

YOU CAN TRANSFORM A LIFE TODAY!



*“It is Christmas Every Day!”*

This is a sentiment that Gabriel (now 23 years old), one of seven biological children (ages range from 29 to 17 years old) has expressed often to his mother, Dolores, about adopting three young children.

What is unique, is that Michael and Dolores after careful thought and prayers chose to adopt three children with Down syndrome (DS). After researching and learning as much as they could, meeting people with DS their parents who felt blessed by their children, they started actively searching.

They adopted Joel, now six years old, referred through the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati. They found Adopt America Network (AAN) online, and adopted Timmy and Ella through us. Of AAN, Dolores says that “Our experience was wonderful. I will be forever grateful to them for my children!”

Timmy, was born one month premature with DS, and numerous serious complications. Voluntarily relinquished into foster care at birth, he had heart surgery in California. When Michael and Dolores first held him at 5 months, although very tiny and so weak he could not yet hold his head up, he smiled at them – and simply captured their hearts. He was fed and given medications round the clock through a nasal gastric tube, which was intimidating to learn to insert and use. However, “we learn to do what needs to be done for our children.”

Now 4 years old, he still receives his nourishment through a g-tube. Timmy is developmentally like an 18 month-old child – becoming a more stable walker, crawling up and down stairs, saying Mama and Papa. He has several sensory sensitivities – strongly disliking having his teeth brushed, nails clipped, anything touching his face. Yet, he loves to give hugs! He is making major advances in communicating his needs. Tim’s vision impairment has been an obstacle to signing but he is now using the signs for “more” and “please” as well as attempting to vocalize.

“Timmy is very lovable, in fact, irresistible. He likes to be silly – putting on hats because he thinks they’re funny. He loves dancing, music and tries to sing along. He wants to get to know everyone.”

Ella, voluntarily relinquished at birth, was adopted at 7-weeks old, looking like the “cutest little elf.” She also has Down syndrome, a moderate hearing impairment and wears glasses. For a while they felt like she was not “with” them. However, after having tubes put into her ears because of repeated ear infections, her personality just blossomed – her parents feel that perhaps it is because she can now hear more. Ella turned two in November and is incredibly sweet, affectionate, tries to get everyone laughing, and is a great tease. She has no words yet but is moving to music now, is quick in motor skill growth and is walking. They feel “incredibly blessed and lucky to have her.”

Dolores says that when one has a child with special needs, it is critical to be their advocate and get early interventions. Likewise, it is important to have a really good pediatrician who is open and responsive to the need to have referrals to specialists, which children with multiple challenges need.

As to how adoption has changed their lives, Dolores shared that “Adopting has made us feel younger and older at times. They do have more needs than the typical newborn baby. A child with special needs isn’t just your own private baby to cuddle and nurture—it takes a lot of people; therapists, specialists, to work together to care for them properly and give them all the help they need and deserve to reach their full potentials. This is a good thing though, because it brings more support and friendship to the parents. Mike is a loving father and this alone has been an immeasurable blessing! It really helps having two parents. Both of us love these children the same as if they’d been born to us. You just can’t help loving each of our little ones, everybody feels that way once they meet them. There’s a great deal of joy here!”

Dolores sums it up by saying, “We couldn’t separate adoption from our life any more than we could separate religion from our life. It is part of us and our family. With Joel, Timmy and Ella it is Christmas every day!”

#### How You Can Help

Adopt America Network has helped place over 3,500 children with loving families in the last 25 years – 909 in the last 4 years without charging fees to families. You can help in two ways:

- Share your love, talents and time by adopting a child and giving them a family of their own to whom they belong.
- Donate to Adopt America Network so that we may help more waiting children find their forever family that they deserve.

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Please visit [www.adoptamericanetwork.org](http://www.adoptamericanetwork.org) to learn more about the 129,000 children who through no fault of their own have been abused, abandoned or neglected. They wait on average over 3 years in the U.S. foster care system for someone to pick them out and cherish them.