

What Happened to Misty Dawn?

by Cynthia Leal Massey



(above) Side front of the Clown Alley bar. Found in a paper sack between the telephone pole and the sidewalk 16 years ago, "Misty Dawn," now Kallie Tuttle, is a happy, thriving teenager.

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ixteen years ago, on a cold, drizzly January morning, a young woman walked from her apartment to a 7-Eleven on W. Military Drive, near Lackland Air Force Base. As she passed Clown Alley bar, according to newspaper accounts, she heard something that sounded like a dog whimpering. "I looked down and saw a paper bag leaning against a step. I

opened it up and there was a baby inside," she said. She removed the "shivering, unclothed infant" from the bag, covered her with her coat and rushed back to her apartment. After warming the newborn, twenty-year-old Karen Taggart, airman first class at Kelly Air Force Base, took her to the apartment of a friend who had small children; they found clothes for the baby, then Taggart called police.

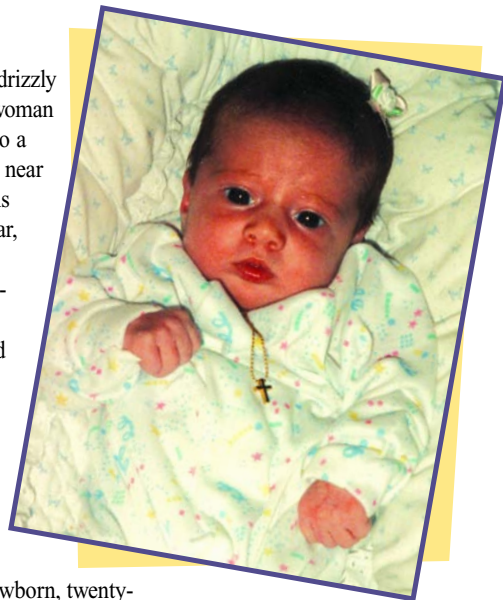
At Medical Center Hospital's neo-natal intensive care unit where authorities took the baby for observation and care, hospital employees dubbed the abandoned infant "Misty Dawn." They quickly fell in love with the five-pound, five-ounce baby girl, as did the entire City when news of her discovery was reported in the newspapers and on television. Dozens of people called the Department of Human Services offering to adopt her.

On February 1, 1989, the healthy, five-day-old baby was placed in a foster-adoptive home, and six months later, after an effort to locate her biological parents proved futile, she was officially adopted by a San Antonio couple.

Here is where a story like this usually ends. Adoptive parents often prefer anonymity, wanting to protect their children from the discomfort of exposure and people's often tactless remarks about adoption. Some adoptive parents are also afraid that their child's biological parents will surface, causing conflict in the adoptive family.

Dave and Patti Tuttle are not such parents. Besides being the couple chosen to adopt Misty Dawn, the Tuttle have been a foster family for 187 children over the past 22 years. They are a remarkable couple (although they would deny this), and they have raised remarkable children (this they would not deny). They have two biological sons Troy (32) and Chad (29) who is serving in Iraq. Their daughter Nanci (22) was their first foster child and was adopted when she was 18 months old. Then came their other little miracle, Kallie (Misty Dawn), now 16.

When Kallie was a baby during the six months before her adoption was final, the Tuttle granted several media interviews. Their case workers thought they were being too



open. But Patti believed otherwise. “She’s a gift to us, but she’s not ours to hide away,” she told them. “. . . We believed one of the greatest gifts we could give Kallie was to tell her how we handled her situation, that we were always honest with her and with the public and also to let her know that we didn’t hide her from her birth mother, that we agreed to the interviews, in a way, to be able to get information to her birth mother to say, ‘You’re baby girl is OK, and we’re loving her and we’re cherishing her, but she is OK. We also were trying to help the birth mother heal.’”

Why are they willing to share their daughter again with the public?

The answer lies not just in Kallie’s story, but in the story of her family, in foster parenting and adoption, and in the Tuttle’s concern for desperate mothers. “We can’t ever afford to get tired of talking about what we do,” says Patti, “. . . Every time we go to HEB or church, or wherever with a baby, we talk about why we’re a foster family. And we find . . . the first thing that a lot of people say, the first words out of their mouth is, ‘How can any mother give away her baby?’”

“That’s our cue to lovingly educate them. There are days when I’m just tired and I would rather not have to talk about anything. But I realize that that’s the way you change hearts; that’s the way you un-do the negative stuff you see on television or read about [about fostering and adoption], by showing people the other side of it.”

