

Inspiring Households



What began as an ordinary Brownies excursion became a life-changing event for one North Carolina mom.

In 2003, Lysa and two of her daughters attended a performance by a boys' choir from an orphanage in Liberia, a West African country ravaged by 14 years of civil war. At the concert, Lysa learned the 12 boys in the choir, and 400 more children abroad, were left homeless after an attack on the orphanage.

As they sang, Lysa says she felt God speak to her. "God just clearly spoke to my house and said, 'Lysa, two of those boys are yours,'" she says. "And, of course, I just went to hear a concert. I didn't go that day for life interrupted."

After the concert, Lysa and her girls met two of the boys. "They wrapped their arms around me and gave me a big hug and they just called me Mom," she says.

Lysa left to call her husband, Art. "I had to get in the car and call him on the cell phone and say something like, 'Hi, honey. Do we need milk? And by the way, there are two teenage boys from the other side of the world now calling me Mom.'"



Although Art says he was initially "shell-shocked," the couple decided to welcome the boys into their home. But Lysa's four best friends were not as excited as she had hoped. "All I could think is, 'You're going to bring two almost teenage boys from another country into your home? Are your girls going to be safe? Is this wise?'" Lysa's friend Cindy says.

Still, Lysa convinced her friends to attend a choir performance and listen to them perform. After meeting the boys, each of her friends had a change of heart. "As they started to sing, something happened," Genia says. "I just realized that there is a strength in them that resonated with me." Genia and her husband Rob already had two adopted children, but after some thought and discussion they decided to add Robert, another Liberian orphan, to their family.

The other three friends also decided to take these boys into their homes—including empty-nesters Debbie and David who adopted *six* kids!

Cindy and her husband Mark say that adding Nyan to their family has been more rewarding than they could have imagined. Nyan has bonded with their daughter Sophie, but he's formed a special relationship with their son Dominick, who has special needs. "Everyone looks at us and sees us and says, 'Wow, you guys have done a great thing,'" Mark says. "And it's so funny because, really, the blessing's been ours."



That fateful concert was just part of the miracle that was about to happen. In all, 14 families from this North Carolina community adopted a total of 31 children from the same orphanage.

Although these children found happy endings, there were still adjustment periods within each family. "Some of the adjustment is having a mom and dad and realizing these people are committed to me for life," Genia says. "Part of that has to do with setting boundaries and disciplining and just communicating."

Lysa's husband, Art, had to adjust to having two preteen boys enter their world of pink dresses and Barbie dolls. "Honestly, I was a sergeant about the whole thing," Art says. At first, he assigned the boys and girls to stay in separate parts of the house. "But I think that lasted all of about two weeks," Art says. "The girls and the boys were interacting as if they had been brother and sister all along. There was an innocence there that was real and that was genuine."

As for getting older brothers, Lysa and Mark's daughter Ashley was thrilled. She says her friends at school thought it "was really cool" when they found out. "I really like my brothers. They're fun to play with," she says.

Aside from adjusting to finally having a real family, the kids also experienced culture shock. Debbie says the police arrived at her door one day because her son, James, thought you could dial 911 and call anyone you wanted.

Lysa describes the time the pork tenderloin she wanted to make for dinner went missing. "The kids were helping me unload the groceries and my son, Mark, inadvertently put some pork tenderloin and a frozen pizza underneath his bed," Lysa says. When she asked about the roast a few days later, Mark ran and got it for her. "Of course, we did not have it for dinner," Lysa says.

Lysa and Art's son Jackson says he's always prayed for a mom and dad. Now that his prayers have been answered, Jackson says he has an easy response when asked about having a white mom by friends or classmates. "It's God's plan because God has a plan for everybody," Jackson says.

"Love knows no color and you guys are great examples of that," Oprah says.

Read the full story on the group of Liberian orphans who found homes, love, and family in North Carolina in the [December 2006](#) issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*.