

God's Plans and Our Plans

'Now I Can't Imagine Our Family Any Other Way'

Brad and Mimy Rollman had a plan for their family even before they married in December 2008. They would have some children of their own and then expand their family through foster care and adoption.

A teacher and former nanny with a heart for children, Mimy had wanted to care for foster children as long as she could remember. "While we were dating," recalls Mimy, "I approached Brad about someday doing foster care and adoption, and he was open to it."

Both 31 years old when they married, Brad & Mimy intended to start a family right away, but things didn't go as planned.

(Above) The Rollmans—Brad, Mimy, Alea, Carson, Alyssa, and Annika—pose for one of many photos on Annika's March 3 adoption day. (Below) The Rollmans enjoy a lighter moment with Judge Jay Hoberg following the finalization.



"About six months into our marriage we had our first miscarriage," says Mimy, "the first of six. So we knew we were going to have some struggles with having our own biological children."

After some months of struggle and grieving, the Rollmans felt it was time to move on to the second part of their family plan. Independently of each other, both heard through an ad on the radio that COBYS Family Services was seeking families to care for children.

"We loved the heart and the mission behind COBYS, just the whole Christian orientation," says Mimy. "We loved that. That's what drew us there."

They completed their training and were approved as foster adoptive resource parents in May 2011. Before they even had finished their paperwork, COBYS called with their first placement—3-½-year-old Alea and her older brother. The older brother



December 2011, but Carson, a newborn biological brother to Alea, joined the family a day or two later.

Alea, now 8, and Carson, 5, were adopted into the Rollman family in June 2013. On the day that Alea was adopted, Judge Jay Hoberg also took the time to make Alea an adoptive mother to her baby doll, Alondra. Alondra was Alea's name given by her birth mother, or "belly mother," as Brad & Mimy put it.

Mimy explains to each of her children that they have both a belly mother and heart mother. While each child grew in the belly of another

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Mission Statement

Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.

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If Only. . .

Each March COBYS employees are invited to fill out brackets for the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, appropriately named March Madness. For three consecutive weekends 64 of the best college teams face off until only one is left standing and crowned the college basketball champion. And each year, I participate in our office pool by filling out a bracket. (There is no cost to enter our pool and no prize money. The winner gets bragging rights for a year and a free lunch.)

This year 23 employees entered the contest. After the first day I was winning! In all humility, I wasn't surprised. After all, I won in 2012, and I was in the running until the final weekend last year. Imagine my disappointment when things quickly went south, and by the end of the first weekend I had plummeted to ninth place and was mathematically eliminated. (I felt MUCH



better after Cindy Umberger, our Controller, sent me a picture showing her name atop the leaderboard. I was so happy for her.)

If only Michigan State would have beaten Middle Tennessee State. If only West Virginia had topped Stephen F. Austin State. Actually, with my bracket this year, there are a lot of "if onlys."

Suffice it to say that things didn't work out as I thought they should. If only things would have gone as I had planned, I would be winning our March Madness office pool and deciding what I would like for my free lunch. But, as the saying goes, there is no such thing as a free lunch (at least for me).

If only things would work out like we had hoped, but sometimes they don't.

We recently had a child placed with one of our committed foster families. This child had been in multiple placements since entering the foster care system, struggling with anger issues, trauma issues, and grief and loss issues. Our caseworkers worked diligently to support the family, offering ideas on parenting and how to deal with some extremely difficult behaviors.

The foster parents gave so much time and energy to parent this child, exhibiting great amounts of patience and grace. But, despite everyone's best efforts, in the end the child needed to be removed from the home and placed in a residential setting that is better equipped to deal with such extreme behaviors.

If only it were easier to parent a child like this. If only a safe, welcoming home with foster parents who truly cared could erase the effects of years of abuse and neglect. If only being patient could calm a child and convince that child that we would do all we can to help. If only someone had taken the time to more appropriately care for that child in the first place and the abuse had never happened. If only. . . things would be different.

