

Merry Christmas, Season's Greetings,
and Happy New Year from
The Henry and William Evans Home for Children!

December 2011

Thank you! Your generosity has allowed us to share another year in the lives of extraordinary children. Whether your contribution came in the form of cash, services, goods, or your time, the following is a small testament to the love and magic that you have inspired.

Our home gets viewed from all sides in all ways. Last year started with two days of intensive scrutiny from our licensing reviewer for renewal, who came December 28 and 29, and checked everything from light-bulbs to medication records. Additional inspections during the year included the health department (we carry a full health restaurant license); USDA (same as school lunch programs with documented menus down the ingredients on each can of soup); and facility-wide fire and safety inspections.

Others of you saw our place as you dropped by to donate items and sometimes maybe got a quick tour to see where the kids live (usually while they were at school). Some saw us from closer inside, like groups who came in and threw parties with us, or entertained us, or taught us skills like money management.

But the only really important view of our home is that seen through the eyes of our kids. And hopefully we can share just a little of that view with you here.

Holidays are a challenge for all of us, aren't they? With parties to schedule and prepare, presents to select, surprises to plan and secrets to keep . . . the theme seems to resound that we are meeting someone else's expectations. And the more we layer those "someone's," the more challenging it gets. Imagine for a moment how it must be for our children. Perhaps you can. At a time when we're all focusing on fulfilling expectations of others, the world is buzzing with song and message about "family." And if you're one of our kids, that is the very thing that you don't have at this moment in your life through no fault of your own. Holidays also seem to be moments when memories are galvanized. So they represent past anniversaries of pain and suffering that are all too vivid.

So how do we spend this time? With the help of some extraordinary friends, we keep our children spinning and grinning as much as we can! We start the season with a special party thrown by a company who takes us to shop for our little friends at the day nursery where we perform our community service all year . . .

and then they give us presents! And so it begins . . . The garden club comes and begins the transformation of our home while the kids are at school, and the place begins to look and smell like a cabin in a northern forest, made cozier still with carols playing on the stereo and bowls of fruit and cookies waiting for snack-time when the children arrive home. From that point on we're pretty much a blur of parties, performances, and services, touching on all of our needs from comfort to attention to spiritual until the "regular" routine of winter resumes. With too many participants to thank here, let me just reiterate how important you are and how thankful we are if you played a part in that uniquely Evans Home experience last year! I never tire of hearing from former residents how their memories of Evans Home Christmas Seasons are the best of their childhoods. Wow.

What change a year has brought! Last December we started the month with eight children: 7 boys and 1 girl, all aged 15 to 17. By Christmas we had 3 more girls and another boy, all in the same age range. This year we are beginning December with 7 boys and 6 girls, ages 8 to 18, plus a 3 year-old sibling in foster care who visits on a regular basis. Boy, are the family dynamics different between a mostly-boys population of all teenagers and a more balanced group of boys and girls, younger and older. Everything changes, from chore breakouts to what kinds of jokes are told out loud and what times certain kinds of movies get watched in the living room! (And talk about the difference in drama!) What doesn't change? All kids love Legos.

Of the kids who started the year with us, *Gary* (all names in italics have been changed), was finishing his senior year in high school! He had been with us since elementary school, having come as a 4th grader who could barely read and was the reason that we had signs on everything from clocks to doors, including one on house dog, *Billy*, that said, "Dog." He left during the summer, tried some things on his own, and came back to live in our Lloyd House (Alumni House) last month. He's working hard in the community, and plans on furthering his education starting next year!

Jimmy is 15! So hard to believe! He, too, has been with us since he was a little guy. He spent his first year in high school this year making sensational grades (3.5 GPA), . . . and had a date to Homecoming! The rest of the group did such an amazing job helping him prepare, as did house parents Mike and Winona, nobody could help but smile as the couple pinned flowers to each other and headed to the big show. Thirty minutes later Mike got a call. Yup, they were bored, so they came home and watched a supervised movie in the living room before Jimmy escorted his date home at a fashionable hour.

