

portrait

VANCE EVERETT, MANAGER OF THE LAW SCHOOL COMPUTER SYSTEM, AND HIS WIFE, LAURIE, PUT

by Matthew Kennington

Sometimes family home evenings at Vance and Laurie Everett's home aren't what you'd call typical. In a family of 12, with a wide range in ages and interests, the Everetts have found unusual ways to honor their commitment to putting family first. Instead of a formal lesson, they some-

times gather around the piano and harmonize or play their musical instruments together, or they might simply take a soccer ball out back to kick around. With 10 children, all of them adopted, the Everett family is a study in making things work in extraor-dinary ways.



To meet the challenges of rearing a family with children of diverse backgrounds, the Everetts draw on their creativity, commitment, and faith in the Lord.

Early in their marriage, when Vance was nearing completion of his degree in music education at BYU and Laurie was finishing hers in therapeutic family life, they talked about someday having “about a dozen children.” Vance’s heart was set on teaching music, and he had already begun to do some recording, but he didn’t want to end up selling insurance in the evenings and hot dogs on the weekends like many of his fellow music teachers had to do to make ends meet. After a great deal of soul-searching, the Everetts decided they wanted something more conducive to family life.

So Vance started over. He went back to BYU, and picked up a second bachelor’s in computer science. Laurie had decided that after graduating she would begin raising a family, but when it became apparent that nature and medical science weren’t accomplishing much, the Everetts tried another route. They became foster parents. It was a frustrating emotional roller coaster—some foster children were in their home for only a day, others for several years—but the Everetts stuck with it and have fostered more than 40 children to date.

Eventually, through the Utah Foster-Adopt program, the Everetts found their first child, a beautiful baby girl of Latin American descent, reminiscent of the children Vance had grown to love as a missionary

in South America. It took two long years to complete the adoption, and after that struggle the Everetts might well have been gun-shy about adopting again. Instead, they responded to spiritual promptings and began to work with LDS Social Services, with whom Vance had come in contact through his work as a bishop. Through that agency, the Everetts found their second child, a boy, also of Latin American descent. Approached by a state adoption worker, the Everetts then had strong feelings that they should foster a set of three siblings with the hopes of a short adoption process. In fact, the legal battle took seven years, and in the interval a fourth sibling was born, but eventually the Everetts successfully adopted all four children.

Vance had begun working for the J. Reuben Clark Law School on a programming contract through West Publishing. He was asked to stay at the Law School to manage the new computer system that the school was installing. Eight years had passed, and Vance and Laurie had had continual feelings that their family wasn’t complete. Because demand for adoption is very high in Utah, the Everetts began looking out of state. Eventually they found child number seven, an African American baby boy in Ohio. One year later, another child, also African American, joined them from Florida.

In some ways, it was like starting over with a second family, except that this time Vance and Laurie had help. “It’s amazing how much easier it gets the more children you have,” Vance says, “except when they get ill.” For all the challenges, the Everetts have found ways to make it work. For example, on a recent excursion to the Hill Air Force Base Museum, each older child tended a younger child as they meandered through the displays of jets and rockets, leaving Vance and Laurie to enjoy their time alone together.

Recently the Everetts adopted two more children, from the Marshall Islands. Because of the priorities they set years ago, they are able to find one-on-one time with each child. Right now, two of the boys are nearing their Eagle Scout awards. Vance has taken them to pow-wows, Scout camps, and high-adventure camps, and he has pushed the merit badges. When one son was preparing to meet with a Pleasant Grove city official to arrange his Eagle project, Vance sat down with him in the kitchen and role-played the conversation with him.

With older children to help, the Everetts have found ways to pursue their passion for music. Laurie has home-schooled each child and involved all six of the oldest in piano lessons as well as another instrument of their

choice. Vance accepted a calling to sing in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. When Vance was called to join the choir, Laurie was asked, “Will you support your husband in this calling?” She said, “Yes.” Then she heard, “That means accompanying him on all the tours and trips whenever spouses are invited.” Laurie raised her eyebrows, but she accepted.

Although the Everetts didn’t realize at the time exactly how difficult it would be to keep that commitment as more children came into the family and the demands on time and finances increased, Laurie has been able to accompany Vance on every tour and concert. They have a firm belief that when they are obedient to the counsel of Church leaders and the prompting of the Spirit, they will be able to find a way to make things work.

To meet the challenges of rearing a family with children of diverse backgrounds, the Everetts draw on their creativity, commitment, and faith in the Lord. In a state as racially homogeneous as Utah, there may be difficulties when it comes to friends, dating, and marriage. But Laurie and Vance continually find joy in the life of each child, celebrating their individual personalities and divine parentage, and look forward to children yet to come. Whatever challenges the future brings, the Everetts will find a way to make things work.