But we can't live in the "if only" world. That isn't how it works. So we do all we can in each of the situations we are faced with to make a difference in the lives of those we serve. And we trust that God in his infinite wisdom and perfect timing will take care of the rest.

Mark Cunningham, Executive Director

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mother, they grew in the hearts of Brad & Mimy.

“We have a good relationship with their birth mother,” says Mimy. “We see each other twice a year.”

While she recognizes that each situation is different and it isn’t always possible to maintain a relationship with birth parents, in Alea’s and Carson’s case preserving ties with their birth mother continues to be a positive experience for all.

Shortly before Alea and Carson were adopted, another newborn joined the family in April 2013, but this one was hard to plan for. When other arrangements for this little girl fell through, Berks County called COBYS and COBYS called Brad & Mimy. They had two hours to get to the Reading Hospital to pick up their new daughter, Alyssa.

Rather than being stressed about the suddenness of the situation, Brad found it exhilarating. “It’s one of the many surprises with foster care,” he says. “But for us it’s a rush. We like that aspect sometimes.”

Mimy recalls fondly, “Alyssa was feisty from the get-go. We picked her up and she lifted her head up and looked around at us and she was just two days old. She’s been a go-getter ever since.”

Alyssa was adopted in October 2014 and the new family plan was coming along nicely. While Brad & Mimy weren’t totally certain what would come next, they had talked about adopting a brother for Carson, and perhaps one who was out of the diaper stage. And another biracial child would be nice to fit in with their colorful family. But it didn’t work out that way.

Brad, who works in homes of widows through a nonprofit called Handyman Ministries, had been doing some work for a widow who shared her home with her son and daughter-in-law. One morning in late February

2015, Brad was surprised to learn that the couple gave birth to a baby girl that day, and that she would need to be placed in foster care. Neither he nor the couple giving birth had been aware of the pregnancy. Brad sensed that the family held some bitterness toward the child welfare system from previous involvements, and as he talked with the widow he felt a tug at his heart to care for this child.

Mimy picks up the story. “So he called me and he was like, ‘Honey, I just think we need to take this baby



girl.’ I was like, ‘Are you kidding me? This is everything we had not talked about.’” A white baby girl wasn’t part of the plan.

And even if they were interested, she reasoned, the chances that this little girl had been referred to COBYS were slim, since COBYS handles only

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A Lot of Support

Brad & Mimy Rollman responded to God’s call on their lives to adopt four children, but they aren’t in this alone. They speak highly of the support they receive from COBYS staff, family, and their church.

“We can’t imagine not being with an agency like COBYS,” says Brad. “The support in every aspect, from the foster process and through the whole adoption process, and even post adoption has been tremendous.”

Brad also appreciates some of the special things that COBYS does for resource families, including an annual Christmas dinner and program hosted by the Florin Church of the Brethren, a more formal spring appreciation banquet, and monthly training events hosted by churches. Those trainings, says Brad, “allow our kids to intermingle with other foster adoptive children. It gives a good sense of family and community within the COBYS network. Those are just some of the things that we thoroughly enjoy, being with COBYS.”

Mimy says that knowing COBYS staff and the network of churches that support COBYS are praying for families like theirs also is a great source of encouragement.

In addition, both Brad’s and Mimy’s families have been very supportive, with involved grandmas and grandpas (including Alvin Petersheim, pictured above holding Annika) on both the Petersheim and Rollman sides and others who have adopted within their extended families. Folks at Honey Brook Community Church, where they attend, also have a heart for adoption and have been another valuable source of support.



Mark Myers

'Reunion-Goers' Set New Marks in Giving, Attendance

Daytime Banquet Program Offered for First Time

"Alumni" attending the COBYS Family Services School Daze Reunion Banquets at Middle Creek Church of the Brethren on March 4 had some fun, learned a thing or two about COBYS ministries, and gave a lot of money to support the "class project," which just happened to be COBYS.

