wife teams provide a safe, Christ-centered home for children who have known loss and instability—modeling consistency, compassion, and the unconditional love of Jesus. The cottage is more than a home; it's a mission field where faith takes root.

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