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Couple travels overseas to bring a family together

By **KIMBERLY POORE**

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Don't be fooled by the red brick house or the mini-van in the driveway of their quaint suburban neighborhood, Carrie and Brian Wood have journeyed far across the world to bring together their family.

The Wood family looks like the typical all-American family from the outside, but what is inside this family's home is something far more atypical than all-American.

Carrie and Bryan Wood knew that they wanted to have kids, but what they didn't realize was what they were willing to do to get them, and after 19 years of marriage, the journey they were about to take to have children was about to begin.

"My grandmother had passed away and we had a long drive home (from the funeral services)," Carrie said. "We made the decision that we were ready. Brian was adopted, as were my parents, so adoption just seemed like the logical choice for us."

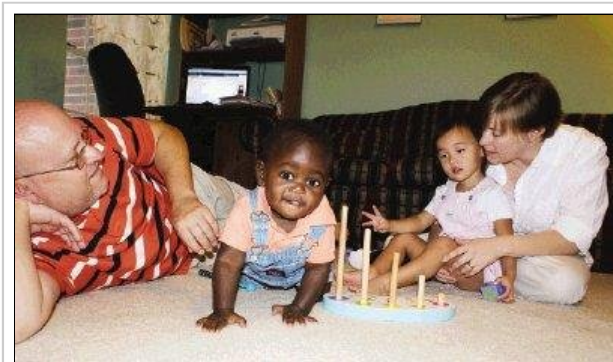
The Woods adopted their first child, Grace, two years after their decision to adopt. They took Grace home from China after she was left on the doorsteps of an orphanage in a village with her umbilical cord still attached.

"We received Grace at nine months old on Christmas Eve," Brian said. "It was a wonderful Christmas present for us both."

After some time with Grace, Carrie and Brian knew that they wanted another child. The adoption process in China was even longer than it had been before and the Wood family began to explore other countries for adoption.

"We wanted a sibling for Grace and we came across the 'Our Family Adoptions' website and the need in the Democratic Republic of Congo was so great," Carrie said. "There are 5 million orphans in the Congo and the living conditions are horrible."

Recent reports show that more than 45,000 Congolese die every month primarily from disease and famine



Haven Wood has found his way home to his new family.



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and more than half of those affected are small children under the age of five.

"There was no running water or electricity," Brian said. "There is a huge shortage on formula and the children are undernourished. The need for adoption is just so great."

With the help of Jilma Meneses, an attorney who volunteers her efforts for 'Our Family', called the family to tell them of a call she had received from a Congo pastor.

"She called and said there was an orphaned baby boy whose mother had died shortly after his birth," Carrie said. "We had wanted another girl and felt we had to pray about this baby. We didn't know anything about his medical history. Then you wonder if you have enough love to give two children."

The baby's mother had given birth to him on the road trying to flee the violence from the war in Congo that had killed the baby's father. The baby was malnourished and had malaria. His life was hanging by a thread.

"These children are true orphans," Brian said. "Their parents have been killed from the civil war, malaria, AIDS or tuberculosis. They have no access to medical assistance. An orphan in Congo has no reason for hope. "

Carrie and Brian decided to take a leap of faith and wired money to have the baby flown to Kinshasa, the capital city, where he would be cared for by a pastor and his family until the adoption could be finalized.

"When we got Haven he was in dire medical condition," Brian said. "He was three months old and only weighed six pounds. He wouldn't be alive if he hadn't gotten care when he did."

Haven, unlike so many other orphans in the DRC, had been spared from what was certain death either from a disease or famine. He traveled across the world and found a new loving home with two parents and an older sister.

"He bonded beautifully with us," Carrie said. "He is a cuddler and he loves giving kisses. He is a super happy baby. By the time you get the baby you have already waited so long that you love them before you even put them in your arms. When we held him, we said to ourselves, 'of course there is enough love for two'."

Surrounded by toys and people who love him, Haven is learning so much from his new family.

"He emulates everything he hears," Brian said. "He loves his big sister. They are both healthy and on track developmentally."

Carrie and Brian, both teachers, are teaching both children English and sign language. Haven, now only ten months old, is already signing several words. His smile lights up the room and he knows no stranger.

When asked about the adoption process Carrie said, "Do it! Do it! Do it! People spend so much time and effort getting their child that when they get them they really do appreciate it. We didn't adopt to save kids, we did it because we wanted a family. So many children don't have homes. People spend so much money on fertility; why not spend that money on a child already in the world needing a loving home?"

According to Hope for Orphans of the World, there are reportedly more than 143 million orphans in the world today. Many of these children will never see a home and will "age out" of the system.

"Adoption is a viable means to adding to your family," Carrie said. "If one family hears our story and adopts, then we are helping these children. These kids have added more than we could have ever imagined to our lives."

"I cannot describe how cool it is to have these kids," Brian said. "We get the same satisfaction from having children that other families do, but we get the added bonus of knowing we saved these kids lives."

For more information on "Our Family Adoption," visit www.ourfamilyadoptions.org.

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