The banquet setting was the 35th reunion of the class of '82 from the imaginary Mid-Central High School, where quite a number of COBYS-related folks were said to attend. While the school and the reunion were just pretend, the program included some real high school photos and information from presenters and quite a bit of genuine information about COBYS ministries.

Income totaled \$56,575.50, up from last year's record amount of \$53,277.58. "The strong financial support of our ministries felt really good," said Director of Development Don Fitzkee. "We are grateful for the many generous people who gave through the banquets."

For the first time COBYS hosted both daytime and evening programs.



Photos by Mark Myers

1. Stan Bucher and foster daughter Jenni Sangrey told of the lasting relationships that formed in their family a quarter century ago; 2. Class of '82 members Mark Cunningham and Don Fitzkee shared a laugh; 3. We sang to Earl Ziegler, who celebrated his 87th birthday at the noon banquet; 4. Controller Cindy Umberger led the singing of the Mid-Central High alma mater; 5. Cindy Bucher and twins Jessi and Jenni. Cindy wrote a letter to her former foster daughters each Monday for a dozen years, more than 600 in all from when the girls were six years old until their high school graduation; 6. Permanency Unit Supervisor Nicole Lauzus emceed the reunion program, even though she was much too young.

Volunteers from the Middle Creek Church of the Brethren served a total of 588 people (230 daytime, and 258 evening), but 14 of those were program participants who attended both times, leaving 574 unique

attenders. The previous high attendance was 558 two years ago.

"We were thrilled with the strong daytime attendance," said Don. "After maxing out the facility the past few years it is nice to have



room to grow again.”

Program highlights included sharing from Stan Bucher, daughter Rachel Swank, and foster twins Jenni & Jessi, telling of the lasting impact they have had in each other’s lives over a quarter century; and a video segment featuring the story of COBYS adoptive parents Brad & Mimy Rollman and their four children, the youngest of which was adopted the day before the banquets. COBYS staff provided additional updates about programs and services.

Mixed in with these presentations was some of the usual silliness that goes with COBYS banquets, including the singing of the school alma mater, greetings from a presidential candidate who graduated from Mid-Central, and an amazing scientific discovery from alumnus Doug Balmer. Ryan Shenk and Mark DeRose provided music.

A photo gallery from the banquets can be viewed on our Facebook page. Video of the program is available on YouTube. Use a link at www.cobys.org/news, or search for “COBYS School Daze Reunion Banquet” on YouTube.



Family Fun Walk Slated for May 1

COBYS Family Services will host the 22nd annual Family Fun Walk on Sunday, May 1, at Peter Becker Community, 800 Maple Ave., Harleysville. The walk begins at 4:00 p.m., with registration beginning at 3:30.

The event consists of a three-mile walk, followed by ice cream, refreshments, and awarding of door prizes. Walkers donate, enlist sponsors to benefit COBYS ministries to children and families, or both. Nearly 100 participants raised more than \$11,100 at last year’s walk.

Members of the Kulp family and friends (above) sported six years’ worth of Fun Walk shirts at the 2015 walk, which was held on a picture perfect day.



Top fundraisers can choose between grand prizes of two tickets to *Samson*, donated by Sight & Sound Theatres, Lancaster, or a Cracker Barrel rocking chair. All participants receive a free t-shirt, ice cream and refreshments, and a chance to win a door prize. Additional prizes are available for those who reach certain levels of support. Youth groups who raise \$1,000 or more receive a free gym and pizza night.

Costs of the event are partially underwritten by Bauman Family Fruit Butters and Cider, Sassamansville; and Gouldey Welding & Fabrications, Inc., Souderton. Additional business supporters and prize donors are being sought. The event will be held rain or shine.

For more information about the event, contact Don Fitzkee at 800-452-6517 or don@cobys.org. Printable brochures and sponsor sheets are available at cobys.org/news.



