

A Home Made in Heaven

If you were to drive past the Murphy home in Morrow, Georgia, a few miles from the Atlanta airport, you wouldn't see anything special—a weathered ranch house that fades into the fabric of this struggling neighborhood. But looks are deceiving. Inside the house is a place so special that angels must celebrate its existence.

John and Jeanette Murphy have filled this home with love and children—lots of children. They have adopted 23 children, one by one, all with special needs, many with very serious health problems, most with Down's syndrome. And to top it all off, they completed their family with four birth children.

John and Jeanette met 30 years ago while working at a home for people with special needs, and from the time they married, they knew their calling was to care for children no one else wanted.

In 1983, their vision became reality in the freckle-faced form of Shannon, one of the most severely handicapped children the Murphys had ever met. She was also extremely hyperactive and difficult to manage.

"The center was blunt with us that this was one child we may not want," Jeanette says. "But John and I had already decided that we would not refuse any child. If God made a way for us to have a child, it was for a reason."

After God opened that door, it seemed to stay open. Each child they touched became a "happier ending," but none more so than

Nathan. When his methadone-addicted mom had discovered she was pregnant and learned that the baby had Down's syndrome, she decided to have an abortion.

"We later learned this woman had already aborted twins and had given up two other children," John recalls in disbelief. "She was facing pressure from her grandmother who offered her some money to abort again. Thankfully, her pro-life Christian stepmother offered her more money not to."

"We got a call from the stepmother asking if they could visit that night," Jeanette adds.

"As soon as they walked in and saw our kids you could see the amazement on their faces," John continues. "This woman had been told that her baby would not be able to do anything. Here she saw our Down's kids swimming, reading, cooking, laughing and loving each other.

"She gave us Nathan when he was born, and he is now 9 years old," John adds. "He has been one of our toughest challenges, but what a joy!"

The Murphys explain that many special-needs children are raised with low expectations. As a result, they can become self-centered and over-dependent.

"But God's Word tells us how to raise children, and we don't make exceptions just because of their disabilities," John says. "With loving authority and correction, these kids can do almost anything."

And “almost anything” is not an exaggeration.

The children all are learning American Sign Language. They take regular gymnastics lessons, and nine of them have formed their own dance troupe. And already three of the Murphys’ special-needs children have moved out and are living on their own.

But raising 27 children is far from easy.

To start, providing for their basic needs requires nothing short of constant attention. Every ordinary misadventure is multiplied in scope. And staying financially afloat can be difficult.

“Our van is hard to replace because it has 20 seats. It started out as an RV, but we gutted it and outfitted it so we could take the whole family places. But since it is 15 years old, it can be a challenge,” John explains.

This past summer the air conditioning broke. The total bill came to \$2,990. But the Lord got the last laugh.

“The very next day, we got a check from a grand-uncle of one of our boys for exactly \$3,000,” John says with a grin.

The Murphys have weathered trial after trial—heart surgeries, tracheotomies, amputations, legal issues—and these will likely continue.

Some of the challenges have been even greater. Jeanette’s eyes

are moist as she tells about the five children they have buried. Most passed away as infants, but one son, Jonathan, struggled with Leukemia for five years.

Through it all, the Murphys rely on God for their strength. Although John and Jeanette are not understood or accepted by most of their biological family, God has blessed the family through an unusual connection with Christian entrepreneur Madeline Balletta and Bee-Alive, her nutrition company.

“It’s actually like family,” Jeanette muses. “We’re closer to them than to most of our family members.”

In fact, employees at Bee-Alive send gifts to the Murphy children every Christmas and pray with them on the phone. The Murphys have even taken two vacations to visit Bee-Alive headquarters in New York.

When one browses the Murphy family’s photo album, the message on its pages is echoed in the sincerity of John and Jeanette, in the sound of laughter outside the house and in the peaceful spirit resting on the entire home.

It is also reflected in the extraordinary capability and interconnectedness of their children.

The message is that God can use an ordinary couple with an ordinary home to demonstrate His extraordinary grace on Earth.

Mary Hutchinson, a regular contributor to Charisma, is president of CreativeOne Direct in Westford, Massachusetts, and the author of several books.

For more information, call 404-366-2978

Send tax-deductible gifts to Christian Life Missions, Attn:
Murphy Family,
P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248