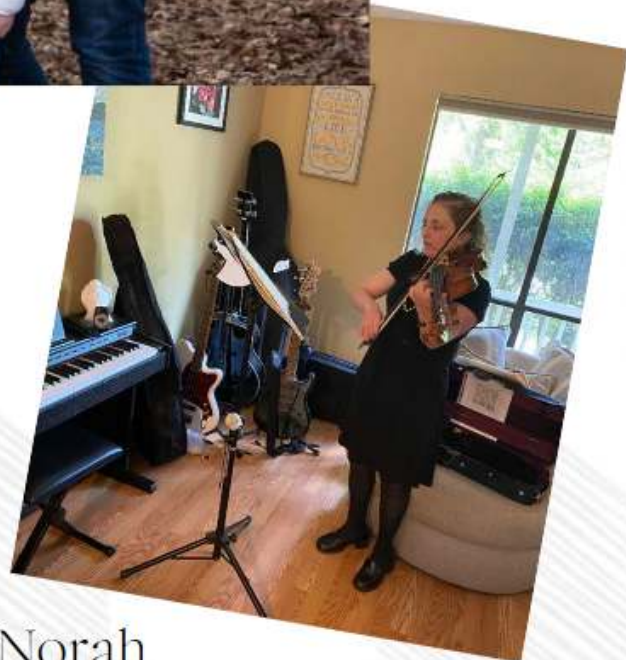


BLAKE AND CRYSTAL



With William and Norah
Our Children from Blake's Previous Marriage



HELLO!

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking this moment to allow us to introduce our family. We believe this must be a stressful and overwhelming time, but please know you are in our thoughts, our hearts, and our prayers. We can only imagine your strength, selflessness, and dedication. We look forward to getting to know you, and hope you see in us a story that you would like you and your child to be part of. We appreciate the loving sacrifice you are considering. We hope you feel God's love for you. He knows you, and will always be there for you.



WHO WE ARE



Our Christian faith is fundamental to our family. That means weekly services as well as daily prayer and scripture study. Something unique to our faith is the role of temples. We build temples as Houses of the Lord, and they are a sacred part of our worship that is separate from our weekly Sabbath observance. In the temple we make covenants with our Heavenly Father that promise the opportunity for families to be together forever. We love the temple – we're blessed to have one here in Atlanta where we attend and volunteer serving others. When our temple closed for maintenance this past April, we took the opportunity to drive to Birmingham to worship there. We were grateful the time change crossing into Alabama made up for the bad Atlanta traffic we hit on the way there, letting us arrive just in time for the service. It was a late night, but it was wonderful and we got to add another temple selfie to our album.

For us, music is the language of the soul. Family karaoke night has been a huge blessing to us. It's meant so much to be able to share music we've loved throughout our lives with the children. Likewise, hearing them sing the songs they love has been a treat. Recently we've introduced our children to some of our favorite Weird Al songs. They've particularly enjoyed his Star Wars parodies. At our latest karaoke night Will and Norah insisted on singing Yoda, which is full of extra laughs now that Norah can read all the words. Your child will grow up surrounded by music, pretty much all the time.



Family dinners bring us closer together. As a family we take the time and care to prepare and enjoy them. We welcomed in this spring with a fire in the backyard. The kids worked together to gather kindling while Blake split the logs. Will helped Blake with setup and then lit the fire, which the kids fed while Blake supervised. Once a good blaze was going we were able to sit back and enjoy the nice weather until it burned down to coals. Will was so excited that he ran to the door to make sure Crystal had an appetite right when she got home from work. She did, so Will – the resident hot dog chef – made dinner for everyone.

CRYSTAL (BY BLAKE)

Crystal's faith runs bone deep. The last thing Christ said as recorded in the Book of Matthew includes the phrase, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," so she did. Just before her twenty-first birthday, Crystal began an 18-month mission to Bolivia. She did not speak Spanish and had never been outside of the United States. Missionaries were able to write home each week, but they could only call home twice a year. She even dealt with a pretty severe bout of typhoid fever after she'd been in Bolivia a few months. It was hard, but she learned Spanish, and being immersed in the culture impacted her life tremendously. Crystal's decision to go and her decision to stay despite hardship were reflections of her faith. She knew that Jesus Christ was her Savior, that He understood her challenges, that the people of Bolivia were her brothers and sisters, and that she could help them to know and feel their Heavenly Father's love for them. Your child will have an incredible example of love, service, and sacrifice in the home.