Sigman, Taylors to Headline 21st Annual Wenger Praise Dinner Kenyan Children’s Group Also to Perform

Speaker Mike Sigman and gospel artists The Taylors will provide inspiration and entertainment at the 21st annual Wenger Foundation Praise Dinner on Thursday, April 21, at 6:00 p.m., at the Lebanon Expo Center. The event will benefit COBYS Family Services and three other ministries.

Sigman is the Lead Pastor at Grace Community Church in Lancaster and a frequent preacher at area churches and camp meetings. In addition to serving as



Mike Sigman

both a pastor and bishop in the Evangelical Congregational denomination, he is past president of Evangelical Seminary in Myerstown.

The Taylors are a nationally known brother-sister quartet from North Carolina. In 2008, The Taylors won First Place in the Talent Showcase of the National Quartet



The Taylors

Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. They have performed on national and international stages.

In addition to Sigman and the Taylors, a late addition to the program is East African praise, dance, and song by the Baba Nyumbani Children’s Performing Group from Kitale, Kenya.

The Praise Dinner will include a buffet meal catered by Country Home Catering. Others benefitting from the event are Evangelical Seminary, Friendship Community,

and On Fire Youth Ministries.

The cost to attend is \$125 per person or \$1,250 per table of 10 guests. All donations support the designated ministries.

Underwriting all of the event’s expenses are:

the John & Judy Byler Charitable Foundation; Brightbill Body Works; Country Fare Restaurant; Roger & Marjorie Gerhart; Good’s Disposal Service; Kline Kreider & Good Auctioneers; Tom B. Morrissey TV & Appliance; Roger & Carolyn North, North Group Consultants; Sight & Sound Ministries, Inc.; Bill & Nancy Smeltzer; Jim & JoAnne Speers; Gene Wenger’s Meats & Fine Foods; Wengers of Myerstown; and other anonymous donors.

The Wenger Foundation, Inc., was established in 1996 as the charitable giving arm of the Wenger Family of Companies. Since then, the Foundation has awarded more than \$2 million to a variety of Christian and community ministries.

Last year’s Praise Dinner attracted some 850 people, and raised more than \$130,000, including \$26,038 for COBYS. Since 1999 COBYS has received more than \$331,000 through the Praise Dinner.

For more information about the event, please contact the Wenger Foundation at 717-866-2130 or rwalmer@wengers.com.

IRA Giving Provision Made Permanent

A provision allowing donors to give tax-free gifts from an Individual Retirement Account to qualified charities was made permanent in December. The so-called IRA rollover had been approved on an annual basis in recent years, often late in the year when fewer donors could take advantage of it.

The basic rules for an IRA rollover remain the same: Donors age 70½ or older can transfer up to \$100,000 from their IRA to charity each year. An IRA rollover is a tax-exempt distribution from the IRA. The amount transferred can be used to meet the donor’s required minimum distribution.

To learn more about this provision, or other ways of supporting COBYS—such as charitable gift annuities and estate planning—contact Director of Development Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or don@cobys.org. Consult your own financial advisor to discuss how specific ways of giving affect you.

Foster Care, Adoption-Related Programs Expanding to Meet Demand

This article is adapted from a presentation given by COBYS Director of Placement Services Mary Sourber at the March 4 COBYS banquets.

This past year has been one of the most eventful years I have had since I started working at COBYS in 1989. In my job as the Director of Placement Services I oversee the adoption, foster care, and permanency unit programs. If I had to sum up what is happening in these programs in one word that word would be “growth.”

Last fiscal year (July 1-June 30) our adoption staff finalized 16 adoptions. This year, with a third of the fiscal year remaining, we already have finalized 14 adoptions and anticipate doubling that number by June 30. Last year we provided post-adoption services to 10 families. This fiscal year we already have served 14 families. These are just two examples of across the board growth in adoption. We recently hired a sixth adoption caseworker, which is a new high in staffing for this program.

