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# ANGELS WALK AMONG US

## A widower with a servant's heart

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### “Hi, my name is Richard.”

Thus began my knowing a giant of a man named Richard Blount (62) as he sat down in the chair beside me. The occasion was my first meeting at GriefShare, a widely available program for those who have experienced a loss in their life. I was attending the program as part of the research I was conducting for my book, *The Widowers Journey*.

I would soon realize that Richard, a native of Tampa, was no ordinary man. Built like a linebacker from your favorite football team, Richard is also a giant of a man in another way. You see, Richard loves people . . . especially children. He loves children so much, he and his previous wife had two children, Rebecca and Matthew. When Richard married Terri in 1991, her three children, Joshua, Ryan, and Tyler joined the family.

As deeply religious people, both Richard and Terri felt a calling from the Almighty to do more in the service of those in need. “We prayed over it,” says Richard. “We then decided to become foster parents.”

Once approved by the State of Florida and over some time, Richard and Terri opened their loving home to forty foster children. You heard me; forty.

As any foster parent will tell you, foster parents become very attached to the children they are asked to care for as their own until the day a court orders otherwise. This sense of attachment caused Richard and Terri to adopt five of their



Foster children, Alex, Ricky, Sarah, Abigail, and Jacob, two of whom have special needs (autism and bipolar disorder). Ten children in all, each showered with love in the Richard and Terri Blount home.

When asked why he and Terri felt a need to serve as parents to ten children, Richard replied, “You’ll have to ask the Lord that question. He placed it in our hearts to care for his children.”

Tragedy struck when Terri passed away, leaving Richard as a single Dad with ten children, ranging in ages from 1 ½ to 30.

As a widower, Richard needed time to grieve the loss of his wife, Terri, but he had little time to do so. After all, he had ten children who needed him, a house to maintain, and a career he desperately needed to preserve if he was to provide for eleven people, including himself. Again, Richard turned to the Almighty for strength and direction.

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Believing no prayers go unanswered, it wouldn't take long before Richard would meet Cheri (63).

A widow with four children, Jenny, Jason, Lizzy, and Michelle, Cheri's life parallels Richard's in several ways, including having served as a foster parent with her deceased husband Jim to over 100 foster children. Also, like Richard and Terri, Cheri and Jim adopted some of their foster children, six to be exact, Lucy, Kayla, Emma, Daniel, Izabella, and Isaiah, three of whom have special needs.

*"I prayed the Lord would point me in the direction of a man that I could love and who loves children," said Cheri.*

Once introduced, the chemistry between Richard and Cheri was immediate. It didn't take long before Richard asked Cheri to marry him, bringing the total number of children in their now consolidated household to twenty. Yes... twenty children, several of who have special needs.

With so many children residing in their home, one of their neighbors complained to the local authorities that Cheri and Richard were forming a "group home." Cheri said, "I can't help myself, I love babies, and I love God."

"We're a good team," added Cheri. Indeed. But their union did not come without significant sacrifices. At 62 years of age, Richard is unable to retire for another ten years. "We look at people our age who are empty nesters, enjoying their senior years realizing we won't be able to retire until we're in our 70s," Cheri added. "At times, I feel as though I have lost my identity, I had to quit my career as a nurse." Cheri went on to say, "It was all worth it."

Richard added, "We make time for ourselves and our marriage, which includes a date night every Saturday." He went on to add how the date may be a simple meal at a local diner, or perhaps they'll take in a movie.

When asked what surprises arose raising 20 children, Richard said, "I'm surprised I could do it. I've become more humbled by the blessings I have received, including being able to provide our twenty children with a stable home and a sense of belonging to a family that loves them; I have also become closer to my Lord."

Today, Cheri and Richard live in suburban Orlando, Florida, with nine of their twenty children, the youngest nine years old, including several with special needs.

Widowed and faced with the responsibility of raising twenty children, Cheri and Richard have plenty of reasons to be angry, even jealous of others. Yet, they choose to celebrate the lives of their deceased spouses by gracefully touching the lives of Our Lord's children.

Cheri and Richard didn't stop there. When it was time to acquire a therapy dog for their children with special needs, you guessed it, Cheri and Richard adopted a beautiful Golden Retriever named Mr. Wilson from an animal rescue center.

Did I mention that Richard was at the GriefShare meeting on the evening I first met him because he volunteers as one of the program's facilitators? Some people just never stop giving to others.

Are there angels walking among us?

Say hello to Angels Cheri and Richard Blount.