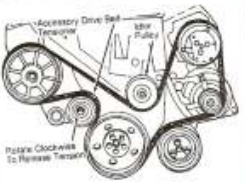


Something that impresses me the most about Crystal is the way **she reaches out to help those around her.** One way she does that is her work as a pharmacist. Something that consistently brings Crystal a sense of fulfillment is helping people navigate the stress of diagnoses and treatments. Recently, she had the opportunity to work with a newly-diagnosed diabetic who did not speak English. Crystal was able to talk the patient through the situation, showing the new testing supplies, injections, and lifestyle expectations in Spanish. She loves allaying their fear and uncertainty as she demystifies the process by walking them through their first finger prick or injection.

Crystal's soul is filled with song. I love hearing music in the home, hearing her hum or sing, or play in the background. One of the big ways Crystal expresses her music is through instruments. Growing up Crystal spent some time with the **piano and violin**, but most of her training has been with the **viola**. I remember visiting Crystal in Utah while we were dating. We took her viola with us and visited her parents. Crystal played while her mother accompanied her on the piano. It was wonderful to sit in their living room and listen to the music, including Piazzola's *Libertango*, Massenet's *Meditation*, and Crystal's grandmother's favorite hymn, *In the Garden*. Her parents have a wood-burning stove they use to keep the house warm in the winter, and while there was snow outside, the fire was hot and the room was toasty. Her dad and I were able to just sit and soak it all in. It was a great visit, and I later asked her dad for his blessing on my anticipated proposal to Crystal.



BLAKE (BY CRYSTAL)



Blake is a lifelong learner and problem-solver – he truly believes there isn't much he cannot do himself with two hands and a little help from YouTube. Whether it's troubleshooting vacuums, managing the plumbing and kitchen hookups, or fixing the cars, his first instinct is to see if it's something he can do himself. Most recently he's been doing car maintenance. Last winter he had to change the serpentine belt on his Altima. It's normally a two-person job, but no one was around at the time, so he managed to lever his arm up into the engine, get his forearm on the Allen wrench he was using as a lever, and keep both hands free to remove and replace the belt. He told me later it was a little touch and go for a bit, but the whole process took less than thirty minutes!

Blake is blessed with a broad appreciation for the importance of fun and laughter. He makes sure to find a way to help us all laugh and unwind every day, and his favorite method is as a tabletop and video gamer. Between working at a video game company and pursuing it as a hobby, Blake spends a fair amount of time enjoying the worlds that gaming brings to our fingertips. Beat Saber, for example, is a particularly fun merging of his love for gaming and music. Recently, he spent an hour with a friend in his 80s who gave him a run for his money! Blake usually gets more points from flailing around, but his friend is all about precision – winning every match's surgical cut award, and he's currently working on taking *The Greatest Showman* to Expert difficulty. They had a wonderful time sharing small-talk and mutual interest with music and friendly competition.



Blake loves nothing more than to share his favorite things with those around him, and finds equal joy in giving time and attention to the interests of those he loves. As a Valentine's Day surprise, he took me to the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra to hear a viola concerto. Not a lot is written to feature my instrument of choice, and it was such a wonderfully thoughtful gift. We were front row and had a perfect view of the soloist and the viola section, and I could hardly contain my fan-girl excitement and goosebumps as the conductor prepped the opening downbeat. I felt loved and reminded that sharing is a sacrifice I should always be willing to make for those I care about. Your child will have a wonderful example of sharing, supporting, and encouraging their passions and talents.

BECOMING A FAMILY

The Covid pandemic provided the perfect opportunity for online adventuring. **We met through a dating app**, where Crystal happened to mention that her nieces and nephews were huge fans of her homemade crepes. Blake's first message was:

"Hi Crystal! It's nice to meet you! I hope your Monday treated you well. How was your weekend? Also, just how good are these crepes?"

It worked! Crystal's reply combined some of our favorite things - family, food, and chocolate. We were off to a good start.



