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Defending the Fatherless:

God's Most Tender Mission Field

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On a crisp October morning in 2005, at a Belgrade hospital, a baby girl was born. She had ten perfect fingers, a button nose, and the most beautiful brown eyes her mother had ever seen. She named her Barbara. But all was not right. Doctors soon discovered that little Barbara had several severe congenital heart defects—defects so bad they could not be corrected by even the best surgeons in Serbia. It would not be long before little Barbara was gone forever. The heartbroken mother decided to leave her daughter to die at the hospital, alone.

But little Barbara had no intention of dying, at least not without a family. She lived two more days. Then three. And four. By the end of that first week, little Barbara was still alive. The weeks quickly slipped into months, and little Barbara would not die. The months passed. Doctors and nurses scratched their heads as they passed by this tiny baby's crib. Her heart was so bad she should not live, and yet she refused to die. By the time eleven months had passed in the hospital, they gave up on waiting for her to die and decided to call the local orphanage.

A social worker picked Barbara up and took her to an orphanage called Kolevka (meaning "the cradle" in Serbian) in Subotica, where she was put up for adoption. There, amidst the comings and goings of many other orphans, Barbara grew, took her first wobbly steps, and

finally said some of her first words, "Mama! Tata! (Daddy)." As Barbara watched other orphans leave in the loving arms of their adoptive parents, a dream began to grow. More than anything else, she longed for a mommy and daddy of her own. She *would* live to see them come for her, no matter how long it would take.

Three years later and nearly six thousand miles away, in Wimberley, Texas, Matt and Lorraine Patterson had a decision to make. They had been told about a little Serbian orphan girl with heart problems. Matt and Lorraine already had four children, one of whom was adopted from Colombia. Could they take another one, especially one with such severe heart problems? Several families had already begun the adoption process with this girl, only to back out later. Matt and Lorraine discussed it for a little while, agreeing to pray for God's leading. Later that night, Matt was suddenly struck with a familiar verse, "Withhold not good from them to whom it is

due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." Proverbs 3:27. He thought of all he had been blessed with and knew that this was something that was within his power to do. The decision was made. They would adopt little Barbara.

In October 2009, just in time to celebrate Barbara's fourth birthday, Matt and Lorraine's airplane touched down in Serbia. They were coming to get the little girl



who had been hoping and dreaming about this day for nearly three years. At the orphanage, a worker placed a beaming Barbara on Lorraine's lap. Barbara tenderly cradled Lorraine's face in her hands, stared deep into her eyes, and, in Serbian, said "I love you, Mama!" The worker quickly translated. Looking over at Matt, Barbara's eyes sparkled. "Tata, I like chocolate!" she said.

On October 14, Matt and Lorraine signed all the necessary paperwork to make Barbara, now Christyn Joy Patterson, their legal daughter. She was delighted and ever so ready to make the thirty-hour journey to her new home in America. She never shed a tear about leaving everything she knew behind in Serbia. Her dream had come true. She finally had her family, and she was ready!

Chrissie, as they nicknamed her, was just as energetic as her four-year-old deformed heart would let her be. She jumped on the trampoline (while her daddy held her in his arms), rode horses at the ranch, and joyfully played with her new brothers and sisters. But, after only a few minutes of activity, she would stop, gasp for breath, and say, "I tired." Her skin had a bluish tint to it from not getting enough oxygen. Matt and Lorraine met with a skilled team of surgeons to examine Chrissie and see what could be done to repair her heart. What they found astounded them all.

Chrissie was born with no pulmonary artery (the artery that connects the lungs with the heart, thus bringing life-giving oxygen to the entire body) and no pulmonary valves, which meant she had no blood flow

from her heart to her lungs. There was also a large hole between her lower left and right ventricles, and she had extreme stenosis (narrowing) of her arteries, which were the size of dental floss, among other things. However, she had "grown" three blood vessels that worked independently of her heart and, in some miraculous way, oxygenated her blood. A very complex surgery was planned, which had to be postponed several times, but in April 2010, everything was ready. The surgery would not be easy, and no guarantees of a good outcome could be given. Lorraine asked everyone she knew to pray fervently as they neared the surgery date, and a friend of Lorraine's organized a 24/7 prayer chain so that at every minute of every day for the first three days, Chrissie would be lifted up in prayer.

"Mama, no leave me!" Chrissie was adamant as they neared the hospital. "Mama, no leave me." Lorraine was not about to leave her daughter's side. With a mother's dedication, she had packed her suitcase and was ready to move into Chrissie's hospital room. For thirty-one days after the surgery, Lorraine tenderly mothered Chrissie through the valley of the shadow of death as Chrissie struggled for life. In the middle of the tubes and needles, the lights and examinations, Chrissie could always feel the warmth of *her mother's* presence. On May 19, the battle was over; only seven months after meeting her family, Chrissie fell asleep in Jesus.

