

## Marissa Dove: Finding greater meaning

By Daniel Lowry, Labor Cabinet

The first thing you notice about Gideon is his smile. It's a big, wide smile, and at seven years old he's lost his two front teeth, which makes his smile even more infectious and fun. His laugh is like music, soft and alive, and it's a laugh that starts fast and stays in the air after he has stopped laughing and is simply smiling again. He is always absorbing his surroundings.

What is his favorite thing to do? He thinks for a second and says, "Ride my bike." When asked what he wants to do when he grows up, he replies without hesitation: "Ride bikes."

The Labor Cabinet's Marissa Dove and her husband, Chris, travelled more than 7,500 miles to Uganda to adopt him this year.

Uganda is a progressive and stable country by relative standards in Africa, but it's still one of the poorest nations in the world. According to data from the World Bank, in 2012, about 38 percent of the population lived on less than \$1.25 a day. About 57 percent of adults there have HIV, and the World Health Organization reports that only about 34 percent of people have access to "improved" sanitation.



"In the orphanage," says Marissa, "Gideon was the oldest male. So he had a lot of responsibility." Gideon lived in an orphanage from the age of one. "By orphanage standards it was pretty nice," says Marissa. "They kept it very clean. But it was still very poor, and they didn't have a lot."

"We originally started to adopt an infant, somebody three or younger, and as we went through the process we saw the need to adopt older children."

The whole process was long and difficult. Marissa and her husband, who were high school sweethearts and have been married since 2005, began thinking about adoption after they found out they could not have children of their own. In November 2012, they narrowed their search to Africa and used an adoption agency. They had to undergo numerous investigations, background checks, finger printing, and attend 100 hours of adoption training and state foster parenting classes.

It's an expensive process, too. "A typical international adoption costs more than \$30,000," Marissa says.

Marissa and her husband are generous and caring people. Her husband is the children's minister at Capital City Church in Frankfort, and Marissa has been at the Labor Cabinet since 2013. Among her many duties, she oversees OSHA Express, a crucial data collection system, for the Labor Cabinet's Compliance Division. She enjoys her job, which gives her a chance to help improve workplace safety and do a public service for the workers of Kentucky.

In March, they first found out about Gideon. In June, they flew to Uganda for the first time to attend a court hearing for approval on the adoption. "Uganda is beautiful," Marissa says. "You can't imagine the beauty of it. There are red dirt roads, and then the sky is so blue, and the grass and the jungle are green; all these beautiful earth tones." After the judge's approval, they flew home to Kentucky with the understanding that it could be weeks or months before they were given approval to travel back. It ended up being two weeks later when they found out they had been granted guardianship of Gideon. They would fly back to Uganda to get him. They met Gideon again and told him he was going to be part of their family. He flashed his wide smile and gave them his musical laugh.

He loves watching Thomas the Tank Engine. He loves superheroes. He loves Coca-Cola. His favorite food? Chicken. Any type. Marissa and her husband have taken him on canoeing trips and places like the Newport Aquarium and the Louisville Science Center. I ask him if he likes Kentucky and he smiles and sticks his thumb high in the air. He has a new home here. It's a home of love. At first, his new parents told him he could call them Marissa and Chris. It wasn't long at all, however, that it became Mommy and Daddy.

Toward the end of the interview, I hand him a yellow notepad and a blue ink pen. He writes his name. Gideon, a Biblical name that means "mighty warrior" and then his surname from Uganda, Muwanguzi, which means "winner." He writes another name, too, which has even greater meaning. It means he has found love in a new place where he belongs— with a family he loves and who loves him right back: He writes "Dove."