

ADOPTING CHILDREN - AS A CHILD I ALWAYS KNEW THAT I WOULD SOMEDAY

From the time that I was a five year old boy see (photo right), I had a knowing within that, I would grow into adulthood, adopt, and raise children someday. How did I know this? I had to think about it to remember the roots of where it came from in my life and as of today (September 10, 2013), it is a 176 year old story that is about several sacrificing, loving, nurturing people in my family that, prepared me to be the privileged dad that I am.



Over the years, I've talked with other people that have adopted children and it seems to be a common thread among people that do adopt children that, for one reason or another, they've known most of their lives that they would someday do so. In analyzing my way through this I've come to believe that, God has his various methods of putting it into people's hearts, He began early in me, and I come to the belief that, it is God's way of providing for His people's needs to be parents by giving them these precious children. For sure, in my case, in the long run, my children have done much more for me than I would ever be able to do for them because, after I adopted them, they lovingly adopted me, and called me daddy, and I am so privileged. I hate to think of how empty my life would have been without them in fact they are my life.

It all began for me in 1946. In my early years, until I was five years old, I was raised by a loving, nurturing grandmother, she was a woman that was part Cherokee Indian and part Irish-American, raised as a child, acquiring her knowledge for life between two very different societies, Cherokee Indian and Irish-American. It was because of a loving nourishing Cherokee Indian great grandfather, Mr. John William Jordan, and her mother, Laura Allie Wooten that, my grandmother knew the value of family, loving, and supporting the people around you. Not that, the Irish are not loving and nurturing because most probably are, but this girl, from what I am told, took most of her nurturing knowledge from the Cherokee side of her family. As a child, she told me that, she would visit her great grandfather. He was a man with a special, but difficult life story, living in the Indian Territory that, as an infant, had lived through the "Trail of Tears" march in the late 1830's. If you do not know it, the "Trail of Tears" was a terrible time in American History when the greed of some men caused the American Government to literally use corrupt/illegal treaties between it and the Cherokee Indians to cheat and move the Indians from their homes and lands in the southeastern United States to a desolate place called (Oklahoma) Indian Territory.

John William Jordan, my great-great-great grandfather was born in the Smokey mountains of beautiful, Eastern Tennessee in 1838. John William, his mother, and his father had been rounded up like cattle with 17,000 other Cherokee Indians under the terms of the Ecota Treaty of December 29, 1835. The United States Government and a band of Cherokee Indian men that, were later executed by their own people because of their unauthorized betrayal of their Indian brothers in the Eastern United States. John William's father died along the way to Indian Territory and he was buried along the trail somewhere. John William was taken care of by his mother as well as she could



under the circumstances during that cold winter on their way west. What a terrible ordeal this must have been for them, he never really knew his father. John William's mother had become sick during the cruel winter of 1838/39 march, her health was never the same and she died in 1843, when John William Jordan was just five years old in the Indian Territory. John William, was raised and taught without his parents by his mother's Indian Klan, his family values began here. As an older man during one of the



Federal Indian Census being taken, he was asked what his original Indian name was and he couldn't remember what it had been as he was such a young child when his parents had died. As a young boy and into early manhood he learned the importance of family, values, and friends from his fellow tribesmen that raised him in the Cherokee way, and he passed these values onto his great-granddaughter, Lula Lee, my grandmother and she passed them on to me. Like I said before, the Irish are a loving people too but for some reason grandmother was touched more in her life by the Cherokee. John William Jordan's family had embraced Christianity during the times of the Moravian missionaries in the 1750's and it is evident from

the stories told to me by grandmother that, God was with his family through fortune and misfortune. For some reason, John William clung to his Christian heritage from early childhood onward, not forgetting it even though he couldn't remember his Indian name.



As I said earlier, my knowing from childhood that I would adopt children, began in 1946 when my grandmother took me to a movie, "Father Flanagan's Boys Town", starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney. It was a simply told story but with a lot of meaning about family values. Afterward, grandmother pulled one of her "Cherokee" moments on me. She was always giving Cherokee versus Anglo philosophy and she told me that Father



Flanagan evidently believed like the Cherokee Nation. I asked grandmother how that was, by helping people? She said "No, the white man has the cities that they build on the backs of their people but the Cherokee has integrity, love, and family and if everyone that could, would take just one orphan child, provide for, and raise them that, there would be no orphan children in the world." Her great grandfather, in reality, had been an orphan but his tribal people were a family to him, he learned and lived their values. The Cherokee have a saying, "If you see someone that needs help, help him, John William needed a father and mother and his people had given him numerous mother's and fathers and good values oriented upbringing." Even as a five year old boy to me, this was very profound and I remembered it all of my life. Yes, my grandmother had put a hook in my jaw with her Cherokee wisdom, I could not get away from it. I eventually did adopt two Children, Khristiana and Ronald Jordan when I grew into manhood. I tried for three children, another South Vietnamese boy, Minh Thom, while I was in the Army but I was denied any more than two by Army regulations, at the time.

