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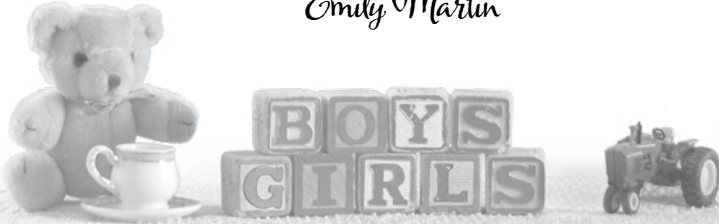
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The Prayer of Two Hearts

Emily Martin



*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,
and cometh down from the Father of lights. —James 1:17*

Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. —John 16:24

Read John 16:16-33

*S*omeday I would like to take in foster children, I wrote in my diary as a teenager. *Please let that be Your will for me. I have such a desire to take in hurting children, to help them heal, and to show them love.*

My big sister Marian had a library full of stories of unfortunate children who had been salvaged. In my quest for reading I devoured them. Books like *No Language But a Cry* gripped my heart. That particular book was a true story of a horribly scarred little girl who wouldn't talk and could barely even walk until after a therapist had helped unlock the door to her past and her pain. When she was a baby, Laura's parents had literally fried her alive in a frying pan. Because neighbors reported the bloodcurdling screams, she was rescued and lived. But since over half of her body had second degree burns, she spent the next three and a half years in the hospital. She then was transferred to a Catholic institution as a tiny crippled girl who found the world too awful to deal with. She was seemingly without speech—without joy—nothing but a vegetable-like existence. Together the nuns and the therapist gently coaxed her out of the lonely

prison of herself. Her first words were spoken at fourteen years of age. The story finishes with triumph as a radiant Laura learns to trust again and devotes her life to caring for children.

I want to work in an orphanage, I dreamily added to my journal, or travel to a third world country to rescue street children. There's so much I'd love to do!

Life is too short to realize all of a girl's dreams, but unknown to me, God was preparing me. After teaching school for three years, I married the man of my heart. I delighted in being a new wife and hoped in due time to be a mother of many. *Maybe we can have our own children's home,* I thought.

Malvern shared my vision—especially after we had been married for a number of months and there was no promise of a little one on the way. As I cried into my pillow and longed for a baby, my plea became, *If not a baby, Lord, at least send us some little children.* We inquired about adoption and foster care. It was a goal we worked toward and longed and prayed for daily, then hourly, as the longing intensified. When our prayers were answered after two and a half years, it seemed God was smiling upon us.

Our first two little boys came in the arms of social workers. They were two and three years old with large, expressive brown eyes. That evening, Malvern and I sat smiling at each other across the dimly-lit living room, each rocking a little boy. At last our hearts and arms were full!

Ricky, the two-year-old, adjusted faster than Alex, who was a year older. The next day as Alex sat crying for the familiar and begging for “Mommy,” little Ricky leaned up against him and asked in his sweet baby voice, “Wada matter, Alec?”

“You know!” Alex said, and pushed him away.

But it took only a few days until both felt secure with us. As new foster parents, it was a very happy time for us. In one month's time it was as if they had always been calling us Mommy and Daddy, filling our home with childish chatter and sunshine. “Oh, Mommy,” one would say, “I need a hug!” Or “When is our daddy coming home?” It was like music to my ears.

Ricky was an especially huggable, lovable little boy with an optimism that seemed to say life was indeed an adventure worth living. Though he was naughty at times, punishment brought good results. Alex, just as

lovable, was affectionate and sensitive. Like open sponges, they soaked up the teaching we tried to instill. They were our boys. We couldn't have loved them more.

A well-meaning aunt tried to explain to me that she couldn't believe we loved the boys quite like we would our own. "That's how it was for me," she confided. "I loved my nieces and nephews so much that I couldn't imagine loving my own children more. But when my first daughter was born, I realized it was just different. This one was mine!"