This is an update on the person many San Antonian’s remember as Misty Dawn, but it is also the story of a family who had, and continues to have, the courage to say “Yes.”

The Fantasy Story

Patti listened patiently on the phone as her daughter’s third grade teacher related her concerns about Kallie. “She’s been telling her friends a fantasy story of being found in a brown paper bag when she was born. When I asked her about it, she stood by the story. I think it would be a good idea to set up a meeting with the school counselor to find out what’s bothering her.”

“Well, I’d loved to accommodate you with that, but that’s not a fantasy. That is her story.”

Patti smiles. “In a way, I wish I could had been able to meet with the teacher to tell her that because I knew by the silence on the other end of the phone, not only was she stunned, she must’ve been a little embarrassed,” she says of the incident that happened eight years ago. She told the teacher, “Don’t feel bad that you called me. The blessing is it tells me that Kallie feels safe with her friends, even with you that she reiterated this story to you, that she’s OK with who she is.”

Kallie Today

Kallie is a lovely sixteen-year-old who lives in a bucolic Hill Country home on five acres of cedar and oak-studded land. She is wearing blue jeans and a pink and white striped collared shirt, one of her bare feet touching the floor, the other tucked underneath her, as she sits for an interview about her relatively short, but eventful life. If she is tired from the slumber party the night before to celebrate her sixteenth birthday, it doesn’t show.

“It seems like I’ve always known,” Kallie says of her unique birth experience. “But I guess it wasn’t until third grade that I really realized



Kallie with the family dog, Sam.

it. . . . When I do tell people,” she says, “they think it’s horrible. But I tell them it could have been worse.” She smiles. “I mean, she [her birth mother] still loved me; she didn’t do it because like she didn’t want me, because she gave me life, so I’m not bothered by it. [My friends] now think it’s cool. Well, not cool. Different. . . .” She giggles.

Kallie is very much a teenager. She likes to “hang out” with her friends, watch TV, dance and listen to her favorite music, songs by Rascal Flats, the 2004 Country Music Awards Vocal Group of the Year. Some of her favorite television shows are “Friends,” “Super Nanny,” “Survivor,” “The Bachelor” and “Trading Spaces.”

And like a lot of kids who live in the country, she loves animals. She started riding horses when she was six. Her parents bought an old sorrel mare and Kallie took care of her—feeding,

grooming and riding the horse until she died of colic a few years ago. In October, the family purchased two miniature horses (Indy and Shimmer). “They’re like big dogs,” says Kallie. “We thought we’d get them just to walk them around a little and they don’t scare the kids like the big horse did.”

In the agricultural program at her high school, Kallie recently showed White New Zealand rabbits at the Walter Gerlach Livestock Show. “I haven’t placed in the last two years I’ve shown, but it’s like a fun experience anyway, and it’s fun when your friend wins,” she says. But it’s clear that she’d like to place, and she thinks she may have a better chance with a swine. “I’m going to try to show a pig next year, something more challenging.”

Kallie likes to read mysteries (not too surprising given her background), although her favorite books are the Redwall series by British author Brian Jacques, which feature adventure and comedy with characters who are all woodland animals: kind-hearted mice, villainous piratical rats and even an aristocratic cat.

She says she likes “chick flicks,” but her favorite movie is “Elf.” It doesn’t take a degree in psychology to understand Kallie’s attraction to this movie, the story about a baby in an orphanage who crawls into Santa’s bag of toys, is taken to the North Pole and is raised by an elf. Buddy grows up, and realizing he is not really an elf, he goes to New York City in search of his roots and his real father. It is a funny, touching story about regaining the true Christmas spirit and the quest for identity.

Kallie says she sometimes wonders about “who she is,” but not often. She does, however, have a yearning to know who her biological mother is. She’d like to know “what she looks like, what she’s doing and if she ever got married and had more kids. . . stuff like that.”

She has no ill feelings toward her birth mother, something that can be attributed to the open and loving attitude of her parents and the experience she has had over the years helping with foster babies and meeting the mothers of some of the children. In fact, when Kallie’s older sister Nanci became an unwed mother at the age of nineteen, her situation crystallized for Kallie the truth that giving a child up for adoption is often the best possible and most loving choice for a young woman feeling “trapped” in an unexpected pregnancy.

Nanci

Both Dave and Patti say that if it hadn’t been for Nanci, there would be no reason to interview them. Dave remembers seeing Nanci at the church

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Kallie, December, 1989.



With her horse, Laura Beth, June 1995.