My Khristiana:



I had been drafted into the Army, in July of 1966. I went through my basic and advanced training and had been assigned to Fort Ord, California to await a class date to go to Officer's Candidate School that I received in March of 1968. I eventually, graduated a 2nd Lieutenant, in late October and received orders to go to Germany and to be there shortly after Thanksgiving in November of 1968. I do not know how, but somehow, God had began let me know that this would be my time to acquire my children and I needed to be ready for God's instruction on what to do when the time came so, I prayed for His guidance.

I was assigned to Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery in Augsburg, Germany. My unit commander was very conscious of presenting a good front both to the German people and also to the news people from home (USA). He made sure our unit sponsored numerous high visibility public projects, one of which was an orphanage in Augsburg. There were many orphanages in the Augsburg/Munich area and this was one of those operated by the Catholic Church. Christmas was coming and the men and the women of our battalion were excited about what they would be doing for the children. As a brand new 2nd Lieutenant, I had numerous assignments, one of which was for me to help out with the Christmas party that we would be giving for the children of the orphanage. We made fruit & candy baskets, and had presents of all kinds for the children, it was really nice, there are no more generous hearts than an American's at Christmas time.



Just a couple of days before Christmas my staff and I began to decorate the large banquet hall in our army barracks, for the party. Everyone was excited, we all had the Christmas spirit. Then, the day came and we all waited for the children to show up in the big Army 2-1/2 ton personnel carrying trucks. When they arrived, the nuns had broken the children up into age groups, each child had a name tag on, and they had given us a list of their names so that we could distribute their gifts in an orderly manner there were several hundred. In doing so, we had anticipated that someone would be



overlooked as they always seem to be at functions like this and I would be in charge of giving out gifts and food baskets to those children to make them feel that they had been remembered too, it was such a rewarding assignment. I remember that when every child had been given their gift and some party food, there was still one child, a precious little frightened brown Pakistani girl, her name was Jasmine, she was about 2-1/2 years old. She was standing there in wonder and amazement and trying to take it all in. Little Jasmine clung to one of the nuns, wide eyed and seemed a little frightened of the big, loud American soldiers around her. In my broken German, I asked the nun what we could do to make the child feel comfortable

so that, she could enjoy the party too. The nun told me that she was afraid of men because, when she was a very small child a male doctor had dropped her and broken her left leg and that she had been afraid of men ever since. Then, I picked her up, and in a warm, loving way, held her close, and gave her an orange which I found out later that the orange was her favorite fruit, she responded in a positive way and readily ate it and the nuns were amazed that she would even come to me as she did not like men at all. In fact, she would not let me go all evening and she cried when they had to leave. That evening, that child had placed a tugging within my heart, and a love for those small helpless, precious children and I knew that God had brought me to Germany for this kind of thing. However, I had vowed to wait on God's instruction and to do nothing toward adopting any children that God did not first, let me know what I should do but somehow, in my heart, I knew that my time for getting children of my own was to be very soon.

A day or so after Christmas, 1968, I was working with my men who were performing what we called at the time, "Motor Stables" where each vehicle in my unit was being maintained by its driver and a helper. One of my sergeant's said, "Weren't the children great at the Christmas party? They all seemed to enjoy themselves very much and so did you Lieutenant, you couldn't seem to get away from that little girl you held all night long." "Yes, I know", I replied, "and I did enjoy making her feel loved for at least a little while." Then suddenly I felt that tugging in my heart wishing that I could see that child again and give her a little fatherly, love and security. Then, something told me, now is the time. By now I had checked with my JAG office (Military Attorneys) and asked them about adoption and what I needed to do to accomplish something like that while I was in Germany. Do you have a child in mind? Because if you do, forget it, because the Army and the German Government will tell you who is available and what child you can or cannot adopt, they have to be physically and mentally fit, normal children and meet the Army's physical and mental qualifications for being adopted into an Army family. Because you are an officer, you do have a good chance to be an adoptive parent but you'll need to meet the qualifications of both the U.S. Army and the German Government. First, you need to be interviewed by a German Government official and approved for parenthood. This takes several months then, you and your wife will be investigated and approved by the International Adoption Agency, and you can then begin to think which of several hundred children you may want to interview and adopt.

I had the address of the German Youth Office where this German interview needed to happen but, I didn't get off of work until 4:00 p.m. that day and they closed at 5:00 p.m. but I felt that, I would go anyhow even if I couldn't get in. I could, at least, see where it was located then, when I made my appointment to be interviewed, I would at least know exactly where to go. "Father lead me and let me go in your favor," I prayed as I left work on my bicycle that evening peddling into the ancient City of Augsburg, to the City Hall where the German Youth Office was located. When I got there they had closed but the building was still open so I walked in (In a U.S. Army Fatigue Work Uniform, big ugly and brash) and I started looking at the office doors for what I knew would be called in German, the "Jugendamt" (Youth Office). Then a friendly voice said to me in plain and understandable English, "can I help you Heir Lieutenant?" "It's late", I said, "and I know they're closed but I just wanted to know where to come when I get my interview appointment to adopt a child." The Lady looked at me in a funny way and said, "How did you know that I would be here?" I said, "Who are you, do you know what I need to do?" "She

said, my name is Fraulein Shaddach, "Come upstairs to my office, I guess I will be working a little late this evening." She gave me all of the paperwork that I needed to fill out for the adoption, I filled it all out, and we talked for a long time and I asked her, "how long everything would take?" She said, "I will be in touch with you soon." I asked her when I could get an interview appointment and she told me that I had been interviewed and that she liked what she had found. She asked me if I was a "Vickor) (Church of England, American priest) I said no, I'm just a Christian that loves God and I am fulfilling a destiny that God has given me. I left, knowing I was in His favor and God had been in charge of everything and that, everything would be OK and in accordance with His perfect will, what usually would usually have taken several weeks had happened in one marvelous evening, how wonderful, God's favor is.

Fraulein Shaddach, called me early the following week, "Hello, Heir Lieutenant, I hope all is well with you, are you still wanting a child?" "Yes", I said, I've wanted a child all of my life, do you have one for me. "Well Heir Lieutenant, do you have any reservations about adopting a very temperamental black child." "None whatsoever, If God has me a black temperamental boy or girl, that would be an answer to my prayers. My only requirement is that they need love and since most children need love that will probably be no problem. I have a black girl that needs a foster home for a year then, if your application investigations that are now going on, have turned out satisfactorily, you may be able to adopt her for your own. Will you be her foster father for a year? "Sure" I said, "When can I pick her up?" "The Marienheim (orphanage) will have her ready when you say." "This evening, will be good, but I must arrange for transportation." "Good this evening it will be, and Good Luck in being a father Heir Lieutenant."

It was a snowy January, 1969 night, the roads were slick, I had hired a German taxi cab and we were on our way. When we arrived, the nuns were waiting for me, I signed for my little girl and they brought her in. The nun had a familiar face and the little so-called black girl turned out to be none other than my little brown Jasmine from the Christmas party, in His plan, God so graciously arranged all of this. The nun looked me and tearfully said, she has never stopped talking about you. Little Jasmine looked at me, smiled at me and in her childhood German she said, "Du Bis Mine Pappi und Ish Leben dish! Danke Pappi fer kummen Danke!" Interpreted, "You are my daddy and I love you, thank you daddy for coming for me thank you!" Well, needless to say, there wasn't a dry eye in the place and I'll never forget the happiness of that evening. I took my baby home and it was sweet, Oh! So sweet.

My Ronald Jordan:



I got a telephone call from Fraulein Shaddach one morning in late January 1969, Good morning Heir Lieutenant, I have a German boy, Thomas Nasal, that you may be interested in. Your investigation is looking good and it looks as if you may be approved to be a parent soon. We have a boy that comes from good German stock and his parents have a background that is much like your own. He was born to two students, the father is from the middle-east and the mother is from the Munich area. The boy's grandfather is a prominent German Building Contractor. I think that you will like this boy, his temperament should be a lot like yours. He is a beautiful child, are you interested? "Yes" I said, this is too wonderful,

first, my girl and now a boy too, yes when can I pick him up.” Well, he will not be old enough for you to take for another month but when he is three months old, you can take him as a foster father then, in one year if you want, and things go well, you should be able to adopt him for your own.

On February 22nd, 1969, Thomas was 3 months and 5 days old and ready to be picked up, I borrowed my sergeant and his car and went to the kinderheim (infant’s orphanage) in Farenzhausen, Germany and picked up my boy. He was really a beautiful German boy, in fact, over the years, he was so beautiful that I had to tell him that he was ugly to keep him from getting the big head. When he was small, he would ask me, “Daddy, was I really ugly when I was little.” “Yes”, I would tell him then, I would jokingly say, “I had to take you or no one else would.” He would laugh and say, “yes Daddy, but you loved me didn’t you.” “Yes, without a doubt, I loved you then and still do now. God has been so good to me by giving you to me son.”

Well things weren’t so smooth on the home front, my little girl, “Daddy’s princess”, had a very jealous nature and didn’t like this little white German boy horning in on her territory. “Nixie Daddy, nixie, I no like, take him back”, she would say, and wow!, was she angry. I prayed about what to do because it was important that they get along together. Then suddenly, God let me look into human nature a little and I knew what I would try. I took little Thomas and laid him in the floor, in the middle of the room all by himself then, I asked my little girl, “If we do not take care of him, feed him, bathe him, and put clothes on him, who will?” In fact sweetheart, he would die without us if we left him alone. This is your baby too and just like mommy and daddy, you must help take care of him or no one else will.”

My little Jasmine stopped, looked at him, she walked around him, looking down at him then said, Mine pupin auf poppie? (my baby also daddy?). Ya, das is su pupin auf (Yes, that is your baby also). “Mine Poppie?” “Ya” (“Yes!”). “Then, can I hold him?” So I picked him up and let her hold him, It was love from the beginning, my little Jasmine was hooked. What a wonderful big sister for my little German boy, she immediately became a miniature little mama. She did everything for her baby brother and if I bought her anything, I needed to by one of whatever it was for him too. It was a wonderful relationship, she fed him, changed his diapers, helped me wash his clothes, I taught them English and she would tell him what it meant in German, we were a happy family. After a year, I officially adopted them both, changing her name to Datha Khristiana Underwood and his name to Ronald Jordan Underwood. They always have been and always will be the two lights in my life.



My Minh Thom, the precious little boy that I couldn’t adopt:



I cannot remember the exact date but I do remember that it was in late February of 1970. I had temporarily been assigned to forward observer duties for the infantry in the 9th Infantry Division in Binh Luc (or however you spell it?). It had been a busy night for the Viet Cong, in one of their terrorist attacks, they had (tongue in cheek)

bravely raided, of all things a Catholic orphanage, wounded a priest, killed several nuns, and frightened the children more than you can imagine, probably scrounging for food for their men as they did this often. Binh Luc was in the southern section of South Viet Nam in what they called the IV Corps area. Father Thaun (at left in this photo) had called the 9th Division Headquarters and ask for help as they had been torn up pretty badly.



When we arrived, I met Father Thaun, a Jesuit Priest, tearfully he began to show me what had happened to his family, his orphanage. Father Thaun and I quickly identified with each other as people that love children and that was a unifying thing within our personalities. Our troops began to give out bandages, medicine, food, and a few clothes that we had and we tried to bring a calmness to the situation. Little Minh Thom, like my little Jasmine took to me immediately and clung to me wherever I went, I had an orange for him too, just like my little Jasmine and he ate it. Minh Thom's little stomach was bloated from hunger and we left them food showing them where and how to hide it from the Viet Cong if they tried to come again. From time to time, when I could, I would visit Father Thaun, talk, and sometimes we even played chess together, he was good too.



Minh Thom, like my little Khristana and Ronnie were addictive to me, I enjoyed the boy and would take him gifts often. Then one day, I asked Father Thuan if little Minh could be adopted and he said yes, I thought you'd never ask, he said that, he thought that Kristiana and Ronnie might need a little brother and that he would help with what he could. I went to my commanding officer, Colonel Gudgel and he told me to go to the JAG office and fill out the paperwork and he would see what he could do. It took several weeks but USARV (United States Army, Viet Nam) headquarters in Siagon sent me back paperwork disallowing my request. They told me that I already had two children and that was all that Army regulations would allow me to take home, and no exceptions to that could be made. They also called me in and further advised me that I should cease my contact with that particular orphanage as my caring and concern for the children could be a problem. That particular orphanage had been terrorized before and probably would be again, especially if the VC thought that an American officer was close to or cared any of the children. For their welfare, I stayed away for awhile but my unit later went back, moved them to a more secure area, and built them the building you see in the photo above and you can see Father Thaun standing with his family in the photo above. We were able to take the children on outings to Siagon and help them in various ways. It was one of the highlights of my life. Although I received several decoration for my work in the Republic of South Viet Nam (see photo on page 8), this



will always be one of my greatest dissappointments, I almost got you a little brother, Ronnie and



Kristiana, sorry but you've filled my life completely and it turns out that you were all that I really needed anyhow. My Krissy passed away in 1987, Ronnie grew up and married Shanie, the third love of my life and they gave me three grandchildren, three more loves that I will always cherish. What a rewarding life this is, thanks to John William Jordan, and grandmother Lula Lee, see my family below.



Ron & Shanie
My first two
Great loves



Jordan Taylor
Gentle loving grandson



Savannah Glee
My brilliant granddaughter



Cayden Dane
My, I can do that too boy.

Hasn't God has been good to me!, Maybe later, little Minh Thom.

Ronald A. Underwood, Soldier, Landscape Architect, Dad