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FOSTER CARE SCHOLARSHIP FULFILLS JAMES 1:27

BY MICHELE (CUMMINGS) SOLOMON '91

Since 2013, Cedarville University has awarded a full-tuition scholarship to a student who has come through the foster care system in Ohio, born out of the University administration's desire to answer God's call in James 1:27 to "look after orphans and widows in their distress."

Here are the stories of two scholarship recipients. They found themselves in situations they did not choose, but their stories are stories of hope, stories of answered prayers, and stories of how God can redeem even the hardest situations for His glory.

IT'S NOT MY STORY, IT'S HIS

From as far back as he can remember, Luke Combs '19 had a home life that was unstable at best, downright tumultuous at worst. "Social services was part of my life from birth," he said. "It's all I knew." Placed in foster care during the first two years of life, he eventually was sent back to the care of his mother. His father was only sporadically involved in his life. "The dynamic between my parents was all about drugs and fighting," he explained.

Combs found an escape from the turmoil at home in a local church that sent a bus to his neighborhood every Sunday. "I started going because my siblings went," he said. "My mom let us go just to get rid of us."

But it was there that Luke found hope through a relationship with Jesus Christ, accepting Christ as his Savior between the ages of 4 and 5. "I always knew that I wanted to pursue a relationship with God," he said. "I knew I wanted that in my life."

Church became an important part of his life,

offering him what he wasn't getting at home — security, stability, love. "I went every chance I could," he explained. As he got older, he'd even walk to church. "I can remember leaving at 6:30 a.m. to get there on time," he said.

By the time he was 12 years old, things at home had gotten so bad that he was no longer able to live with his mother. He hasn't seen her since. He went to live with a grandmother and then an aunt for a few years, but eventually found himself placed in a foster home during his freshman year of high school. Through it all, he continued to cling to the hope he had found in Christ.

As a cross country runner, Combs began to form a close relationship with his coach, Clinton Murray. Eventually, Murray and his wife, Shelley, became Combs' guardians in the middle of his freshman year. He lived with the Clintons the rest of high school, and it was there he found stability to begin dreaming about his future.

Combs first learned of Cedarville University through attending cross country meets at the University. By his sophomore year of high school, he knew he wanted to come to Cedarville, but financially, it seemed out of reach. Murray and he began to consider local colleges, which seemed more feasible for him. But he never lost his desire to come to Cedarville.

During his senior year, "eight things happened



in one week that told me I was supposed to go to Cedarville,” he explained, “so I sent in an application.” Murray was not supportive at first, since it seemed impossible, but he eventually reached out to Jessi Dyson, Combs’ admissions counselor, to see what kind of financial aid might be available. It was Dyson who first introduced them to Cedarville’s Foster Care Scholarship, and so began a series of events that would change Luke’s life forever.

“Luke was a student with high standards for himself, a desire for deep community, and a love for the Lord that came out in his daily life. He loved campus and seemed like a natural fit,” Dyson recalled. “I was excited to help him get here.”

Combs interviewed on May 6, 2015, with Thomas White, Cedarville’s President, and was

told immediately that he would receive the scholarship. “We switched from stressful interview mode to a celebration,” he recalled. “I didn’t know how to react. Seeing God’s promises come to fruition almost seemed surreal. It’s still hard to believe sometimes.”

Combs is now thriving at Cedarville as a biblical and theological studies major with a mission minor. “I’ve learned that I’m capable of doing a lot of things if I just trust God,” he said. He hopes to be a missionary someday, something he knows may be difficult. “I’m not worried. God has proven to be very faithful to me. I’ve learned to trust Him.

“I know what it’s like to have nothing and have to depend on God for everything. My life is in His hands. It’s not my story, it’s His.”



YOU MUST REALLY WANT ME HERE, GOD

Allie Eybers '21 grew up in a strong Christian family with two loving parents who encouraged her to follow Jesus from a very young age. Her childhood was almost perfect, until her mom got sick. The family moved around for a few years, relocating so her mother could receive the best treatment for breast cancer. When Allie was 12, her mother lost her battle with the disease, leaving Allie reeling and doubting her relationship with God. "But I still had my dad," she said. "He was the one who kept encouraging me and making sure my faith stood solid."