Patience and persistence paid off when we were finally able to spend time together following a long, long-distance courtship. We went from visiting Van Gogh museums online to visiting the Van Gogh immersive experience in-person once Crystal moved to Atlanta. There were a lot of sleepless nights and some crazy flight-planning, but we made it work and enjoyed every moment. Through it all, our love of music kept us in tune. From our first virtual date, part of every conversation was spent singing. One of the sweetest moments was when we met up in Atlanta for the first time after about four months of online dates and late-night video chatting. We were **FINALLY** able to sing a duet - Phantom of the Opera's *All I Ask of You* - without dread of internet lag. It was absolutely magical, and definitely worth the wait.



We have always wanted children. Crystal has always known she would never be able to have biological children, and that loving other people's children would be her only path to nurturing the family she craved. Blake knew that part of remarrying would include embracing his children into his new family as well. We were able to share concerns on a walk through a beautiful canyon above Crystal's parents' home. Blake was overwhelmingly supportive and encouraging, and Crystal was blown away by how prepared and receptive he was to the path of adoption. We both have plenty of proof in our own lives that **biology is no limitation to love and family**, and the plan to adopt became a very natural part of our life together. We look forward to including you and your child in our family. There is always room at the table.



Hi I'm Norah, I can
+ wait to you how
to read, write, and
talk and walk,
ride a bike. Love
Norah.



WILLIAM AND NORAH

Will and Norah are a wonderful blessing from Blake's previous marriage. They stay with us every other week, but **these half-time siblings have full-time love.** Norah absolutely loves all things living (especially Alicorns), discovering and exploring the beauty in the world all around her, arts and crafts, and inventing creative games for friends at the park. She is also a total sponge for facts and information, especially about science and animals. The other day, Crystal caught her randomly practicing Chinese in the back of the car on DuoLingo. Will loves supporting his baseball team, fishing with his Grandpa, and improving his gaming skills. He loves strategy and military history, and devours fantasy adventure books like they're going out of style.

We have had plenty of experience with siblings, and still benefit so much from their love and support and examples. Crystal's love of strings, for example, stems from an older sister who gave Crystal her first violin lessons. Crystal attended her sister's college orchestra concerts, and easily became enamored with all things strings under her sister's tutelage and support. The first time Crystal saw her sister dance onto stage with strobe lights to the *Hall of the Mountain King* for a Halloween concert, Crystal was hooked. **Your child will have older siblings who will look out for them and have an endless reserve of extra hugs** when needed to navigate the challenges of childhood and beyond...and it will probably come with guided Monster Hunter excursions and proper egg-frying technique tutorials. Come to think of it, there may also be benefits to the fact that your child would have a "quiet" dedicated time alone with Blake and Crystal every other week...

Hi my name is will. i can't wait to
play with you in person and
on line



These two siblings are so very different, but we believe it is a very serious responsibility for us to **celebrate their unique personalities and potentials.** We love watching them grow, even as those interests and passions change and develop. This school year, Will joined the 6th grade orchestra and enjoyed rocking out on the upright bass. While Crystal was personally extremely excited at the prospect of having another string player in the family, Will has let us know that he will probably be picking out a different instrument to try next year. We are so proud of his efforts, and **it will be super fun to see where his new interests and experiences take him.** Your child will be nurtured and encouraged with this same pride and support regardless of their interests.

FAMILY

If you choose us, your child will have 4 Grandparents, 29 Aunts and Uncles, and more than **70 cousins!**

Friday nights are for game night with family. Kids, siblings, cousins and in-laws often join us for board and video games. This year Will's birthday fell on a Friday, which was extra fun. Blake's brother brought an extra PlayStation over so more of us could play together. Will got to stay up extra late hunting monsters and demonstrating his new twelve-year old VR skills. Among the records set were slices of pizza eaten in one night. Will had a whole pizza to himself, but Crystal still had to help with leftovers. There's always next year.



In our families, **education spans all generations.** We do not wait for school to start to begin learning, and we do not finish absorbing what the world has to teach us when school ends. When Blake's parents began their family, his mother paused her college studies to be with her children and support her husband as he worked and went to school full time. It wasn't until over thirty years later that she was able to go back to school. By then, Blake, the youngest of the eight kids, was in high school. To recognize her sacrifice, the kids made her a special stole for graduation - it had one stripe for each of her eight children, whose dreams and education she had put before her own.