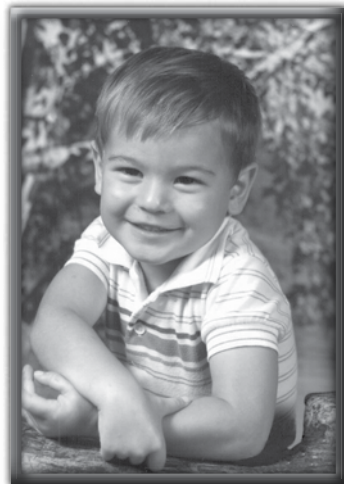
"Precisely!" I told her. "That is exactly how I felt about my nieces and nephews, but since Alex and Ricky came, there is no comparison. They are ours! We are enjoying them completely." And we did.

Thought for the Day

Foster children and adopted children become our own
just as surely as those born to us.



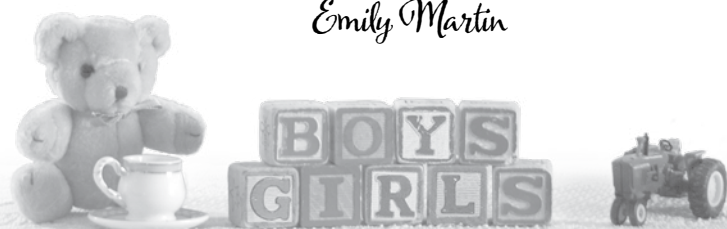
Alex



Ricky

In Answer to Our Prayer

Emily Martin



If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. —John 14:14

Read John 14, particularly noticing the promises for answered prayer
in verses 13 and 14.

People warned us to not get too attached to our foster boys. “Just think if they would have to leave,” they said. “You’re setting yourselves up for heartache.”

“Isn’t it every child’s birthright to be loved?” we asked ourselves. “Besides, how could we possibly parent children without being attached to them?” We chose to love totally and wholly. If ever they would leave, then God would have to help us face that heartache. “But,” we reasoned, “surely God loves these little boys even more than we do. Wouldn’t He want them growing up in a Christian home?”

Each court day we attended with interest and a certain amount of apprehension. Our social worker freely shared details of the case. “Reunification of birth-families is always the first plan,” she explained. “But as time moves on, permanency for the children becomes more important. Even though the father’s love for Alex and Ricky is evident through the cards and letters he sends to them, he is in prison with a ten-year sentence. Considering the length of his term and also the nature of the crime for which he is serving, reunification does not seem probable.

“The main focus at this time is the birth mother,” our social worker continued. “You know that in the two years her five children have been in foster care she has failed drastically in meeting the requirements we have

set up for her. Either she'll need to do better, or her parental rights will be terminated."

On several occasions we had met Alex and Ricky's birth mother. She had long, honey-brown hair, exactly the color of Ricky's, and a child-like simplicity. We had tried to build a relationship with her, remembering that the boys had belonged to her first. When we were together, she smiled upon the boys, commenting on how cute they were in a general sort of way. Yet she didn't appear to be pining over them or especially missing them. She didn't send cards or letters, rarely kept her visits, and as a general rule was not measuring up to the requirements the Department of Social Services was asking of her.

"If the birth mother's parental rights are terminated," the worker explained, "we will likely terminate the father's rights as well. Ten years is too long in a young child's life to wait. We need to move forward with this for the sake of the children. We're very pleased with how happy and well-adjusted Alex and Ricky are in your home. Certainly as their foster parents, you'll have first chance if adoption becomes an option."

Adopt Alex and Ricky? Keep them for always? Perhaps by the next court day real progress would be made toward that goal! Our hearts sang, until several weeks later when the phone rang.

"Mrs. Martin," Ms. Rosalyn's voice sounded strained and sad, "I hate to tell you this. We had a staff meeting here at DSS, meeting with the children's lawyer and guardian ad litem, and we are now considering returning all five children to the mother, including the two youngest boys. This would be on a temporary basis, as a trial to see how it goes. We do this sometimes as a sink or swim proposition. Either the parent makes it, or it is obvious that she won't. Then we proceed with the termination. The unfortunate part is that if the mother does gain custody—even temporary custody—she will likely take the children across the state line into Virginia where she now lives."

"But if she proves unfit and the boys are taken back into foster care, they'll be in Virginia. Does that mean they wouldn't come back to us?" I asked in a small voice.