She, her dad, and her two younger siblings moved in with her maternal grandmother in Munroe Falls, Ohio, which provided needed support and stability to the family as they grieved

her mother's death. Allie was enrolled in Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy School, where she was growing in her faith. Then, the unthinkable happened: Her father died suddenly from a heart attack.

"It was such a shock, so unexpected," Eybers said. "It was really hard to make sense of it." Following her father's death, she and her younger brother and sister continued to live with their grandmother, who became their legal guardian.

Eybers heard about Cedarville University from a friend at school and fell in love with the University the first time she visited. "I loved it," she explained. "It was so different than any other school I looked at. There was just something different about the atmosphere.

"My mom went to a Christian college. I knew she would have loved for me to go to Cedarville,"

Eybers said. But, no matter how much she wanted to come to Cedarville, the cost seemed to make it an impossibility. “I knew that if the Lord wanted me here, He’d have to make a way,” she recalled.

Allie started researching different scholarship opportunities, and she noticed the Foster Care Scholarship that Cedarville offered. “I didn’t know if I would qualify since I wasn’t technically in foster care,” she explained. Her high school counselor, who also happens to be her aunt, stepped in to investigate. “We discovered that since I was made a ward of the state when my dad died and my grandma was appointed my guardian, I qualified to apply for the scholarship.”

She applied and received an email that White wanted to meet her. While her friends were enjoying Senior Skip Day back home, Allie came to Cedarville to interview with White. “I was so nervous, but then so excited when he offered me the scholarship,” she recalled. “I was in shock. I thought, ‘Is this really happening? You must really want me here, God.’”

Now finishing her first year as a communication major at Cedarville, Eybers is thankful for the opportunity that has been given to her. “Winning this scholarship is really a testament to all that God has done in my life,” she said. “My dad’s death was so unexpected, but I see now that God had a plan for me all along.”

She clings to that thought on her tough days. “I’m still grieving; I still struggle,” she explained. “But I know God put me here for a reason. I take it day-by-day to see what He has for my life.”

Michele (Cummings) Solomon '91 is the Copy Editor for Cedarville University Marketing and Communications.

THE HEART OF A PRESIDENT

Cedarville University’s Foster Care Scholarship came out of a burden God placed on President Thomas White’s heart several years ago as he looked over the Ohio Foster Care Registry. “I noticed that many of those in foster care were above 15 years of age,” he explained. “I began to wonder what would happen as these precious children created in the image of God aged out of the system. They certainly wouldn’t have the resources to attend a school like Cedarville.”

White brought the idea of a yearly foster care scholarship to members of his Cabinet. The Cabinet unanimously agreed with the plan for the scholarship, which would be a way to show love for others without requesting anything in return.

“Little did I know that one prospective student that I had spoken to and prayed for would be the first recipient,” White said. “When I first met her, she told me that she could not afford Cedarville but felt led to go to school here. My response was that God would provide if He wanted her to attend. I had no idea that God was already working to provide through this scholarship. Looking back on the way it all happened, I have no doubt that God led us to this point every step of the way.”

For White, this scholarship is a clear example of Cedarville’s firm stand for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ. “James 1:27 says that ‘pure and undefiled’ religion is ministry to the orphans. Philippians 2 states that Christ considered others before Himself, and that we should have the same mind,” he explained. “This scholarship lives out our motto and our student life core values of Loving God and Loving Others. By investing into the Foster Care Scholarship, the University lives out what our faculty and staff urge our students to do. It is consistent in every way with our mission and adds valuable relationships to our Cedarville community.”



When you give to Cedarville University, you help students like Luke and Allie experience an education that transforms lives for godly service, vocational distinction, and cultural engagement. Give today at cedarville.edu/onlinegiving.