



As hundreds of Palestinians die under Israeli fire in Gaza, it's time to demand a true peace movement.  
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'They decided to apply to care for a child with special needs — as many more such children needed a home.'

## Along came Polly, and three lives were transformed

Kaye and Gary are an ordinary couple doing extraordinary things, writes **Selma Milovanovic**.

WHEN Polly came to live with Gary and Kaye, she didn't talk. The girl with a shock of black curls and a beaming smile arrived in nappies, with a dummy and a milk bottle.

"We sort of got a baby in the body of a four-year-old," remembers Kaye, as her daughter, now 10, runs around the house.

Polly, who was born with an intellectual disability, mild cerebral palsy and epilepsy, had spent most of her early

until they became parents to Polly, and Mark, 3 — quite ordinary lives.

Kaye had been married before.

She had had a few jobs and raised two daughters and a son.

Gary, too, had done various things before working for his bookmaker father. One day, he read a newspaper story about taking children with special needs to weekend activities and decided to give it a go.

It was daunting at first, dealing with incontinence and tantrums, but Gary liked caring for others enough to enrol in a university nursing course.

That's where he met Kaye 10 years ago.

They were unable to have children together and decided to adopt as Kaye wanted Gary to experience the joy of parenting.

The couple knew the adoption process, with its mountain of forms and countless interviews, might take several years. They didn't want to wait too long so they decided to apply to care for a child with special needs — as many more such children needed a home than healthy children.

By chance, one of Kaye's daughters came home with a newspaper story about a Down syndrome baby who needed parents. "As soon as we looked at it, that was it, pretty much," recalls Gary.

It took a year to find out that they were listed second as suitable parents for the boy.

They were devastated but determined to keep trying,



Kaye and Gary (pictured), now have two children with special needs. Picture: Penny Stephens



years in foster care. When Gary and Kaye first met her, she was recovering from a seizure, yet she showered them with kisses and cuddles. Then they took her home.

"The social worker . . . was concerned that she might regress but she showed no signs of that," recalls Gary.

"It was like she knew we were her family," adds Kaye.

It took about a year to teach Polly to talk. Now she receives glowing reports from the special school she attends.

Gary and Kaye, both in their 50s, who didn't want their surname used, are an ordinary Victorian couple, with an ordinary house and —

and Catholic family services agency Centacare soon told them about Polly.

Once Polly arrived, the couple didn't want to spend a moment apart from her. Not even on their honeymoon in Queensland three years ago, where Polly quickly developed a love of early morning swims in the hotel pool.

"It got light at about five and she'd be up, wouldn't she?" Gary groans, but you get the idea he loved every minute.

Gary is a man of few words, especially when asked about his generosity. It's Kaye's selflessness he highlights.

"Obviously, I'm pretty proud of Kaye to want to have two more children, to give me that opportunity," he says. "It's an enormous effort."

The couple's second child is Mark, who came to the family at nine months.

When Centacare social worker Lisa D'Acri saw the remarkable progress Gary and Kaye had made with Polly, she

asked if they would like to care for another child with special needs. Again, the couple didn't hesitate.

Watching Mark now, as he tears around the local playground, he seems like any healthy, happy three-year-old.

But as a baby, he was floppy and could not crawl. Because some of his history remains unknown, any permanent developmental problems won't be fully revealed until he is at least five.

Gary and Kaye adopted

Mark last year. Because Polly still has occasional contact with her birth parents, Gary and Kaye are her permanent carers.

According to the Department of Human Services, 72 special needs children were placed for permanent care in the past financial year. More recent figures show that 66 more such children were in need of permanent care.

So what does one need to parent a child with special needs?

"Love, patience," Gary and Kaye say in unison. "Energy wouldn't go astray," adds Kaye. "You don't need money, because we haven't got any!"

Ms D'Acri calls the couple "real people" — the type who are realistic, but also empathetic and nurturing. "They are ordinary people doing extraordinary things," she adds.

But Gary and Kaye shun the hero tag.

"It's rewarding, you get so much love," says Kaye.

"And giving someone a

home is important," adds Gary.

"I think people get a bit caught up in super, property, investing and the future," says Kaye.

"If you can do something like this in the present, it certainly makes your life better."

**LINKS**

▶ centacaremelbourne.org  
▶ www.dhs.vic.gov.au/permanentcare

**TOMORROW**

▶ Tabling a new justice