



Heart, home to needy children



Clockwise from top left: Four-year-old Alex gets some extra help from his dad during a game of basketball. (from left) Aaron, Brenda, Bob, Donna, and Cody debate over how to arrange the growing number of candles on their dad's birthday cake. Cody and his mother Peg leave through the back exit of their Wahoo Church after a Sunday service. Tony and Aaron keep their concentration on the television despite their sister Terra's struggle to ward off another sibling. Aaron and his sister Terra find that it takes some effort from both of them to inflate a oversized bubble.



dy had been abused in three of various homes in which he had and Alex was the seventh child of ar-old cocaine addict. se children all found refuge with ndts. But it wasn't easy. ause the Brandts had just added ildren to their already large fam-ey was becoming scarce. They scraped together enough money ex to Nebraska from New Jersey.), who keeps his humor in a n, said, "I called my banker and need some money to buy a kid." ht children were beginning to the Brandts' three-bedroom

cribs in the dining room. But an accident that seemed devastating at the time turned out to help the family financially and proved that they could survive anything God handed them. It was a snowy evening shortly after Christmas in 1989. Peg, accompanied by five of the children, was forced off the road by an impatient driver. Their van slid into a ditch and then crashed into a row of trees. The children escaped with a few bruises and minor injuries, but Peg was not so fortunate. Her eye was severely injured. She already had one weak eye caused by a birth defect. But in the

accident she injured her good eye. The family feared she would be blind. Peg was laid up for weeks, and Bob tried to balance his job with raising eight children, including an infant overcoming a cocaine addiction.

way. They are all over. They are hungry; they are consuming us! We can't do anything anymore! As they come in, they push the door and the door opens wider. Lord! Our door is wide open. "We can't stand it anymore! It's too much! It's no kind of life for us!" That was when another social worker called and asked the Brandts to take in 17-year-old Melyssa. She was in a psychiatric hospital and was severely depressed, almost suicidal. "You don't know what we have been through," Bob told the caseworker. But Melyssa had been through a lot, too. So Bob and Peg decided to meet the young girl. After meeting her, the answer became clear. "If the good Lord asked us to do it right now, then it must be the right thing," Bob said. "He'll take care of us." So they welcomed Melyssa to their family. Peg is now legally blind, but her eyesight did improve. And with some of the insurance money, the family was able to purchase a roomier house and a swimming pool, basketball hoops and a pool table to keep the children entertained. "We've always got to put money into things that keep the kids around the house," Bob said. Family is high priority for the Brandts. The children aren't bothered by a night at the movie with their parents, or by spending a Friday evening at a

church service with the family. The children aren't always angels. They sometimes miss curfew, swing pool sticks at each other or call each other "butthead." But overall, their lives are better than they would have been without the Brandts. Stephanie, one of four birthmothers who has stayed with the Brandts, agrees that her life has changed for the better since living with the Brandts. Stephanie stayed with the Brandts from April to December 1993 to get her life back on track during her pregnancy. During her stay at the Brandts, she worked and saved more than \$3,000 to go back to college. "If I wasn't here, I would just sit around and feel sorry for myself," she said. On Dec. 16, Stephanie gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Sophia Marie. After being dismissed from the hospital, Stephanie brought Sophia back to the Brandts' house and handed the baby to her adoptive parents, who happen to be friends of the Brandts. Bob and Peg say they have gained more than they have given by caring for desperate children. "The rewards are overwhelming," Peg said. When times get tough and the job doesn't seem so rewarding, Peg concentrates on the last line of their prayer. "Don't worry, God replied. You have gained all. While children came to you, I, your Father ... I, your God, slipped in among them."

Photos by Travis Hoying

"Lord, they hurt us! They are in the