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## Beautiful and Unique

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# *Beautiful and Unique*

Domestic Adoption Creates a Remarkable Family

BY ALYSSA SPEICHER '17



Aaron Cook '99, Cedarville University Director of Discipleship Ministries, and his wife, Laurie (Jelinek) '99, have a beautiful family that paints a picture of the Gospel. After 15 years of marriage and two biological children, Aaron and Laurie adopted daughter Lila, and a year and a half later, they adopted daughter Isabella.

*Cedarville Magazine* sat down with the Cooks to learn about their experiences with domestic, transracial adoption, their advice to other families considering adoption, and the blessings their family has received through adoption.

### Tell us about your family before adoption.

**Laurie Cook (LC):** We got married after our sophomore year at Cedarville University and went into full-time camp ministry after graduation. We had our first child, Aleena, after seven years of marriage. A year and a half later, we had our second child, Dylan.

**Aaron Cook (AC):** Dylan has cystic fibrosis, a genetic disease that affects the mucus in the lungs and affects every organ except the brain. Although it makes for a different lifestyle, there are lots of joys that come with special needs.

### Why did you decide to adopt?

**LC:** After Dylan, I wasn't able to have other children, but we didn't feel we were done with our family. The first few years, Dylan wasn't stable enough for another child, but after five years, we thought it was time.

### Why domestic, transracial adoption?

**AC:** We had a heart for the nations, yet we couldn't go anywhere because Dylan needed to be close to a children's hospital. However, we had a home where we wanted to raise children.

**LC:** Originally, we researched adoption internationally, but for many reasons,

we were closed off to a lot of options. With all international doors closed, we decided to look here.

### What is the story behind your first adoption?

**AC:** We thought it would be a really quick situation because we were open to a lot, but it actually took a year and a half. The waiting was hard. One evening in particular, Laurie was struggling and I remember saying, "Laurie, we not only want God to show us who He would bring into our family, but we also want His timing." Sure enough, 12 hours later we got a phone call, and Lila had been born while we were having that conversation.

### Why did you decide to adopt a second time?

**LC:** Everyone kept asking if we would adopt again, and we weren't really thinking about it. Then we said if Lila's

**Adoption is a part of our entire life. Our walk with Christ has been deepened and relationships started and strengthened as a result.**

birth mom got pregnant again and the agency called us, we would adopt that baby.

**AC:** We thought it was never going to happen, but 16 months later, we got a call from the agency, out of the blue. They told us the situation, and we said, "We've already prayed about this exact scenario, and the answer is yes."



Erin Krizo Photography

The Cooks (L-R): Dylan, Lila, Aaron, Isabella, Laurie, and Aleena in 2016

### How did your faith inform your decision to adopt?

**AC:** We know for sure that God cares deeply for the fatherless and widowed. He is clear about that.

### What challenges have you faced having a transracial family?

**LC:** Very little beyond the regular challenges of raising children. Although I am sure that there will be challenges ahead, by in large the response has been positive.

**AC:** We sometimes get a confused look, but we have experienced more open doors than closed doors. There are always challenges, but it was overall a lot smoother and more natural than I thought. If anything, people graciously allow us into conversations that we wouldn't be in hadn't we adopted transracially. Not because we know it all, but there are many who are wanting to keep the conversation of racial reconciliation moving forward in a gospel direction. I feel very fortunate for each of these opportunities.

### How did your other children react to the adoptions?

**AC:** They've loved it every step of the way. They get to see a part of the Gospel: what it's like to be predestined for adoption.

### What kind of support have you found at Cedarville?

**AC:** The Cedarville community is very supportive. Adoption is promoted a lot here. We feel it's a family; it's really special. In general, a vision of family is promoted here that is counter-cultural. Our society often sees children as a hindrance to be discarded whenever they are no longer a "benefit" to whomever is caring for them. We see children as a wonderful part of our lives and the Cedarville Experience — not something that gets in the way. Both Jon Wood, Vice President for Student Life and Christian Ministries, and Jim Cato '83, Associate Vice President of Christian Ministries, have been very supportive of my family and have volunteered on multiple occasions to take responsibilities off my plate so that I can tend to something at home. For instance, Jon covered for me when Dylan was really sick and had to be hospitalized.

### How has adoption blessed you in ways you didn't anticipate?

**LC:** I'm just so thankful all the time. We can't fathom what our life would be like without them. Adoption is a part of our entire life. Our walk with Christ has been deepened and relationships started and strengthened as a result.

## What is your advice for someone considering transracial adoption?

**LC:** I think the biggest thing is to not think of it as transracial adoption. It's about the child first and then your family. I don't want to discount that the adoption is transracial, but that isn't primary. The primary thing is figuring out the needs of your child because, like with biological children, each is unique.

**AC:** Their identity is in who God says they are; it's not determined by their skin color or what they're good at. Each child needs the Gospel, and you need to study your child to see what their needs are individually.

**LC:** This is especially true if your child comes from a different culture, and you're adopting them into your culture. Age plays a huge part in it, but assessing the needs of your child should be your primary concern.

## Any advice for families considering adoption?

**AC:** Don't go into it looking for applause. Adoption is hard, and many have had it more difficult than we have, but it's so, so good. Our training told us to give our children as much of a story about their biological family as you can, so they can know why they do things a certain way. That was helpful.

## How has your faith grown through the adoption process and beyond?

**LC:** One of our biggest challenges in parenting has been health-related, and we don't have a health history on Lila

or Bella, which can make it more difficult at times. God has definitely grown our faith as we rely on Him through the difficult health issues with all of our children. We have found him to be so faithful, and at our weakest points we have had some of the sweetest communion with Christ!

**AC:** Yes, often in parenting in general, God graciously reveals our need for Him. In that process he expands our love for our kids and our love for Him. Lila and Bella's physical adoption has deepened my vision of God's spiritual adoption of us. This is a magnificent exchange that has infinitely fallen in our favor!

## Final thoughts?

**AC:** We are just so thankful God has blessed us to have children. Marriage and family are not the greatest good, but they are one of God's sweetest blessings and one of the greatest opportunities to put the realities of the Gospel on display. We are just overwhelmed at the kindness of God to choose this path for us. We can't imagine life any other way.

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**Alyssa Speicher '17** is a former student public relations writer for Cedarville University.

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