We are experiencing even more growth in our Permanency Unit, which is a specialized foster care program that we do in partnership with the Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency. The county requested that COBYS double the size of this program. So with the help of volunteers last fall, we did some renovations to the building, and the permanency unit has increased from 8 to 12 staff, with plans to be at 16 staff by July 1. This will double the number people we can serve through this program.

Growth in foster care also has been dramatic. We are placing more children now than at any time in the past 20 years. We recently added a new foster care coordinator position and a sixth foster care caseworker to keep up with the workload.

One reason for the growth is the heroin epidemic that is ravaging our communities. Eighty-five percent of the children currently in our foster care program have at least one parent with an addiction problem. (Many, but not all, are addicted to heroin.) As a result, children of addicted parents are exposed to violence, severe abuse (both physical and sexual), and abandonment, which lead to serious emotional, developmental, and physical needs.

COBYS currently has 82 children in foster care, with 45 foster families, and only 8 families that are available to take more children. In February we

received 57 referrals for children who needed a foster home and we were able to place just ONE child.

To meet demand, during the past year we added three daytime pre-service trainings for foster/adoptive parents to supplement the three evening trainings already offered. We currently are working on completing family profiles for 30 families who have received training, and we have three more pre-service training classes before the end of this fiscal year. So help is on the way, but there is an ongoing need for foster/adoptive resource families.

The next training for new foster/adoptive parents begins April 7. Contact Resource Home Coordinator Rachel Eshbach at 717-656-6580 or rachel@cobys.org to learn more.

Adventurous Boy Needs Home



Jay is looking for a family who loves adventure. This 11-year-old boy will keep you on your toes and provide continuous excitement in your life. He currently is waiting to meet his forever family and is legally free for adoption.

Like many boys, Jay loves video games, kickball, and football. He is in fourth grade and receives learning support for math and reading. Overall, Jay gets along with his peers and the other children in his current foster home. He is working hard to learn how to control his anger and express himself in healthy ways.

Jay needs a family that will be committed to looking beyond his pain and negative experiences in life to see the amazing resilient child that he is. He would do best in a family that understands trauma issues and can provide a structured environment and the nurturing he missed out on as a child. Currently, Jay has mandated visits with his extended birth family; continued contact is suggested. An approved home study is required for families to be considered for Jay.

To learn more about Jay, please contact Melanie Rankin at 717-656-6580 or melanie@cobys.org.

Approximately 2,500 Pennsylvania children are waiting for adoption. While some of these children will be adopted by their current foster parents, many others are legally free for adoption but do not have an identified permanent home. These children often are called “waiting children.” COBYS adoption staff seek homes for such children through a service called Child Specific Recruitment.

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a small percentage of Lancaster County foster children. But to get Brad off her back, Mimy dutifully called COBYS Foster Care Supervisor Sharon Kingsley to explain the situation. When she had finished, there was a pause at the other end of the line.

And then Sharon explained that indeed COBYS had received the referral and that staff were considering whether to call Brad & Mimy.

Plans change. Baby Annika joined the family a day or two later.

"We just took that as confirmation that she was supposed to be ours," says Mimy. "We had a boy nursery all ready and all kinds of things prepared for a baby boy, but we just went and bought pink. And she is just a blessing.



She's just a perfect little addition to our family."

Soon after Annika joined their family, the birth grandmother called to thank them and let them know that the baby's birth parents felt much better about the situation, knowing that their daughter was with a good

family that they knew and trusted.

"Every part of it we just saw God's hand at work in it," says Brad.

Annika celebrated her first birthday on February 25 and was adopted on March 3.

Admitting that sometimes she has control issues, Mimy reflects, "Who am I to say the family God has in mind for us? If you have biological children you can't pick and choose which gender or anything like that. It was just a good lesson for me again to surrender to God and what he has for us. I can't imagine our family any other way now."

Brad & Mimy Rollman were featured in a video segment at the March 4 COBYS banquets. Find a link to the video on the News & Events page at cobys.org.