

W. Richland family doubles with adoption of 4 siblings

Kristin M. Kraemer, Herald staff writer



Michael and Molly Turner of West Richland always knew they wanted to adopt and grew their family by four in March 2008. The four siblings, one of whom isn't pictured, joined their biological daughter, left. Even newer to the family is Quincy, a stray that they adopted one month ago.

WEST RICHLAND -- When Michael and Molly Turner were first dating, the young couple knew that over time things would change, but there always was one constant -- they wanted to adopt.

Neither was a product of the foster care system or came from an adoptive home. But they considered it a reflection of their Christian values to open their home and their hearts to kids waiting for a mom and dad.

So in March 2008, the Turner household grew by four when they took in children from Texas. They were living in Minnesota and already had a young daughter.

"We were able to have children, but we wanted to be able to provide a home for children who might not be able to have a home," said Molly, 33. "There are so many kids that need a forever home, I couldn't do anything else."

She wanted to follow the example set by her mother, a longtime president of a community pregnancy center, and "put my life where my mouth was."

She believed the kids needed a chance to become "amazing, happy, productive members of society" instead of languishing in the foster care system.

The family of seven now live in West Richland. Michael, 35, is a doctor who works in the Kadlec Neuroscience Center, focusing on physical medicine and rehabilitation. Molly says she fills many positions, but most particularly "awesome mom" all day and every day.

The Turners have asked that the names of their "kiddos" not be published. Their girls are now 5, 8 and 12, and the boys are 10 and 11.

Michael Turner will be a featured speaker at Friday's National Adoption Day event in Pasco. He plans to talk about the importance of staying committed for the kids and not quitting.

"When we persevere, we can see things through to the end," Turner said. He noted how unsettling and psychologically devastating it must be for the thousands of children each year who leave the foster system at 18, having grown up without an adult figure.

National Adoption Day will be celebrated with a 3 p.m. ceremony at the Franklin County Courthouse, 1016 N. Fourth Ave., Pasco. The main event will start in Superior Court's courtroom No. 2, followed by private adoption proceedings in two separate courtrooms.

This year's theme is, "A family for every child."

Adoption hearings generally are closed, but some families have agreed to do them in open court. Officials are planning seven adoptions, with each child receiving a teddy bear and a framed picture of their new family with the judge to mark the event.

Benton-Franklin Superior Court has been celebrating National Adoption Day since 2006. Information about the adoption process and services from different agencies will be available in the courthouse rotunda.

The day was founded in 2000 by a coalition of national child welfare organizations hoping to raise awareness of the thousands of foster children available for adoption. Dozens of foster children are expected to be adopted during special court events this week across Washington. They will join almost 800 foster kids in the who have been welcomed into new families on National Adoption Day since 2005.

As of Aug. 1, there were 9,114 children living in foster care in Washington, and 1,323 of them were available for adoption. Their biological parents' rights to raise them have been permanently terminated by the courts.

State officials say the number of foster children is declining because of intense efforts "to move children more quickly into permanent family situations, either through re-unifying children with their birth parents or through adoption out of foster care into new families," according to the Department of Social and Health Services' Children's Administration.

The state Supreme Court in 2005 established a Foster Care Commission with the goal of quicker resolution for foster children. The group includes judges, child welfare workers, foster parents, current or former foster kids, legislators, school officials, tribal officials and attorneys.

On average, between 1,100 and 1,200 foster children in Washington are adopted during a fiscal year. But between July 2008 and June 2009, the Children's Administration reported a record 1,701 adoptions, with 1,533 the following year ending this June.

"I am pleased that so many communities are celebrating adoptions with children and their forever families on these special days," Denise Revels Robinson, the Children's Administration assistant secretary, said in a news release.

The Turners were looking for three things in their adoptive children: older kids, multiples from the same family and of mixed race. They "definitely hit the trifecta," Molly said, when they found four siblings, ages 5 to 10, with a white mom and black dad.