Was it worth it? Was it worth all the pain and heartache and money to spend just six months with a child? Many would say, No. But Matt and Lorraine's family will tell you a different story. At Chrissie's



funeral, Matt, with tears in his eyes, said he never regretted adopting Chrissie. “Those six months [with Chrissie in our home] were the best in my life, and I would gladly do it all again.” Her teenage brother said, “I would much rather have gotten to love her for six months, than never to have loved her at all.” In fact, the Patterson family has gone on to adopt three more children—two from Haiti and one from the United States. Why? Matt summed it all up by stating that adoption gives one the priceless opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ with a child.

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Today, there are between 147 and 150 million orphans around the world. In the United States, 500,000 children move in and out of the foster care system—angry, afraid, and alone. Their vulnerability makes them a targeted population by those seeking to exploit children for monetary gain. Psalm 82:3 commands us to “defend the ... fatherless.” James 1:27 states clearly, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ... unspotted from the world.”

Consider these words: “Brethren and sisters, I ask you to consider this matter carefully. Think of the wants of the fatherless and motherless. Are not your hearts stirred as you witness their sufferings? See if something cannot be done for the care of these helpless ones. As far as lies in your power, make a home for the homeless. Let everyone stand ready to act a part in helping forward this work. The Lord said to Peter: ‘Feed My lambs.’ This command is to us, and by opening our homes for the orphans we aid in its fulfillment. Let not Jesus be disappointed in you.

“Take these children and present them to God as a fragrant offering. Ask His blessing upon them, and then mold and fashion them according to Christ’s order. Will our people accept this holy trust? Because of our shallow piety and worldly ambition, shall those for whom Christ has died be left to suffer, to go in wrong paths?

“The word of God abounds with instruction as to how we should treat the widow, the fatherless, and the needy, suffering poor. If all would obey this instruction, the widow's heart would sing for joy; hungry little children would be fed; the destitute would be clothed; and those ready to perish would be revived. Heavenly [angels] are looking on, and when, imbued with zeal for Christ’s honor, we place ourselves in the channel of God’s providence, these heavenly messengers will impart to us a new spiritual power so that we shall be able to combat difficulties and triumph over obstacles.”

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 284, 285.



Not everyone is able to adopt. However, adoption is not the only way you can help orphans. Here are some ideas:

Defending the Fatherless: What I Can Do

- Pray for orphans around the world
- Become informed about the plight of orphans
- Donate toys, clothes, and/or money to a foster care or adoption agency
- Volunteer as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for children
- Babysit for an adoptive family so the parents can have some alone time
- Donate toothbrushes, school supplies, coloring books, or other personal items to “My Stuff Bags Foundation” for children in the U.S. foster care system
- Volunteer to work with victims of trafficking (most of whom come from foster homes, group homes, or are runaways from abusive situations)
- Volunteer at a prison (approximately 80% of all U.S. inmates spent some time in foster care)
- Volunteer at a homeless shelter (approximately 30% of all homeless people were in foster care) or a women and children’s shelter
- Become a “Safe Family” for a family in crisis
- Sponsor an overseas orphan
- Donate toward building an orphanage
- Donate toward a family’s adoption expenses
- Become a “special friend” at a group home
- Foster or adopt

“God sets the lonely in families...”
Psalm 68:6

Photos courtesy of Lorraine Patterson: p. 1, Chrissie; p. 2, the Patterson family at Chrissie’s adoption; p.3, the Patterson children, including their three newest additions



American Union Conference Invitation

Life gets so busy at times. As we race from deadline to deadline, it's easy to let our relationship with God slip away. The American Union Conference gives us the much-needed opportunity to reconnect and re-establish our relationship with our heavenly Father.

From **Wednesday, August 24**, through **Sabbath, August 27**, we will all have the privilege of refreshing our spirits at the Cohutta Springs Campground in Crandall, Georgia. This unique setting will surround you with the beauty of nature, gently reminding you of the never-ending love of its Creator.

Make plans now to attend this next American Union Conference.

2011 Calendar

- **August 23-24: American Union Delegates' Meetings**
- **August 24-27: American Union Conference at Cohutta Springs Campground in Crandall, GA**

The *American Union Newsletter* is the official organ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement, American Union. It is published monthly, is complimentary for our members and friends, and carries items of interest submitted by church members. We reserve the right to make changes as necessary and to refuse to print certain items.

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