

Christmas special season for mother, new daughter

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She earned a full scholarship to Wake Forest University where she obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting with honors. She is a Certified Public Accountant and owns her own home and brand new car. She's also happy and single.

So besides living the American dream, what more could Chappell want? Well for one, she's always wanted to skydive. Accomplished. Her skydiving certificate is proudly displayed on her refrigerator.

That's not all you'll find on her refrigerator. On a sheet of paper with perfect legible handwriting reads, "Latondra Anne Chappell."

The mother feels blessed for what the daughter has brought to her life. "I am so proud of that kid," Chappell said. "She has been through so much and she has not cracked."

Nikki hasn't cracked either. Matter of fact, she's been looking for a brother for Latondra.

"I think everybody should adopt," Chappell says. "They are the kids that have almost been just thrown away."

There is an increase in interest of adoptions during the holidays, said Ruth Amerson, director of Another Choice. Sometimes that interest turns into adoptions. "I think holidays remind folks that there are kids without families," she said.

For children who are awaiting adoptions, Christmas brings on a mixture of emotions because these kids are not with their biological family, brothers and sisters.

"Christmas is a painful reminder of their loss," Amerson said.

Chappell's life plan consisted of her adopting a child when she was 31. Latondra came four years earlier.

It was spring 2002 and there was an Open House at Chappell's church for adoptions. She attended thinking the whole process would take years anyway, but applied with an adoption agency and took a mandatory parenting class.

Chappell knew adopting a child was a serious step and at that point she would have to take an honest inventory of herself. She admits she could not handle caring for a severe physically or mentally handicapped child. She knew she wanted a little girl between the ages of 4 and 8.

Latondra's was the first

profile that Chappell saw. "She was the first kid I looked at and wanted," Chappell said. But the process had its bumps. The adoption agency Chappell was working with merged with a larger agency. In the process, the agency lost her paperwork and required her to take parenting classes again.

Chappell said felt defeated, frustrated and on the verge

of giving up. But that feeling of frustration did not last long. She contacted Another Choice For Black Children to help her adopt Latondra.

It was during this process that Chappell reviewed Latondra's medical records that revealed Latondra was mentally handicapped. Chappell didn't buy it.

On a Saturday morning, Latondra seems very comfortable in her home setting

with her mommy. She's under the weather with a cold and fever, so she's not as animated as usual. But Latondra is as normal as any other 5-year-old - talkative, precocious and loveable.

Latondra attends speech therapy and physical therapy, and she's made strides toward normalcy.

"I don't want to people to look at her differently," said Chappell. "We can deal with

this. It may take a couple of years, but we'll get through this."

Being a single parent is tough, but Chappell has a network of support. Her neighbors, coworkers and family have all chipped in to help. Chappell's 25-year-old brother Marcus is especially instrumental in their lives.

"I think (Latondra) is lovely," Marcus said. "She is my world and I'm so proud of

her." Marcus is also proud of her sister and impressed with her decision to accept Latondra in her life.

It's this kind of support that makes it easier for Chappell. "It has changed my life a lot. God had a plan," she said.

If you are interested in adopting a child, contact Another Choice for Black Children Inc at (704) 394-1124.

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Malvo trial turns to defense

By Sonja Barisic
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHESAPEAKE, Va. – The daughter of one sniper victim called Lee Boyd Malvo evil. Teachers and others who knew the convicted killer when he was younger described him as bright, courteous, sweet and lonely.

Now Malvo's estranged father is expected to add his assessment Monday as the defense makes its last bid to persuade jurors who convicted the 18-year-old of capital murder to spare his life.

"We hope you'll see the value of that life," defense attorney Thomas Walsh told jurors Friday during his opening statement for the sentencing phase of Malvo's trial. "That young man has value."

Malvo was found guilty Thursday of two counts of capital murder in the killing of FBI analyst Linda Franklin on Oct. 14, 2002, during a three-week series of sniper attacks in the Washington area that killed

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