

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

A Rich Family With Just 10 Bucks

It's not often that you run into a Catholic family like the Bucks. But to hear their story and learn how they live is to be both moved and humbled.

I've known Shana and her husband Bill casually for many years. They live in West Virginia. Bill works in some complicated IT job in Pittsburgh, with a title that seems vaguely technical and confusing to me. Shana, meantime, is a stay-at-home mom.

But that hardly means that she doesn't work.

Shana and Bill Buck have raised eight kids with sixteen years between the oldest and youngest. One has autism; another has Asperger's. And Shana, God love her, has home-schooled every one of them.

Once while I was giving a retreat not far from their home, we got together for lunch. I just had to know one thing.

"How on earth do you DO it?" I asked.

"Well," Shana explained, "everybody has a job. They all have to pitch in. The older ones help the younger ones, and they all have to get along and cooperate, or else it's chaos. If we're headed out the door for a trip to the grocery store and somebody forgot the diaper bag—and at one time, there were two in diapers—well, that's a problem."

Bill added with a smile: "The thing is, parenting is a job, like farming. You get up and do it. It's just that simple. And you keep doing it. Some years the crop is good, some years it isn't. Some days are better than others. But every day, you get up and you head back into the field."

Among other things, having eight kids with one working parent means a lot of sacrifices. It means that when they picked me up from the retreat, we took slower back roads so that they didn't have to pay tolls. It means that we traveled those roads in a 20-year old sputtering car with a radio that was broken and an air conditioner that consisted of all the windows being rolled down. It means that when you shop, you buy in bulk—lots and lots of bulk.

It means cutting corners on things like a teenage daughter's prom dress. "Home-schooling proms are different," Shana said. "First, there are no dates. Everyone goes as friends, in a group. Second, the dresses are mostly bought from thrift stores. They all have to have straps. We got our daughter's dress secondhand, and I bought some material to sew on the straps, and it was really lovely. And if you show up with something that looks immodest, the parents will make you put on a sweater. But everybody has a great time!"

As we rolled through the hills of Pennsylvania, I thought to myself, that's almost unheard of in New York. I couldn't imagine anything like that among teenagers in Queens.

But while it sounds like the Bucks are bucking the culture, they are in fact redefining it on their own terms—and they are doing it with great joy and great devotion to the faith. The Bucks are happy people. Yeah, it's not always easy. Shana confided that she has to do a lot of praying. Sometimes it's as simple as "God, help me not to strangle this child." Other times, she'll go online and ask friends to pray for her. As a result, she feels loved and supported not only by Bill—a gentle giant with an easy smile and a bottomless supply of patience—but also by a wider community of parents and friends around the country who are doing exactly what she is.

Bill and Shana are both cradle Catholics, and Shana is also a Third Order Franciscan (though she admits that her faith, in her youth, was wobbly). But they are committed to living out God's will in their lives, whatever that may be. Right now, that means eight kids and a thrift-store prom dress and a car without air-conditioning—but a family life filled to the brim with love.

Add it up and you realize: There may be 10 Bucks, but what they all have together is worth something beyond price.

God love 'em all.

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