

Single mother approaches holidays with new home, hopes for future



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Pattie Johnston, her two-year-old daughter, Erica, and their assorted friends have found a home at last.

By Teresa A. Parsons
Say a Thanksgiving prayer for Pattie Johnston and her two-year-old daughter, Erica.

There's a lot to be grateful for thanks to the determination Pattie has shown and the faith in her some friends in Avon have demonstrated. She has a new home, a better future and renewed confidence.

But like many single parents, Pattie (who was profiled in the Courier-Journal on October 2) will also need all the strength and support she can get during the holidays. Her experience of those times when most people celebrate family hasn't given her much to anticipate.

"Bad things always happen to me on holidays," she said simply.

Although Thanksgiving and Christmas appear formidable, Pattie faces them armed with considerable accomplishments. Since October, she has found and furnished an apartment in Avon — Erica's first home. After some hard hours of study, she took the high school equivalency test and this month learned she has passed it.

"I knew I passed, but the science was really hard," Pattie said. "It's amazing what a little piece of paper can do for you."

So far, that piece of paper has opened up opportunities that she hardly dreamed of before, like going to college. "I think I'd like to study computer programming — maybe at Monroe Community College or taking classes at BOCES," she said. For now, she's seeking a babysitting job several days a week.

Her friend, Georgiana Delles, agrees that Pattie's life has taken a hopeful turn. "It was hard at first for her to accept people reaching out and giving her things," Delles said. "But she's learning that she's not really an exception. She's just another neighbor."

Last week, for example, Delles' aunt brought Pattie a set of drapes. During her visit, the elderly woman mentioned that she would need to climb up on a chair to hang her own new drapes, so Pattie volunteered to help her.

"She's realizing that people aren't just reaching out to her with charity and pity," Delles added. "People just do these things for one another."

At the same time, Delles noted that Pattie can be overwhelmed and frightened by thoughts of her future and by allowing more people into her life. "I try to keep her focused on one day at a time ... Sometimes she still talks scared," Delles said. "Neighbors are stopping and saying hello to her on the streets, and that's something that was very difficult for her to get used to."

Pattie still feels angry and bitter over occasional setbacks as well. After having a phone installed in her apartment recently, she received a bill for more than \$100 instead of the \$40 she expected.

"At first she reacted by saying 'see, I can't make it,'" Delles observed. "But she deals with her anger better now. I'll let her belt it all out, and finally she'll laugh and say 'I'm still mad, but we'll talk about it tomorrow.' I think we're at a point where we take two steps forward and one step back."

This year, Pattie and Erica may even enjoy their first family holiday. Several weeks ago, Pattie's foster mother surprised her by appearing unexpectedly at the door of her apartment. It was the first time they'd seen one another for several years.

"We're speaking now," Pattie said. "We're even talking about Christmas and doing something together."

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm dreaming," she added. "I really can't believe it."

St. Anne's Events

St. Anne's Parish in Palmyra is sponsoring a craft fair and two adult retreats early in December.

The craft fair is planned Sunday, Dec. 8, after all Masses. Proceeds benefit the

church's Renovation Fund. Retreats are scheduled Wednesday, Dec. 11 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and Tuesday, Dec. 17, from 7:30-9:30 p.m. at the Religious Education Center. Call (716)597-9694 for reservations.



Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Now that we have observed the Thanksgiving Feast, we prepare for our celebration of the Advent-Christmas mysteries of our faith. It is a beautiful time of the Church year during which we remember the fidelity, mercy and exquisite patience of God as God prepared a holy people to receive the gift of our Redeemer.

The season invites us to an attitude of contemplation and attentiveness so that we might have room in our hearts and time in our lives to understand how much we are loved by a generous God and how profound our call is to extend God's tender mercy in our time and place.

In the ordinary patterns and rhythms of prayer, this would call us to moments apart from hectic activity, to moments of special sharing with those we love, to moments devoted to those small expressions of care which we can so easily forget during ordinary time.

I am very much aware as I write these words that this special call of the Church is not one to which we can easily respond during a time that can be so hectic. There is shopping to be done; there are parties to be attended and arrangements to be made for all kinds of social events.

But I am also convinced that if we lose the dimension of life and awareness to which the Advent-Christmas season calls, our activity is empty and vain. Activity not rooted in the spirit bears little fruit. Comings and goings that fail in some way to flow into and out of prayer have little lasting significance and

often leave those involved with a sense of emptiness.

I wish I knew more answers than I do to this prayer-activity contemplative-response challenge that so many of us face on a daily basis, and perhaps in a special way during this season. It's not so much an either/or as a both/and.

Somehow our prayer should flow into and inform our daily living, and our experience of daily living should draw us back to loving conversation with the Lord. But for that to happen we usually need to challenge normal patterns, and we almost always need to adjust our use of time.

From the safety of my room, let me raise two questions I shall think about with you. I know they are odd, but they're meant to call us beyond cultural patterns to the deeper streams of our Christian life.

Can we plan an Advent 1986 without Christmas parties and save those for the days following the Feast? And could we use the time and energy thus saved for deeper, quieter things?

Can we plan to complete most of our Christmas 1986 shopping by the beginning of Advent 1986? What would that mean in terms of price and style? And what possibilities would it offer us for next December?

There are no doubt questions and ideas among you far superior to the ones I have raised. If these, in any way, help you to stay collected during Advent, I shall be delighted.

Peace to all!

Annual appeal pledges pass \$2.5 million mark

More than \$2.5 million has been pledged to the Thanks Giving Appeal by diocesan parishioners.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark made the announcement this week. In expressing his appreciation, the bishop said, "I am deeply grateful to the many generous people who, in responding to our Thanks Giving Appeal, have joined together in sharing their finan-

cial resources."

The purpose of the diocesan-wide appeal is to raise funds needed to continue and promote the charitable, educational and pastoral works of the diocese.

Bishop Clark expressed his confidence that the \$3.6 goal will be reached. He based that statement on the history of generosity among members of the diocese.

March for Life

Reserve your bus seat now for the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., January 22, 1986. The bus will leave

Guardian Angels Church at 10 p.m., January 21 and return the evening of January 22. Fare is \$25. Call Dee Dries, (716)334-7562.

Toys Needed

A Rochester man is seeking donations of toys, from finger paint to old towels, for a therapeutic play room to treat children of alcoholic parents. Catholic Family Service of

Amarillo, Texas, is attempting to establish the room, which would serve some 200 children. For more information, contact Domenick White at (716)647-1510.

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