

Gerry's Story

A Love for Children That Impacts Generations

One of Gerry Burkee's earliest memories is accompanying her mother, Edna Small, to volunteer in the early 1930's at Lutheran Children's Friends Society's annual picnic in Wauwatosa, WI. This large community picnic was held to raise funds for fostering children into adoption and to showcase the many children searching for the perfect family. Just barely 5 years old, Gerry recalls women preparing food while men used wagons to carry the meals to booths for sale, of bands playing and of many games for children to partake. At some point during the picnic, Gerry would join her mother for a tour of the LCFS building and walk through a viewing area of babies and toddlers. She remembers marveling at the children and their nurses all dressed in white and she recalls on several occasions asking her mother if they could please take home a sister, as Gerry was surrounded by all brothers. Her mother politely declined.



Throughout Gerry's teenage years in the 1940's, she watched as her mother and other local women would sew clothing, bedspreads and curtains for the orphans at LCFS. In her early adulthood and marriage, Gerry learned that Irma, her

best friend, was one of those orphaned children, patiently awaiting adoption for several years. Irma, who had been terribly burned as a child in a house fire, was finally adopted at age 13 by a loving minister and his wife.

After Gerry and her husband, Bob, had gotten their youngest of five children into kindergarten, it seemed logical, almost natural, for Gerry to think of LCFS and the children. She told Bob she would like to foster some babies and Bob wholeheartedly agreed. Soon, Annamarie, their first foster baby, came into their home. Then came Kale and Peter and Barbie and Billy

and....over 21 others over the next several years.

"My husband would come home from work, change his clothes, sit in his rocker and say 'Gerry, bring me a baby'", Gerry recalls. "And my oldest son, Gary, who was in high school, would joke that he spent his entire high school years with a baby on his shoulder. It was a hectic time, but we had a house filled with love, laughter and thriving children."

Gerry admits she cried her eyes out each time a baby was placed for adoption. "But I knew that LCFS had found them a loving Christian home and adoring parents. I knew each and every one of them would be okay."

And then came Jeff. He didn't arrive at the Burkee home as an infant. He was 3 years old and had a rough start. He was a bit of a rambunctious child and had moved through several foster homes. He was even adopted by one who changed their minds after a year. "They returned him and said they thought their daughter wanted a little brother, but instead she wanted a dog," Gerry says with tears in her eyes. "Can you believe that? They wanted a dog instead of this beautiful child?"

Jeff was welcomed into the Burkee home and before long, they all decided they wanted him as a brother. He was officially adopted later that year. Now a family of 8, the Burkees thought that 9 seemed like the perfect number to round out their clan. Together they discussed and decided that a baby girl would be the perfect addition and they worked together on a name. Marin was officially adopted in April of 1964.



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Congratulations to the following families on the finalization of their adoptions

Brian and Barb adopted Piper November 1, 2017

Christina and Brad adopted Gavin November 22, 2017

Gerry's Story—continued

Gerry continued her mother's footsteps by volunteering with LCFS over the years. During the 1970's, she served as President of the Women's Auxiliary of LCFS and became the first woman appointed to LCFS's Board of Directors. She continues today to actively support Lutheran Counseling and Family Services (the official name change of Lutheran Children's Friends Society as of 1987) to promote its three elements of care: adoption services, mental health counseling and addiction treatment.

"Serving in these roles was and is important to me," she states. "It is an opportunity to educate people in understanding that there are so many children who need to be given a chance to grow up in loving homes. And the other aspects of counseling are also vital. We need to support the entire family unit, keeping families strong and healthy. To me, that's our real purpose in life and is exactly what LCFS does."

It is clear that fibers of love, acceptance and compassion towards children are woven into the fabric of Gerry Burkee's life. As a child she had no way of knowing that over the years those fibers would weave into a beautiful family tapestry of diversity, colors and blessings for generations to come. Gerry's family now includes 29 grandchildren, 39 great-grandchildren—many of whom are adopted either domestically or internationally - and one great-great grandchild. Continuing Gerry's legacy, several still actively open their homes to foster children awaiting adoption.



"My children saw how adoption brings families together," says Gerry. "Like me, they understood early on that each life of a child is sacred and that every child deserves love, acceptance and feeling they are a part of a family. I have been very blessed."



Most would agree that it is Gerry who has been a blessing. LCFS would not be the same without her and others like her. Thank you Gerry for being a true model of God's grace and love.

To learn more about Gerry's story in her own words, watch her video at www.lcfswi.org.

A Message from the CEO Deb Rayburn, MS, LPC, CSAC, CSIT



Hello Christian Friends and Supporters!

I recently had the privilege and pleasure to speak to women, ages 65-103, regarding "How to Lead a Healthy Lifestyle". I believe these women from Covenant Lutheran Church were placed in my life for a reason. Their Christianity and love for our Lord Jesus Christ filled the fellowship hall. I was humbled and honored that they asked me to speak to them, when in fact, their presence spoke to me. They have lived their lives honoring the Lord, and their faith has been unwavering. As we approach Easter, these women reminded me that Easter is the best time to celebrate the love we share for each other and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose love is eternal!