Adoption has been a consistent part of our families. Blake has two brothers who were adopted as infants. Crystal's nephew was adopted. They have had an open relationship with his family of origin. It has been hugely beneficial not only to her nephew, but also to his adoptive parents. There have been times when his birth family has been able to offer priceless counsel and encouragement, like when he had questions about race as he began public school. Your child will be a member of a family that is bigger than its DNA - where adoption is part of who we are.





We both come from **BIG** families. Crystal's family has a reunion every two years. We all do our best to attend. Her parents live on a small farm, and the extended family pile in and set up tents around the house. At the latest reunion, we had over seventy people there, which made for quite the sprawling tent city. There were kids running around, strawberries being picked and eaten, epic slip-n-slides, snakes and baby bunnies (separated), and spontaneous camp songs. It was hectic and crazy and loud and amazing. Your child will instantly have a massive and tight-knit family.

Mission service is a tradition both of our families share. Including parents, our families have sent missionaries to:

• Asia	1
• South Pacific	2
• Europe	5
• South America	9
• North America	
○ Mexico	2
○ Central America	2
○ Canada	3
○ United States	25



Blake's dad served in the West Spanish American Mission. Back then (it was about sixty years ago), it covered most of the southwestern United States. He'd been born in a log cabin in rural Utah. He had to teach himself Spanish, and served for two and a half years. He met Blake's mom while serving his mission, and speaking Spanish helped him with his career working in Southern California. He kept up with his Spanish throughout his life. Once they both retired, Blake's parents served multiple Spanish-speaking missions, including to Ecuador and Bolivia, a long way from rural Utah. Just this May, two of our nephews got to find out where they were being sent. When we go on missions, we don't get to choose where we serve. Missionaries send in applications and then receive assignments from church headquarters. Receiving, opening, and reading that letter is a big deal, and usually an extended family event. They were excited with their assignments, though the second sibling was understandably tense having to wait for his brother to finish reading!

FAITH AND VALUES

Singing hymns is one of the sweetest parts of worship. One particularly special moment we've had in the past couple of years came because of Covid. For a while, we didn't have hymn singing during services, which was tough on us. We were so excited the first Sunday we sat down and saw that the hymnals had been returned to the pews! Our first hymn following the pandemic was *Thy Will, O Lord, Be Done*. It talks about Christ's willingness to come and be our Savior, to sacrifice through hardship, to perform the atonement, and through it all to accept His Father's will. Hymns hold a special place in our hearts, but that day, a reminder that another way we can strive to emulate our Savior is to accept our Heavenly Father's will during hard times brought an extra measure of His Spirit.



We live a life of service through ministry. In our congregation, Crystal is the music minister for the children. **Each week she comes up with ways for the kids to wiggle and worship.** This year we're learning about the Old Testament, and one of Crystal's best-received lessons incorporated animal yoga into songs about Noah and the Ark. By the end of the hour, the seven-year-olds were playing leap frog all around the room in a happy cacophony singing about the flood. Your child will grow up knowing that service is a way we show love for others and for God.

We take our faith on the road. Last summer we drove to and from a family reunion out west. It was about a 5200 mile round trip, and we took the opportunity to stop (even in 110 degree weather) at seven temples along the way. This Memorial Day we had a special opportunity we were extremely excited about. When a temple is ready to be dedicated, the church opens it to the public for tours. Over the past four years, the Washington D.C. temple has been undergoing extensive renovations, which have only recently been completed. Because it is temporarily open to the public, we decided to take a family trip. Instead of just taking a family selfie outside, it was wonderful to take the kids inside - and they loved it! Norah insisted on being held up at every staircase landing to look up and down the interior of the 200+ ft. stained glass spire. Having spent the day roaming the National Mall, the contrast of the hustle and bustle of D.C. on a holiday weekend with the tranquility of the temple was particularly striking.



TRADITIONS

Many of our favorite traditions involve our “Georgia family,” the Rowberrys. They opened their home and hearts to Blake following his divorce, so many of his post-divorce traditions came to involve their family too. One of his favorites has become **summoning Santa with fireworks on Christmas Eve**. When it came time to build some new Christmas traditions, working in some fun-filled explosions seemed appropriate. The kids loved knowing that Santa would know exactly where to find them, and Blake loved getting to wire up the pyrotechnics. This past year we made sure to load up plenty of fireworks before driving over to the Rowberry’s neighborhood. They and their neighbors joined us at the base of the cul-de-sac. Blake had fused an assortment of Roman candles and mortars, along with some fountains for ground support. Someone even donated additional fireworks to the cause. The finale was amazing, and Santa found us just fine! New family circumstances call for new family traditions, and we look forward to learning about your favorite traditions and including them in our gatherings for your child.