Involved in her high school's agricultural program, Kallie raised New Zealand rabbits for a Fall 2004 show.

they were then attending in 1984. "What a scrawny looking little kid with her eyes slanted and stringy hair," he says of the toddler who was barely a year old. The family the little girl was with were her foster parents, friends of the Tutttles. They told Patti and Dave she was going to be available for adoption because her mother was voluntarily terminating her parental rights.

Although the couple had always wanted a daughter, they already had two sons (then 10 and 8) and believed their family was complete. However, Patti felt a tug on her heart for the little girl. She asked Dave what he thought about adopting. His first response was, "I don't think so." She said a prayer, "God, if this is for us, you're going to need to change his heart." After Dave came around, the couple asked Troy and Chad to write their thoughts about adopting Nanci. They, too, wanted her in the family. When Nanci was 22 months old, she became the Tutttle's first foster child and then, their first adoptive daughter.

Although people may think Kallie's birth story is appalling, Nanci's early life demonstrates the cruelty of neglect. For the first five months of her life, she was left alone in her crib while her mother went to work. Her mother went home at lunch time to feed her and then left her alone again until after work. "Here's this baby in this crib who would cry when she was hungry and nobody would come," says Patti. "She'd see no face, have no eye contact, nobody would touch her to calm her through the crying. So, this went on for days and weeks. And she would cry and nobody would come." Eventually, she quit crying. "When she was found at five months, the caseworker wrote in her report that when they realized there was a baby in the crib and they began talking to her, she didn't even turn her head to follow the sound of the caseworker's voice."

Nanci was so disconnected, she never was able to bond properly and just didn't trust anyone. Patti says, "If Dave and I had the information that we've learned over the years when we first got Nanci, we could have parented differently. I don't know that the outcome might've been different, but we would've been so much more equipped to give her a little bit more [even though at the time] we felt like we were giving her all we had."

Even though raising Nanci was a challenge for the Tutttles, they decided to continue to foster other children. They also applied to adopt a sister for Nanci, something they thought would never come to fruition because they already had three children. When the call came about a baby girl that might be available for adoption, they thought it might be "Misty Dawn." Because of a six-month waiting period before they could adopt, the foster/adoptive parents had to be willing to give the baby up in case the birth mother or father or a family member surfaced. The Tutttles

had fostered 42 babies and children between Nanci and Kallie, and authorities knew they would comply with the courts.

When the six months were over, Kallie Marie officially joined the Tutttle family. Patti and Dave still marvel that they were chosen as Kallie's parents. Because she was five days old when she came into their home, they were able to bond easily with her. "Kallie just came, fit in, trusted, bonded, attached and was just a normal happy kid.

Bonding

"Kallie's ability to bond and Nanci's inability to bond have opened our eyes to the differences in children and to how wounded children are who are older when they get into adoptive homes," says Patti. She believes that God wanted them to become Kallie's parents so they could see this, so they could be better parents to Nanci and to the foster children who continue to come into their home.

Because of her experience with an older adoptive child, Patti says, "There's nobody who could ever convince me that removing a child at two, three and four years of age from the family that they belonged to—I don't care if it's foster or not—to put them with a birth family [is in the best interest of the child]. The repercussions won't happen until that child is 15, 16, 17, and then the wounds just open up. "A birth parent who really loves a child would take a step back and say, 'Is this in the best interest of me or is it in the best interest of that child?'"

When Patti and Dave learned that Nanci was pregnant outside of marriage, they were surprised and sad. "It's not what our dream was for Nanci," says Patti philosophically. "But you know, life is what it is." Patti was even more surprised when Nanci told her that she had called Methodist Mission Home (where she had been sent as a baby), and was going to place her baby for adoption. "I would've bet you anything she wouldn't have placed her baby for adoption. She always told us if ever she got pregnant she would never do to her baby what her mom did to her. And I told her that her mom didn't do anything to her; she tried to give her the best life she could by sharing her through adoption."

In fact, Nanci called the Methodist Mission Home even before she told her parents about the pregnancy. Patti says, "It told me that God had planted the seed of adoption in her heart, that that would be the best plan for her and her baby, and that it was a good thing." A family with a young daughter adopted Nanci's son, who will be a year old this month. His new parents keep in touch with the Tutttles. "We talk to his family a

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lot, and it's so open that there's nothing I have but peace and gratitude for the way it's happened.

"I have a new admiration and love for Nanci, for her courage," says Patti of her daughter's decision to put her son up for adoption. "She knew she wasn't ready to parent, and she did the right thing for the child."

