

Finding success despite the odds

Orangewood Children's Foundation helped Ken Reid escape an alcoholic home.

By **KIMBERLY EDDS**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

It was cancer that took Ken Reid's father from him when he was 14. That's when his mother started drinking. It wasn't long before Reid and his two younger brothers lost her in the bottom of the bottle.

A neighbor's call to child protective services set off the chain of events that changed it all.

The three young Reid brothers – Ken, Lee, and Emerson - found their new home at Orangewood Children's Home, a 24-hour emergency shelter for abused and neglected children.

Orangewood Children's Foundation and partner CASA are one of eight charities selected to receive donations from The Orange County Register's Season of Caring campaign. The charities were identified through The Possible Dream – a program of Festival of Children Foundation that connects donors to children's charities that provide critical services.

The Reid brothers spent longer than normal in the Orangewood system. Then the system split them up. Ken and Lee went to separate foster homes. The youngest brother, Emerson, was adopted.

"To have parents that don't care about you is worse than having parents that passed away," said Reid, now 24 and married. "I felt forsaken. And what do forsaken people do where they're trying to get through the pain? They turn to drugs, violence and gangs."

Those doors were all opened to Reid – but with the help of Orangewood he closed them, knowing he had two younger brothers watching his every move. An Independent Life Coach from Orangewood shepherded Reid into adulthood, helping him fill out college applications and make a way for himself.

Reid wasn't sure about college. His parents never went, but his life coach kept pushing him. "He was my parent who had gone to college and could tell me all about it," Reid said.

Reid tried it – it just didn't stick. He dropped out and traded in books for tools and a life on the construction site.

A few years of reality and hard labor, Reid decided it was going to take an education to get him to a career that he wanted to do not that he had to do.

"I'm good at construction but I hate it," Reid said. "I hate everything about it. I'm an extrovert."

Worried the doors to Orangewood would be closed, Reid went back with hat in hand.

"They just looked at me as if I hadn't dropped out at all," Reid said. "They were just happy I was willing to get back up and try again."

Christmases – without his mom and dad - are still hard. "There's still a part of my heart that's still 14 years old," Reid said. "It's left me feeling like a machine without all the right parts." After all these years and pain, he and his mom are just starting to reconnect.

"The support that is offered by Orangewood has changed my legacy," Reid said. "My kids are going to be changed, and my grandkids are going to be changed."

One-hundred percent of every donation goes directly toward supporting charities that support children, so please give generously. For more information and to make a donation, go to

www.ocregister.com/seasonofcaring.

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KIMBERLY EDDS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Orangewood Children's Foundation helped Ken Reid out of an alcoholic home and into college.

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