We carol every Christmas. We have been doing it since we were little, and we still have and use the caroling book Blake carried as a boy. This past year it was especially fun to carol for some of our Hispanic neighbors. Norah had learned *Feliz Navidad* in school, and she was super excited to share it with them. They were a gracious audience for the song. We’re looking at adding another hymn in Spanish to the repertoire for next year.



While life is complicated, the important things can still be simple – especially when it comes to home. **Sundays are for snuggles.** Each week we like to cuddle up in the den and enjoy an uplifting show together. We’ve watched Disney movies, *The Chosen*, church films, and the like. This year we’ve been reading in the Old Testament about the construction of the Tabernacle. To prepare for our trip to the Washington D.C. temple, we decided to watch a documentary on the role and importance of ancient and modern temples. Among other things, we learned about the Hebrew term *Kadosh* as shared by the Director of Judaic Studies at NYU. He explained that *Kadosh* is the Hebrew word for holy, and means essentially to separate – to take something and remove it from the everyday, to set it apart from the commonplace and make it special.



HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD

Our backyard has seen some things. We have enjoyed hunting for Easter eggs with cousins (and occasionally hunting each other), playing catch with the missionaries, and being out on the rare snow day. This past January we were lucky enough to get some snow and the kids went nuts. We got out Crystal's roll up sled, which was perfect for the mostly-mud-not-snow conditions. We had a blast sledding down the hill to the house, taking turns seeing who could get the closest to the house (a contest where Blake's weight was on his side for once). Afterwards wet clothes were swapped, warm blankets snuggled, and hot chocolate enjoyed by all. Your child will get to explore a backyard perfect for shenanigans.



While our neighborhood provides many wonderful opportunities that we like to take advantage of (such as a local ballpark, libraries, and a gymnastics studio), **the streets around our home are our favorite family destination.** We live in a quaint neighborhood with roads that are great for walks. We love to take our frisbee and find flowers (or bugs). One of our favorite walks recently was while we were dogsitting our friend's dog, Gabby. She found all sorts of things to investigate and was more worn out than the kids by the time she got home.

Our church community provides additional support for the children with friends and activities. **One of our favorites is a yearly Trunk or Treat.** Last Halloween, Norah went as a witch. She was particularly excited about her costume because she got to have a plastic cat and broom. There was a face painter present, and she patiently waited for her turn so the effect of her costume would be complete with a large spider web across her left cheek. Unsurprisingly, her favorite trunk was one that had been decorated with a Hogwarts theme as it matched her witch outfit.



WEEKDAYS



Blake works in the video game industry in planning and development. His company is awesome, embracing a **flexible**, employee-first business model; including **work from home** and unlimited discretionary time off policies. Your child will grow up with a father who is available at a moment's notice.

Crystal is a **pharmacist**. She has a **flexible, part-time** schedule helping fill shifts across multiple stores so she can be available for family time. At home, we're all grateful that she knows the answers to all our health questions! Your child will have a mother who has a work-life that lets her prioritize being there for her family.



Mornings can be rough. In our experience it takes just the right ingredients to get them right: chocolate, love and music. **Each morning we make a point of connecting as a family.** We have breakfast together, which usually involves nutella or chocolate chip waffles. We have a family prayer and listen to a hymn. We talk about anything special or important that is going to happen that day. We make sure that we have what we need to start the day off right. Recently we listened to *For the Beauty of the Earth*. It probably wasn't the first time Norah had heard it, but it was the first time we'd taken a moment to have her focus and pay attention. She loved it! Your child will know, first thing each morning, that they are a loved and important part of our family.

TRUSTING IN HIS CARE

We sincerely appreciate your taking the time to get to know our family. We understand it must be hard to make a decision so important based on a book. We hope you feel your Heavenly Father's love and guidance as you navigate this time.

We would feel forever grateful to be part of your child's life. Part of that journey is making sure they know their whole story; that they know of your courage and sacrifice, as well as your deep and continuing love throughout their life.

We hope to maintain contact with you and share updates often through the years.

Wishing you strength and peace,

Blake Crystal

