

Stories from the field

how A Child's Hope International is making a difference

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An Adoption Story “And Then There Were Five”

In their first six years of marriage, Caren and Eric Whitmer experienced the heartache associated with miscarriage—several times. As painful as those seasons of their lives were, the couple never lost hope they would have children one day because God had given them a desire to adopt, even from overseas. His plan, however, would require a less direct route.

In February 2010, the Whitmers attended a series of classes called *Journey to the Fatherless™*, on adoption and foster care, that were sponsored by A Child's Hope International (ACHI). The couple was surprised to learn when the classes ended that the Lord had spoken clearly to both of them...*but not about adoption*. Instead, He was calling them to bring foster children into their home.

The Whitmers were licensed in early May 2010. By the end of the month, they had three siblings in their care: a 10-year-old boy and two girls who were 8 and 2. Though the agency typically only allowed one child if a couple didn't have children, God tripled their blessings. They were off on the journey of a lifetime!

The siblings returned to their mother, but the youngest girl, Sarah, came back into the Whitmers' care twice more. During one of those stays, a 14-year-old boy had also been placed in their home, which proved to be very challenging. After multiple visits from the police and chats with the school board and therapists, they knew it was time for a break. Caren and Eric's initiation into foster care had been fast, enlightening, and exhausting. They needed time to rest, process and regroup.

Beginning in July 2011, a whirlwind of events triggered decisions that would require much prayer, wise counsel,

and deep faith. The first involved a 30 day respite for a mother of a 5-month-old with Cystic Fibrosis. Caren's occupation as a nurse helped drive their decision to say yes to hosting this baby girl whose name was Stephanie. Two weeks later, 3-year-old Sarah returned with her 1-day-old sister, Keyauna, a drug withdrawal baby, who had her own set of challenges.

And then there were three...(again)

To say life was chaotic is an understatement, but the couple persevered and relied on their omnipotent God and the continuous prayers and encouragement of many faithful supporters to see them through.

When the mother's 30 day sabbatical turned into six months, Stephanie went into permanent care and remained with the Whitmers long-term. In May 2012, Sylvia's 3-year-old sister arrived.



And then there were four...

The family experienced a new level of chaos throughout the next year. An intense legal battle ensued when Keyauna's biological father appeared five days before her adoption hearing. In May 2013, the Whitmers began the process to adopt Sylvia and Stephanie, and about the same time Caren lost another baby.

To say life was a challenge is an understatement.

While the courts were retrying Keyauna's case in the spring of 2014, Caren learned she was pregnant again. This time, however, God blessed their family with Abigail, their first biological child.

And then there were five...

Caren feared that their newest family member would be left out, but instead, the girls embraced her. "Abigail was the missing piece that glued our family together. Having her in the house has been a good part of the healing process for the other girls," Caren said.



Since Mom works full-time, Eric handles the girls' day-to-day needs—juggling appointments with school and homework, his part-time work schedule at ACHI, and other responsibilities.

On raising daughters, "It's interesting," Eric shared. "I grew up with one brother, so I didn't know anything about girls. There's a lot of emotion, but I am humbled and blessed to think that God has chosen me to be a father to Abigail and to four girls who never knew their biological dads."

The Whitmers are doing their best, with God's help, to navigate the ever-changing emotions and questions that arise from raising five girls. Though their journey entails a fast-paced life, a roller coaster of emotions, extreme flexibility, and being quick learners on a variety of subjects, they wouldn't trade any of it for the joy they have knowing they are impacting their daughters' lives for eternity.

Caren and Eric are thankful as they have waded through uncharted waters for God's grace and strength, as well as, for the outpouring of love and support from countless family members and friends who have given so much along the way. They are especially indebted to ACHI for the counsel and resources they have provided, including a grant from their Adoption Fund. "Without ACHI," Caren said, "we never could have done it."

Though *indirectly*, the Whitmers' foster care journey did lead them to adoption—something they had not lost sight of—four times. Their greatest blessing is that even through the pitfalls they're all still a family. They didn't lose their marriage or the kids as some do. Caren confesses there were times when she wanted to give up, but knew God was in it and they needed to persevere. As a result, four beautiful little girls, all unique yet fearfully and wonderfully made, now hold a special place in the Whitmers' hearts, in their home, and in their loving, caring forever family right beside their little sister Abigail!

Through the counseling and advocacy work of A Child's Hope Int'l., over 100 children have been adopted into loving homes. To learn more about how you can become involved with ACHI to make a difference in the life of a child, please call us at the number below or visit our website.



As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the mission of A Child's Hope International is to motivate and mobilize the church and community to care for orphans and vulnerable children through adoption, foster care, orphan care, and humanitarian relief. As advocates for the "least of these," our programs reach thousands of children worldwide.

We exist because the children are waiting™.

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