Michael also is of mixed race, as is their biological daughter since Molly is white. She said they often "joke around that mom needs to get a tan."

When the couple first came upon an online picture of the four siblings during their adoption search, "they looked exactly like they fit in our family," Molly said.

The couple met when Michael traveled to Gardnerville, Nev., to see in person a pastor he had heard on the radio. Molly saw Michael walk through the doors of her church and knew she had to meet him. They were married in August 2002.

Molly was an esthetician and owned a day spa, but gave that up to follow her husband through medical school at Harvard University and his residency at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

To encourage adoption over more expensive alternatives for couples wanting children, the Mayo Clinic offered employees up to \$6,000 per child for necessary expenses. Molly said "we decided to go big."

The Turners worked with New Life Family Services in Minnesota, a pro-life organization, and eventually broadened their search across the country. Molly found Heart Gallery of America -- a photographic and audio exhibit of foster care children needing homes -- and fell in love with the kids once she saw their portrait on the website.

Their biological mother had been given five years to work through her issues of neglect, but eventually had her parental rights terminated. The kids were taken into foster care and stayed there for three years before being adopted. They were split up in separate homes, boys and girls, for half of that time.

It took 1 1/2 years to complete the adoption, working with the private agency and the state. The Turners' biological daughter was 3 1/2 when she welcomed her new siblings, giving them a tour of their bedrooms decorated in their favorite colors with their pictures already framed on the walls.

When Michael finished his residency, Molly told him she got to pick the family's next home after living in "bone-chilling" Boston and Minnesota. The Tri-Cities was perfect for the Nevada-raised woman, who said she is "solar-powered" and wanted sunshine and a slower pace of life.

"My kids have to grow up in sagebrush. It's healthy," she said.

They moved to West Richland more than a year ago and live on 2 1/2 acres where the kids can raise animals -- currently two goats -- and have room for imagination. The kids are home-educated, with one room dedicated as a classroom and uniforms to help them transition from home life to school time.

For family time, they watch movies, dance, read books, play games and take walks or bike rides. They also attend Temple Baptist Church of Richland.

The Turners said they wanted to adopt older children because it is harder to find homes for them. "They come with their own histories. They have their own hurts," Molly said.

During the adoption process, the kids' guardian ad litem asked the Turners why two young people would want to take on a large family. Even five kids without baggage is a lot, they were told.

Molly said she's an energetic and strong woman, but when she reaches the end of her endurance, she turns to God. Though adoption might appear to be all "warm and fuzzy, happy and magical," the Turners admit there is more to it, and they couldn't do it all alone.

"You are blending their reality and your reality. It was eye-opening to us how deep their hurts can be ... and how clueless the layperson can be," she said. "... It's a shock when you realize love is not enough."

None of the kids had medical problems, but they suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and reactive attachment disorder, and some were on strong psychiatric medications. Michael said they have "responded well to stability and a loving family."

The past 21/2 years has made a big difference in their young lives. The kids now laugh all the time and are enjoying figuring out who they are as a person.

The Turners say more people need to understand what adoptive families go through and to provide support, encouragement and even hugs. People who are interested in adopting or have become an adoptive family also should read up on the issues and know what to expect. They found help in the website attachment.org.

Molly said becoming adoptive parents is about "letting go of your life and what you had planned for the future and letting them in. It just takes a lot to be willing to do that."

The Turners say there are no plans to add to their family, but once the kids are grown and out of the house, they will consider adopting some teenagers.

"It's all worth it. I'd do it again a million times over. It teaches you so much about what is worth in life, and just to see one child have hope," Molly said. "It's very challenging and continues to be for a long time, but you have to be committed. And if you want to reap the most rewards, it takes everything you've got emotionally and physically."

"My kids came with no medical needs," she added. "However, all needed a heart transplant, and I was the donor."

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2010/11/14/1251961/w-richland-family-more-than-doubles.html#ixzz15NvCx6MP>