

## **Preface**

### *Why So Many Children?*

I was one of seventeen children, all basically orphans who were adopted by our very unusual parents. This really is my story, but to understand me, you first have to know something about them.

Our parents first met in the 1930s and this is the story of our family. Our dad, Carmen Eden, was a handsome, curly-haired paperboy who delivered newspapers on his bicycle. Our mom, Amelia, and our dad were teenagers when they met, and their attraction was lasting. But they lost touch when Carmen grew up and no longer delivered newspapers. They didn't see each other again for several years.

Carmen and Amelia saw each other again when Amelia was visiting her Aunt Katherine, her mother's older sister, one weekend. She'd raised Amelia from infancy after her parents died in a car accident that was caused by an alcohol-impaired driver. Aunt Katherine was left to raise the baby, never married, and raised Amelia alone.

When the two saw each other again, Carmen was visiting his friend, who happened to live next door to Aunt Katherine. Carmen and Amelia started talking and soon began dating.

Amelia was a beautiful, dark-haired girl with high cheekbones and a flawless complexion. She didn't wear any make-up, only a little lipstick. She was studying to become a nurse at the Women's Nursing College when they began to see each other exclusively. Carmen now worked as a manager for the important Yale Rail Line.

During the first year that they dated, Carmen and Amelia were too busy to see each other very often, and Carmen's demanding job took him out of town for weeks at a time. This helped Amelia to stay focused on finishing nursing school.

Carmen told Amelia that he had no family. He'd said only that he'd lost all of them and refused to talk about it. He kept his past hidden, and Amelia didn't let his secretiveness interfere with their relationship. She trusted that someday he'd open up about his past but never expected the heartbreaking truth that eventually came out.

Aunt Katherine died during the first year that Carmen and Amelia were together. Amelia and Carmen, both alone, supported each other and soon married. Then Amelia sold her aunt's house and moved into Carmen's large house, which he'd bought using his inheritance.

Unfortunately, Amelia couldn't have children, but she'd always wanted a large family, having grown up as an only child and wanting to enjoy what she'd missed. Carmen also wanted a large family after having no one for so long.

The Edens got their huge family by adopting seventeen children, from newborn to age fourteen. Why did they take in so many children? Because two large, needy families of kids were all put up for adoption at the same time. They had been in and out of foster care for a while and Amelia knew about the tragic circumstances from taking care of them at the health clinic where she worked. During that time, she had grown fond of all of the children. Especially to Caitlin, who seemed very timid.

She'd often brought special gifts for everyone after visits to the clinic. She even sometimes visited at the orphanage and brought new clothes or other treats.

After Carmen and Amelia decided to adopt, they wanted to keep all the children of both families together. So, after a lot of red tape and legal wrangling, they were given permission to adopt every child from both families. They were well-off enough to be able to afford such a large family and any help they'd need to manage with so many children.

Amelia decided to put her nursing career on hold to take care of the large, new family. She had a lot of experience taking care of sick children in the clinic and was confident that the

older kids' help would be enough in raising that many children, especially since they were siblings.

The Eden estate was in a secluded area outside of Philadelphia, a few miles away from the center of town. It was formerly called The Manor House by the previous owners.

Carmen bought the large three-story stone house, which was built in the early 1900s, and renovated it long before he ever reconnected with Amelia. It sat on three acres and had a wrap-around porch. It featured seven bedrooms, four baths, and a center-hall staircase. The top floor was a huge room with a high ceiling and exposed rafters that Carmen used for storage. The children shared bedrooms: three were girls' rooms and three were for boys. There were two or three beds in each room, and Carmen and Amelia had their own private bedroom on the second floor.

When he first bought it, the mansion was Carmen's haven, a refuge from the stress of helping to build the Yale Rail Line. At that time, he buried himself in his work, almost hiding from something. But now, with a wife and huge family, the house and setting couldn't be more perfect. Soon it was bustling with activity.

When we were adopted, the clan included Carson, fourteen; Adele, fourteen; Faith, thirteen; Macy, thirteen; Rachel, twelve; Dom, twelve; Josh, ten; Julie, eight; Caitlin, six; Ellis, six; Madison, five; Rob, four; Luke, four; Chas, three; Timothy, two; Ron, one; and Stacey, newborn.

Every day at the Eden house had its share of the usual growing pains, tears and laughter, disappointments, excitement, or adventure. And soon the children no longer felt like orphans. They knew their new parents loved them and their adopted siblings. And despite their differences, they all blended well.

The Edens' clan of adopted children came from two families, each family having been torn apart by alcohol. Caitlin was one of nine children from one family and their mother had died during childbirth. Their father was already absent from their lives, having deteriorated into alcohol addiction. The other eight children had been put up for adoption when their divorced mother's addiction kept her from being able to take care of them; she soon disappeared from their lives. And so this lost group of kids now became part of the large and loving Eden family.

Amelia, at home with her younger ones, didn't have the freedom to even shop for groceries. And they could very well afford to have everything delivered, so that's what she did. She never wanted to learn how to drive and was satisfied spending her days cleaning, doing

laundry and cooking. She also spent time building her children's self-confidence, encouraging their talents in the same way her Aunt Katherine had done for her.