

“All of Our Dreams Have Come True”



Ricky works at the computer (top); daughter Amberly, 8 (top right); her cozy new bedroom (above); the happy couple in their new home, with an acre of land to boot (right)

Both Ricky and Reva Campa were born deaf, and both suffer from heart problems as well. But that didn't stop them from marrying, having children and—thanks to Habitat—building a home they can call their own

BY ANNE CASSIDY

who then lived in Arcadia, Florida, that Ricky would need heart surgery if he was to live past age 5, but that the operation couldn't be performed until he weighed at least 40 pounds. When Ricky was 6 months old, his parents moved him and their three older children (one had died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) to Maiden, North Carolina, where he could be monitored at Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem. He was also given the medication digitalis to strengthen his heart.

Ricky Campa was playing basketball at his high school in Morganton, North Carolina, the first time he saw Reva walk by. “I remember looking at her and thinking, She's cute,” he says. Reva, too, was instantly smitten, and the couple soon started dating. Two years later, in 1989, they married. A simple, ordinary love story, except that Ricky and Reva are deaf. When they promised to love, honor and cherish, they did so in sign language. Ricky's mother, Ruby, concerned about the problems the couple might face, was apprehensive at first, but her fears

soon faded. “We could tell Ricky had found someone he could be happy with,” she says. “Deafness,” says her husband, Juan, “is just something they've had to live with.”

“Just something they have to live with” is practically a mantra for the Campas, which includes Ricky, 39, Reva, 35, and their families. Ricky was born deaf and with a hole in the lining of his heart—the result of Ruby's contracting German measles during her pregnancy. An itinerant farmworker, Ruby had already given birth to four healthy children in as many years. Doctors told the couple,

As they waited for Ricky to grow, his parents had to make sure he didn't overexert himself. The couple, in fact, were so concerned about Ricky's heart condition that his deafness wasn't a priority; besides, the boy had learned to read lips and could speak just clearly enough to be understood. In 1970, when he was 5, Ricky underwent a four-hour procedure to repair his heart—and, a year **CONTINUED**

HABITAT FAMILY

later, he was well enough to attend the public school for the deaf in Morganton.

Meanwhile, about 100 miles away in Greensboro, Reva was facing similar travails. Her parents, John and Lynda Barker, ran a chicken farm, and Lynda had also contracted German measles during her pregnancy. Reva, whose four siblings were born healthy, was lucky compared with Ricky: She has about 30 percent of full hearing capacity and suffers only a mild heart murmur. Reva went to Greensboro School for the Deaf until she was 17, then transferred to the Morganton school, where she met Ricky two years later.

The newlyweds were happy, but life wasn't easy. Reva worked as a seamstress, and Ricky had found a similar job at a biking apparel company. But after undergoing surgery in 1993, Ricky's heart was still weak, forcing him to go on disability. In 1994, Reva had a baby who was born 16 weeks premature and did not survive; she would later learn the early birth was due to a weakened cervix. When she became pregnant again, doctors stitched her cervix closed. Amberly Campa was born in February 1996, healthy and hearing; a robust boy, Daniel, arrived in 2001.

Thrilled to become a parent, Ricky picked up his babies even though he wasn't supposed to lift more than five pounds because of his heart condition. The children, whose fingers fly as they sign with their parents and translate for them, are growing up in both the hearing and the deaf worlds. "They are good kids," Reva says, simply (like many hearing-impaired people, Ricky and Reva can speak, though not nearly as well as those who can hear). But the couple yearned for a home of their own.



"I love my new house," says Ricky Campa, with wife Reva in their front yard

The Campas have known sorrow, but they'd rather count their blessings


They had lived in an apartment in Lincolnton, North Carolina, for seven years, then in an old trailer home; the house they later rented was both cramped and poorly insulated.

For the Campa clan—a large, close-knit family—finding a home for Ricky and Reva became a mission, especially for Ricky's oldest brother, Johnny, and his wife, Kathy, who heard about Habitat and urged the couple to apply. Johnny offered to give Ricky an acre of his own land on which to build their home in nearby Vale, North Carolina, a few miles away from the home of another brother, Martin. Still, there were hurdles. Ricky and Reva were living solely on disability checks (Reva had stopped working after losing her first baby), and medical bills had left them \$1,000 in debt.

But thanks to financial help from both their families, the couple were accepted by Habitat in May 2002, and board members agreed to build the home on the land donated by Johnny. Ricky and Reva (or family and friends) had to put in 400 hours of

sweat equity and put \$1,000 down at closing. Then, in January 2003, Ricky suffered a severe allergic reaction to an antibiotic he was taking for bronchitis. "When he started coughing and said his heart was racing, I took him to the emergency room," says Reva. "I was so scared." It took doctors four hours to stabilize him, and he has had to remain on oxygen since. The house was finished in May 2003, and

the Campas moved in.

Ricky and Reva have known more than their share of sorrow, but they'd rather count their blessings. Although Ricky's heart will never be strong, his condition is stable, and he planted a garden this spring. "I have problems with my health, but I have faith," he says. "And I love my new house." Reva, who stays at home tending to her husband and her children, says she plans to return to work once the children are both in school (their disability payments cover the \$342 monthly mortgage). In the meantime, she's hung lace curtains in the sunny windows and filled the house with her collection of ducks made of glass, plastic and wood. And all of that is more than Ruby Campa ever dared hope for. "I used to pray just for Ricky to graduate," she says. "Now he's married with children and has a home of his own. All of our dreams have come true." 

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