Earl was just a little too cool for school. He was a lot of fun to be around, had a great sense of humor, and was a smooth talker with adults, but hesitant to let

anyone truly in close enough to give him the kind of advice that a 17 year old boy truly needs. He left us for a more intensive environment in May with our hopes that he may find the incentive he needs to let his guard down enough to drop some of his street act and let his gentle nature guide him into the future he deserves.

Katherine was our only girl. At fifteen, she actually was very courageous to make the move to join our family, as she was joining all boys at the time! Talk about attention, though, “Who loves to shop?” Actually, it was just a few weeks before she had company, lots of it, down the girl’s hall. And then we started asking ourselves ... no, we love our girls! She also left in May, to give a foster home another try ... we miss her but wish her well!

Cam was 16 last December. A fan of hockey, both ice and roller, he was also a great baseball player, and an amazingly gifted student without having to work hard. He spent a good deal of his year bouncing from girlfriend to girlfriend, and preparing for a school trip to Europe in the summer! He made some unfortunate behavioral choices just a couple of weeks before departure, however, that he knew would be too hard to undo, and wound up running away instead of trying. Don’t you wish you could give a teenager a brain transplant with an older version of his own brain? This is a young man with tremendous resources in terms of talent and intellect, however, and we still believe that as long as his common sense can begin to outpace his mistakes from this point on he will be a great success!

Adam, like *Cam*, had a disappointing year. He started off with some anger stuff that seemed out of character, and went away to get some help for a couple of months in a program in Richmond, but when he got back he was kind of different. He even expressed this, how it was difficult for him to handle things that “triggered” him, and things like that. Anyway, this quiet, sensitive kid had become a short-tempered, aggressive kid, who ultimately ran away with *Cam* and is now in a longer term program. A bumpy road for *Adam*, but hopefully he will get the help he needs and be able to make sense of his journey.

Ryder completed his time with us as planned while his father prepared to receive him in June. He really enjoyed his time at the Evans Home, and we LOVED sharing part of his life! *Ryder* has a quiet, confident demeanor, and a quick wit... but you have to listen hard to hear his comments!

Dewey finished last year with us, but left in late January for more intensive treatment. He needed more help than we could offer, although he wants to come back and has been working hard ever since. (Well, sometimes harder than others.) He had a wonderful home-visit last weekend, and may be finally at the point when we can plan for an actual date for his return ... sweet!

Court and Patty, joined us mid-December last year. What a difference they brought to our world! A new girl, for one, to join Katherine down the girls' hall, and a sibling group. Hilarious to watch this love-hate dependency thing as the 16 and 17 year-olds bicker and then make-up, and then refuse to speak! Two amazing young people to share a year with, as it has turned out; Court now with his own car and eyes on four-year colleges, and Patty working hard at a fast food restaurant while planning to continue her education at Lord Fairfax!

Faye is the reason we all love “blond” jokes . . . and she tells the best ones –on herself! She came to live with us in January at the age of 18 after a long life in foster care, and stayed for a transitional period while she finished preparations for a more structured Independent Living program in Charlottesville where she is now. She says she likes it there, but misses us and keeps in touch with us by Facebook and regular phone calls to let us know she's doing great. Although technically an adult, she didn't give the sense that she is ready for primetime, spending most of her free time bee-bopping around with her eyes closed listening to music or giggling and passing secrets with the resident 15-year old. (Sigh)

Enter the resident 15 year old! *Elvira* also came in during January, and as I mentioned, became very good friends with Faye. A girl of all emotions, she was willing to show them the instant before you expected her to. You never forgot she was in the room, and that was as often because you were laughing with her as when you were trying to comfort her or affect some emotional damage control as a response to something she just brought into the milieu. She left in September to live with her Grandmother as planned, and we're thrilled that things are working out for them!