Happy Easter to you and yours..... IN HIS GLORY

Deb Rayburn, CEO

Contact LCFS at 414-536-8333, FAX—414-536-8348 or EMAIL at lcfswi.org

He Has Risen! He Has Risen Indeed!

Dear Christian Friends,

He is risen! With these words we joyfully prepare for another Easter celebration. However, while we take joy in this message, we also have to take note of the many concerns entering into our daily lives.



With the increasing mass shootings that are taking place in today's world, we are realizing that there are more and more families and children in need of professional mental health counseling. Responding to this concern, LCFS recently increased the number of professionally trained mental health counselors to work in area Christian schools helping children deal with emotional and behavioral problems, trauma and anxiety.

There is also a growing increase and demand for family counseling as our society continues to deal with multiple factors contributing to emotional health and wellness. With men and women leaving military service and returning to family life. With drugs and alcohol running wild today. With financial, social and economic stressors. Some families are unable to overcome and solve these problems without help.

LCFS was founded over 120 years ago as an orphanage for families who could no longer afford to keep their children. LCFS helped them to be adopted into loving Christian homes. This is still an important part of our commitment today. But as society changed, so did LCFS. This is an organization that sees the challenges our families are facing and responds. For this reason, LCFS has satellite counseling offices located throughout the state, staffed by licensed and certified mental health counselors. Most of these professional men and women are trained with additional skills in alcohol and drug treatment, children and adolescent concerns, military reintegration and much more – all delivering their services with Christian care and compassion.

As we continue serving the Lord in His earthly kingdom, we ask that you pray for our ministry and support us through your financial contributions. There is a great need for Christian counseling in Wisconsin as we look for ways to serve our communities with Christ centered compassion.

Ronald (Ron) Maassen, Board Chairman LCFS

**The next Board of Directors meeting will be held on April 24, 2018.
There will be vote on dissolution of membership at that annual meeting.**

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An Adoption Story

The Power of Hope, Love and Faith

We are Brad and Christina. Our adoption story started with an agency in Florida. We went through a couple years of failed matches, loads of money, heartbreak, and many broken promises. We started to lose faith that we would ever become parents. But then the agency found us a “perfect match”. Our families and friends threw us baby showers. We decorated the nursery.

We loved this baby boy already and he was a part of our lives even though we had not even met him yet. A few days prior to going to Florida for his birth, we received an email from the agency saying the birth mother had changed her mind. An email!

We could not believe this was happening. We had been through failed matches before, but this time it felt like the death of our child. We were devastated and grieved our loss. We had a nursery that was empty and had lost hope, faith and couldn't understand WHY this was happening to us again. The Florida agency never called to see how we were doing. We didn't exist to them anymore. We considered giving up on adoption, but Brad wouldn't allow that.

We were connected through a series of friends with a woman who had gone through a successful adoption process. Looking back, Elaine was an angel sent to us in our darkest hour. She shared her story and spoke from experience guided by God. She taught us to stop asking why and start thanking God ahead of time for what we didn't even have yet. Elaine gave Christina a small gift bag and said to open it when she was alone. Inside was a carved wooden statute holding a sign with the word HOPE.

A couple weeks later, we contacted Kate at LCFS. We had used LCFS for our home study and Kate was amazing through our challenges with our agency in Florida. Whenever we needed something she was always there.

In March last year, Kate informed us she had a risky situation for us to consider. A young lady was due in two weeks but the father might not cooperate with the adoption plan. We met with the birth mother and she

picked us to adopt her child. That night we had a decision to make: were we willing, or strong enough to take a baby into our arms for months, maybe a year, and possibly have to give him back? We decided we just needed to give this baby the best start to life possible.

This time, we got into that lifeboat and held on to HOPE. In April, our miracle baby boy was placed in our arms shortly after he was born. There are no words to describe what that moment felt like. It was the best thing that had ever happened to us. Nothing else mattered. He changed our lives forever. We took him home 24 hours later. We held and loved him every second of the day for three months leading up to our first court date in July wondering, hoping, and praying he would get to stay with us.

The phone call came from Kate. She said “Are you ready to be a mom forever?” We couldn't believe it was happening, our baby wasn't going anywhere! He was going to remain in our home and we were going to be his parents!

We finalized our adoption the day before Thanksgiving. It was a day filled with family and friends and best of all by the agency that made this all happen. LCFS stood by us, believed in us, held our hand the whole way, they were a shoulder to cry on and guided us the whole way. They were the right agency!

Our advice to all in the amazing journey of adoption is to follow every lead no matter how hard or difficult the situation might be. Trust and thank God ahead of time because he has a plan for you, just like he did for us—Brad, Christina and our miracle baby Gavin.



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