Foster/Adopt Program

The city's foster/adopt program got off the ground starting with Kallie, according to the Tuttles, which meant that children who were found abandoned would be placed in a foster/adopt family so if they became adoptable they'd never leave that family. Prior to the discovery of Misty Dawn/Kallie, a child would be placed in a foster home and then after six months when rights were terminated, she'd go to her adoptive family, and that bond would be broken. The case of Misty Dawn sparked reform in this adoption practice.

Abandoned Babies

Another thing the Misty Dawn case did was to reverse Child Protective Services' policy of not publicizing when abandoned babies were found. "You didn't see it on the news, because they didn't want to publicize it; they were afraid it would cause mothers to abandon their babies," says Patti. "They tried this reversal thing when Misty Dawn was found and they made it very public."

Even so, babies were still found, abandoned, and in many cases, dead. In fact, two weeks after Kallie came into their lives, another baby was found, this one dead. "I remember distinctly when that came on the news that night, realizing that Kallie and that baby could've traded places in a heartbeat," says Patti. "I told Dave that if no one claimed her, we should adopt her and bury her."

Although her husband was a little put off by the idea at first, he didn't balk. He understood. Their parents and other family members did not. In fact, they thought the couple had gone "crazy." Dave and Patti decided it didn't matter what others thought. When no one came forward to claim the baby, the Tuttle's adopted her, christened her Joyce Marie, and made arrangements for her burial.

The night before the funeral, the couple went to the mortuary by themselves and saw the baby for the first time. "It just took my breath away, because she was huge," says Patti. "She was a nine-pound, beautiful baby. She appeared to be Hispanic. Beautiful. A full head of hair. Perfect. I told Dave, 'If we just hold her long enough, she's gonna wake up. She just has to wake up.' It was that reality that every life counted."

Since then, the Tuttles have adopted and buried four abandoned and deceased babies, all of them girls: Joyce Marie, Sylvia Marie, Faith Marie and Gloria Marie. They are buried at Holy Cross Cemetery. Dave is quick to point out that a lot of other people helped with the babies' burials: the funeral home, the archdiocese, headstone people. "Some people just came up to me and gave me \$20 bucks to help defray the cost."

"There were two babies found abandoned and deceased since we buried Gloria [in 1999]," says Patti. "Other folks took the helm and buried those two babies. One little baby was found near a school. A lot of the parents from that school banded together, named the baby and did exactly what we did." The Tuttles were excited that others have taken responsibility for these babies. "We don't have any special criteria or knowledge or anything. We just went by faith, a step at a time. So we wanted to let people know that if we could do it, there's things they could do."



Patti, Kallie and Dave Tuttle, with foster children.

In 1999, Texas became the first state to enact Safe Haven Legislation, or the Baby Moses law, aimed at encouraging desperate parents who abandon their children to do so with an emergency infant care provider, rather than at a dangerous location. The law also protects parents from criminal prosecution when they deliver an unharmed child to a designated provider. Patti and Dave both consider the Baby Moses law good legislation that should've been in place years ago.

Motivation

The attribute most apparent in the Tuttles is their vulnerability, their willingness to be open. Yet, there is strength in their vulnerability. And something else—a sense of mission born from reconciliation. In 1970, at the age of 17, pregnant and unwed, Patti had an abortion. "I really did believe the information available to me then, that it wasn't a baby until after the third month of pregnancy," she says. Even so, she felt guilt and shame. After her marriage to Dave, she lived in a "semi-depressed state, not really feeling much." It was during a Marriage Encounter weekend, a program offered by the Catholic Church, when Patti decided she wanted not to make up for her abortion, but rather to ask God to use her, to make her feel whole again. She felt "transformed" after that weekend. She believes that God wants us to be free of guilt and shame, no matter what we have done that separates us from Him.

The Truth

This is the family that adopted Misty Dawn, now Kallie Tuttle. Not perfect, not extraordinary—Patti is a homemaker, Dave works for the AI Root Company of Texas, a candle wholesaler and manufacturer—but willing and open. "The greatest gift we can give our children—birth, foster, adopted, it doesn't matter," says Patti, "is the truth. Because if we keep anything from our children and then one day they do find out and it's about them, wouldn't it be natural for them to think you were ashamed of them?"

And in the spirit of honesty, what message does Kallie want to give her birth mother? The young woman who could have aborted her, but did not; the young woman who left her in a brown paper bag on a misty morning in late January, 1989, in a place where she was sure to be found?

Kallie says, "Thank you." **SA**