Dionysus moved in at the end of January and if we wondered whether the boy thing was over before, we didn't then. Not exactly a shrinking violet, she's one 16-year old who definitely knows how to let you know what's on her mind . . . or at least when it is in your best interest to begin probing to find out. And quiet? She shares the same understanding of “inside voice” as our dog Billy. But what a neat kid! Hugely athletic and involved in cheerleading and softball - perfect outlets for lots of natural energy!

Rocky entered in March, followed shortly by *London*. About the only thing the two have in common is an interest in messing with their hair. Rocky is a quiet 16-year-old peace-maker type who easily gets along with almost everyone but is a little short on personal self-control (look up *teenage boy*); and London is a sensitive, highly intelligent teenage girl who is trying to manage a variety of support services and decide which is the best fit during the 6 months or so before

her graduation from school and move into adulthood. Rocky is still with us and London moved out in October to live in the home of a former social worker.

Ethan spent a short time with us this summer. A large, very intelligent 14-year-old boy, he came at a time in his life when he wasn't willing or able to let someone new be a voice of authority in his world. He is away getting some more intensive help for now, and we hope he will be able to return some day because he certainly has a lot of potential and it would be an honor to watch him discover it!

Ruby came to live with us in May. If there could be an opposite personality type to Dionysus ... it came in the form of Ruby. And the two mix like vinegar and oil! Both are brilliant, lovely, athletic and popular. Both also have a wonderful capacity to care and share, when they aren't targeting each other. And both are great at targeting each other. Ah, house parent pay is never enough! Ruby runs track at Handley, works at a fast food restaurant, and is not only academically gifted but is amazingly patient with younger children.

Mia joined us in June, a great time to join the Evans Home if you are ready for outgoing adventure! (*Mia*, as luck would have it, is painfully introverted, with lots of outdoor fears.) It took our girls' best late-night chats to soften her adjustment, and by the end of the summer she was ready to push herself to new "firsts," including completing private swimming lessons with an inspired volunteer instructor, and then tubing on the Chesapeake Bay! *Mia* is also an amazing artist!

Mike and Mindy are brother and sister, 12 and 8, who just joined us in late October. Their younger brother, *Methuselah*, is just 3 so he can't yet be with us full time but he is in foster care close by and visits on a regular basis and loves his time at the Evans Home! All of these three are planning on returning home to live with their parents when preparations are ready sometime next year, and are in daily contact at this point.

In November we had a visit from a school official and a very special mom. This is a person who has found herself unable to provide a home for her three children, aged 16, 11, and 6, and asked if we would provide for them while she set about finding work and shelter for herself and her family. We were and are truly thrilled to be able to provide this for her, and welcomed *Astro, Magnum, and Laleh* to our happy home! Mother and adult brother come and visit almost daily, and we all love taking turns reading bedtime stories!

Last in this year (so far)? Tony moved in at the end of November. He's 14, and this is actually the third time he's been considered for placement. What a wild roller-coaster ride he just got on!

Other news this year included the introduction of new house parents Brent and Missy Rudolph in April! Both have a long history of working with kids like ours, and we are proud to have welcome them to our family! Also, Handley's construction class has been building a new storage building for us, attached to our Lloyd house! This will be a huge help for us, providing a place to house not only possessions of current children but those belonging to former residents in transition (college, armed forces, etc.).

So that's about it for the main house news, oh, except one not so small miracle to mention: second marking period this year - WE ALL (but 1) GOT ON THE HONOR ROLL!

As for the Lloyd House? We've had 5 former residents and a baby there this year, including two who live there right now. Of our current brood at the main house, 5 are seniors preparing to graduate from Handley this year and move up there! In case any of you weren't aware, the Lloyd House is our special response to our children's needs after they graduate from high school. Should they wish, they can come back and live there under our guidance as long as they work and pay rent ... and they get all of their rent back when they are ready to move on ...

We do hope this finds you enjoying the company of those you love, and that this gives you a glimpse into the world you have helped to sustain for us and the children that we love.

On behalf of the children and adults of the Henry and William Evans Home for Children, again, thank you!

Marc

Evans Home adults: with board members: