SIGNS FOR HOPE

"Coordinating the adoption of deaf orphans in the world"

Zdraveyte!
"Hello, dear friends"
from Sofia, Bulgaria!

What a beautiful country and a beautiful people! They need Jesus, too!

This is my 2nd trip to Sofia, Bulgaria in less than one year. I was here in late January last year, accompanying a Deaf couple, Doug and Lynda Collicott, on their first adoption of their deaf son, Andrei. We are back for their 2nd deaf adoption of another deaf son, Brett. Oh my goodness, he is just so precious!

After God called me to this ministry, in March 2008, I questioned Him more than once about the fact Charles and I had never adopted and never felt God leading us to do so. I wondered, "How will I ever have any idea what it is like to adopt?" Little did I realize what He had planned long ago. I, now, have had the great privilege and honor of experiencing, first hand, the adoption of 4 deaf children (2 from China and 2 from Bulgaria, from age 3 - 13). My first trip was to China in April 2012 with the Barnes family to bring their deaf son, Tie, home. Each trip and each adoption has been unique and the experience I have gleaned from eye-witnessing these adoptions has been invaluable. Needless to say God's way of doing things is always so much better than ours. Add to this, the opportunities He has given me to spend time in several homes with families once their deaf children are home. Your continued prayers and financial support is perpetuating not only the providing of an ASL interpreter for Deaf couples who are adopting deaf children, but also ensuring my continued education and training for better insight into the vast world of deaf adoption. Of course, you also supported another ASL interpreter to travel twice to Russia with another Deaf couple during their adoption process in late 2012. There are no currently scheduled trips for our next deaf adoption, but there are several on the horizon. Continue praying for families in the pre- and post adoption world, as adoption is a life-long journey; makes sense, since our adoption by our heavenly Father is also life-long.

Please pray for the Collicott family as they return home with Brett. And pray also as they have decided to move their family to Austin, TX to provide Andrei and Brett with the great benefits of attending the Texas School for the Deaf, as have other families who have recently relocated there for the same reasons.

Also pray for the many families in the paperwork and waiting part of the adoption process and for those who have brought their deaf children home within the past year, and beyond, as adoption is a life-long journey. Transitions for these families and their children are hard and very challenging and they need tremendous support from their extended families, friends, professionals, and, most importantly, our prayer support!

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman,
born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.
Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."
- Galatians 4:4-6

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved." But before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them; and before someone can go and tell them, that person must be sent." Romans 10:13-15

Some might ask, "How does deaf adoption spread the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

There are many answers to that question.

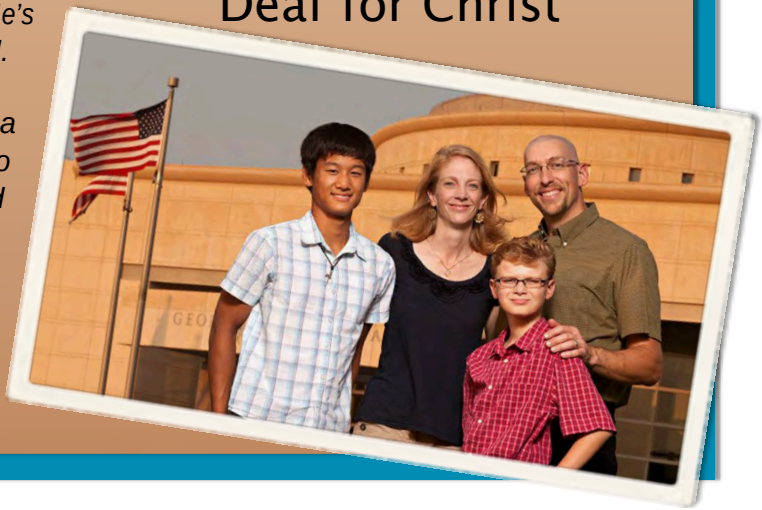
I shared the Johnny Carr family's story with you in the September 2013 SFH PrayerLetter, where their act of obedience to adopt their deaf son—with no words being spoken—was cause for the saving of many Chinese souls. Ah, but there are other stories to tell. God is placing deaf orphans in the homes of Christian families. Many of these families are either already ASL-fluent or are committed to becoming ASL-fluent. Adopted deaf children are responding when they learn of Jesus and His gospel. God is not only calling those deaf children to share His good news with the Deaf people around the world, He is also calling their dads, moms and siblings to do the same.

Let me introduce you to the Bergeron family. I have asked Shelly Bergeron to share their story of deaf adoption and it's impact on their lives and the lives of other Deaf people, in their community and beyond.

To Reach the Deaf for Christ

Becky asked me, Shelly Bergeron, to write an article about how our call to adopt a Deaf child became a calling to reach the Deaf for Christ. That's exactly what He's done, and, it happened in a way we never expected.

So, who are we? We're no one special. Jon is a child psychologist and Shelly is an accountant who loves animals and people. We had been married for 12 years when God called us to foster a special needs child. We ended up adopting one of our first of two foster children Tanner, who is Deaf. He came to us at 3.5 with no language and we all started learning ASL as quickly as possible.



At the age of 6 we adopted Tanner and due to a progressive neurological disease that we learned he had, we decided he would probably be our only child. Fast-forward 3 years, and God's plan changed our lives drastically again. 4.5 months after we heard about a young man in China who was Deaf and about to age out, we were on a plane to adopt him. We adopted Jian 3 days before his 14th birthday. He was fluent in Chinese Sign Language and quickly learned ASL. That was a little over three years ago. It has been a long, hard 3 years. We're so thankful it was clear that this was God's calling for our family.

During these years, our lives have changed dramatically from what we thought life would look like. Our bookshelves became filled with ASL dictionaries and stories about educating Deaf children, signing movies and ASL training videos. I became a certified interpreter and a substitute interpreter at the boys' schools. When we want to attend local events, we can't just show up anymore, we need to schedule things early so that we can obtain an interpreter and everyone can have full access. When we're out with friends and family there is a lot of interpreting going on so that we can make sure everyone participates and feels included. Since Tanner came, we began interpreted Sunday services at our home church, but, about 1.5 years ago, we also realized this wasn't enough for our boys or for most other Deaf we had invited to our church. So, joining with another family in our community that had adopted a Deaf daughter, we followed God's call yet again, to start a Deaf church.

Brian College Station Deaf Church now has Sunday evening services (supported by 3 local churches) that have an average of about 30-40 folks including Deaf/deaf, families, and ASL students. Jon and the other father take turns preaching weekly in sign while there is voice interpreting for the hearing. We like to say the services are voice interpreted for those who are signing disabled. The services are geared towards the Deaf and what they need and prefer with them assisting in the planning and organization with our goal being for it to be a deaf-run and deaf-led church. We are so blessed to see people learning about the Lord and who He is, in a way they have never had an opportunity to do previously.

So, our lives look completely different than we expected when we were first married 21 years ago. Who could have guessed that through adopting Deaf children, we would be called to start a Deaf church. We never imagined going into ministry or starting a church, but we have found that obedience to the Father will take you to some unexpectedly wonderful place.

LIBERIA 2014

We often view our brothers and sisters from a distance and mistakenly assume, "They look good from here, they must be doing great." However, it is not until we take the time to "zoom-in" that we discover the challenges and heartaches they are experiencing and then are given the opportunity to walk with them hand-in-hand through their trials.

This view of Monrovia, Liberia, causes the same assumptions, "What a thriving city this must be." However, it is not until you "zoom-in" do you discover the great need our Liberian brothers and sisters' bear. Allow me to press the "zoom in" button for our Liberia brothers and sisters for the next few moments.

As I typically do, the beginning of a new year, since 2010 anyway, I checked the websites that collect data that determine how things are progressing across the globe. I pray, one day, Liberia will no longer be on the infamous "Top-10 Poorest Countries List", but 2013 was not that year. Liberia is listed as the #2 poorest country in 2013, just behind the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By the way, the Top-10 poorest countries are all in Africa.

Imagine, I really doubt you can because I cannot, living in the 2nd poorest country of the world, Liberia, West Africa. Let that thought sink in for a few moments before proceeding. Now, let me help you with your imagination. During the 16 long years of civil wars in Liberia (1989 – 2003), roughly the same time period as when Rachel began kindergarten and graduated high school, as many as 250,000 Liberians were killed, 50,000, of which, were children. This is in a country the size of Tennessee. 500,000 Liberians of her roughly 3.5 million people—or 1 in 7--were displaced during those 16 years. Many fled to surrounding countries or sought safety in the capital city of Monrovia, named to honor our US president, James Monroe. More than 400,000 Liberians are now living in the USA. At the end of 2012 there was an undetermined number of Liberians who are still "living"—displaced. Electricity and running water has yet to be restored, the airport is still run by generator and 15,000 UN peacekeeping forces remain.

Now, try to imagine the plight of deaf children "living" in the 2nd poorest country of the world. Honestly, this is impossible for us to imagine. Many of these children still live in villages as street urchins or for few, of the more fortunate, with their families. Most do not have a language, even at the age of 20 and beyond. Daily survival for the hearing Liberian is deeply challenging, but daily survival for the deaf children and many deaf adults of Liberia…???

The accepted percent of any given population being impacted by some form of deafness is approximately 3-4%. This percentage can easily be increased by untreated disease and little to no medical care. The percent of late-deafened Liberians, those losing their hearing due to old age, would be relatively small as the life expectancy is only 40. The current estimate for Liberia's population is right at 4 million. Given the above numbers and information, Liberia could easily have well over 160,000 deaf people living within her borders. A very small number of her deaf children, less than 300, are attending deaf schools in and around the greater Monrovia area. These deaf schools are all privately run and are connected to some form of Christian-based organization or other NGO (non-governmental organization). The regular attendance varies in each of these deaf schools and ranges from a dozen children in one to as many as 60 in another. I use that term "deaf schools" loosely.

As I continue to learn about the Deaf of Liberia, I have yet to discover a true/pure "Liberian Sign Language". While there is certainly the use of signing for communication purposes within the organized deaf schools, the need for continued research in this area, in my opinion, is ongoing. Couple with that the constant plea for training from those teaching the deaf children and you have the focus for our upcoming Signs for Hope Liberia Mission Trip 2014, the first for this year. In an effort to evaluate exactly how we can best empower the Deaf teachers and others, we will spend hours in the classrooms observing and evaluating the current teaching practices, then discussing our observations with the teachers/administrators in order to develop future teacher training, for future trips, for the teachers of the deaf.

As usual, God is putting together a team to accomplish His purposes. Dr. Steve Farmer, our Signs for Hope (SFH) board chairman, will lead

Steve is Deaf and Heather is a hearing ASL interpreter. Two other SFH board members desiring to join us are Vandora Henderson (hearing) and Blaire Murray (Deaf). Sonya Swink, a young lady from Colorado, will be joining us on this trip, too. I met Sonya's family in MO at the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf in July of 2012. Sarah Houge and Edward Cheah round out this team. Sarah is Deaf and has spent much time in Liberia with her father when she was younger and on her own, more recently, providing teacher training forthe teachers of the Deaf and seeking to improve the lives of those Liberians living with disabilities. Edward is Deaf and Liberian-born and raised, but is now living in Washington, DC. He is seeking how best to empower his Deaf Liberian brothers and sisters for the future.

Now would be a great time to give to Signs for Hope. Three of our team members have stepped out in faith to "go" on this trip; some being absent from work without pay. They are trusting God will lead others to join them in "going", as they have no means to pay for a trip like this, alone. The cost per person is approximately $3,000. This is truly, a faith-based trip, as always. All donations to Signs for Hope are tax deductible as we are an IRS approved "Charitable" organization.

Please share this need with your church and others as the time for this trip is fast approaching. You can make donations online or by mail: Signs for Hope, PO Box 460, Fairview, NC 28730.

From my heart to yours…

In closing this SFH PrayerLetter I want to be transparent with you. Many of you are in awe of my faith, at times, and many of you have told me so. To be very honest, so am I. What I want you to know is this is a specific spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit and it is for the benefit of His Body—other believers' common good. It is not something God gave me recently, however is it something that has been a "life-saver" for me, especially of late—and more specifically in view of His call for me "to coordinate the adoption of deaf orphans in the world". Since my early days as a follower of Christ—which began at the age of 14—probably around the age of 16 and beyond, I have been given the opportunity to "discover" my spiritual gift(s). While these tools of discovery are not without flaw, each and every time and with several different evaluations over 20 years I have always scored the highest under the gift of "Faith". What I do not want you to misunderstand is that accepting things by faith always comes easy for me. Honestly, sometimes my faith is downright miniscule. The area I struggle with the most, currently, is when I fly and when I drive/ride between our home in Asheville, NC and our extended family home in Knoxville, TN and the struggle is more intense when either involves thunderstorms and/or turbulence. In fact, the last 18 months these times of "fear", or lack of faith, keep getting stronger instead of weaker. It is not that I fear dying, because I know what my future holds, but it is a fear of the way I might die or the suffering I might have to endure before I see Jesus face-to-face that grips me. Fear can surprise us when we least expect it and it can immobilize us to proceed forward. My desire for you and for me is to never allow fear to keep us from doing ALL God has planned for us. I ask you to pray for me, as I pray for you, we will always choose God's perfect love—which casts out all fear—to be our strength and reason for the hope and perseverance others see in us.

Striving to seek His face and not His hand,

Becky

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www.signsforhope.org
www.signs4hope.blogspot.com
beckyblloyd@gmail.com

In You, the fatherless find compassion. - Hosea 14:3