

News

Goodrich family swaps wife, mother  
Stonerocks to be featured on ABC show 'Wife Swap'

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November 23, 2005 - Goodrich- It was just over a year ago that Kelly Stonerock first watched the television show "Wife Swap." Tonight, the couple and their family will be featured on the show.

The show, which airs at 8 p.m. on ABC, switches two wives from very different households for one week, to experience what another family's life is like. Kelly Stonerock, a pastor's wife, swapped places with Amber Finley, an atheist's wife.

"Most of the families they show are dysfunctional," said Stonerock, 38. "I wanted to give hope that you can have a happy, functional family. I wanted to show people what a Christian family looks like."

After Stonerock viewed the show, she had husband Jeff, a pastor at Victory World Outreach Center, watch the next week.

"It brought me to tears," he says. "I thought if we could be depicted properly, we could do some real good. But that was a big if."

Kelly e-mailed the show with questions and they e-mailed her back an application. Then, on Nov. 16, they called to tell her that, out of 10,000 applications, the Stonerocks had been chosen. Amber Finley would come to stay a week at the Stonerock home with Jeff and the Stonerock children: Devon, 10; Justin, 9; Hunter, 3; and Jesse, 2; as well as niece Taylor, 9, and nephew Jacob, 6, of whom the Stonerocks have guardianship. Kelly Stonerock would go to Atlanta, Georgia to stay with Reggie Finley and the Finley children- Dorian, 12; R.J., 3; and Ryan, 1.

Almost every week following the announcement of their acceptance, the show sent someone out - a producer, director, psychologist. Kelly told them she had not yet accepted. Instead, she was busy researching their decision and seeking input from friends, ministers and even former Wife Swap participants.

"We knew it was a risk," she says. "How would it affect the Christian faith and church?"

Would we be depicted properly?"

Although the Stonerocks experienced some opposition to their plans, in the end they felt God was directing them and it was a risk they wanted to take.

"We believed we were going into the world to preach the gospel, whereas some people like to stay within their four church walls," Kelly says.

On Jan. 15, Kelly left for Atlanta and Amber arrived in Goodrich. For the first few days, each lived the life of the other.

"They made me play computer games for hours, because I had to live their life," says Kelly. "It was beautiful in Atlanta, but I could only look through the windows at the weather."

Kelly says she spent a lot of time in a 10x10 room, because that is what the Finley family did while their husband and father Reggie ran his atheist radio show out of the home.

Meanwhile, Amber Finley was experiencing what Kelly normally does, hosting parties, attending church and even playing soccer in front of 350 people.

"The first few days were pretty exciting," Jeff recalls. "Amber is so passive, but she had a lot of fun doing things out of her comfort zone."

On the third day, each wife could make rule changes in their new households, based on information they were given about the family they were staying with.

Amber's new rules included making the home a "God-free zone." Everytime Jeff mentioned God's name, he had to put \$1 in the God box. At the end of the week, his children were given the box, which had \$66 in it. Jeff also had to attend an atheist meeting, read an atheist book which he called "boring," and an atheist tutor was brought in to teach the homeschooled children evolution. The youngest kids were also placed in daycare.

As part of the rule change, Kelly took over Reggie Finley's radio show for an hour as "Bible Gal." She took him and the kids to a Bible study; encouraged Reggie to reduce his work hours (70-80 hours a week); had Reggie spend 15 minutes every night talking to his eldest son and took the younger children out of daycare, instead joining a toddler group. They went and played Laser Tag and out for walks. She also had Reggie do more chores and had him take the neighbors cookies.

"He was really opposed to taking cookies to the neighbors," she says. "He couldn't stand that rule."

Kelly said the show is not scripted, although producers give suggestions.

"They wanted me to say, 'This family needs to be saved,'" says Kelly. "I didn't say it. If they suggest it and you do it, it's your fault. We didn't feel any pressure, we're not passive."

Kelly Stonerock said Reggie Finley told her he had never met a Christian like her. He told her that as atheists, he and his wife are persecuted.

Jeff was learning from Amber exactly the effect that has.

"I learned how stereotypes and judgemental attitudes keep people in their own little worlds and own shells," he said. "Amber doesn't leave her house because she feels judged."

Kelly recalls Reggie would often try to draw her into making a judgemental comment about some facet of society or challenge her on her faith.

"I didn't go in there to convince him or convert him to Christianity, I just wanted to walk in love toward him and his family," says Kelly, who adds she never tried to proselytize his children at all.

After three days at the Stonerock home, Amber made it clear to Jeff she didn't want to talk about religion at all, saying atheism was more her husband's thing.

The experience Jeff enjoyed most about the show was his interaction with Amber and with the ABC crew. There were six ABC crewmembers at each home. Kelly liked the Finley children and says she misses them. She also enjoyed her time with the crew, especially talking to them about her faith.

They agree what they did not like were the cameras on them at every waking moment. They called it exhausting. Son Justin called it "weird."

"There was even more people," he said. "You had to wear microphones, too, and they don't feel good."

He says he liked Amber and was happy because they didn't have to do school while she was there and played all day.

The show was edited to 1-hour from 100 hours of tape. The Stonerocks viewed the tape for the first time last week.

"They (ABC producers) did different storylines than what we expected them to follow," she said. "They focused on family relationships between their family and ours. There was so much good stuff that didn't make it."

Kelly and Jeff Stonerock say they have no regrets about doing the show.

"We would do this all over again," Kelly says. "As a result of the show, conversations were opened up with members of the community over faith or lack of faith. Those conversations have had life-changing results."

But the best thing the Stonerocks got out of Wife Swap came nine months after the show ended - daughter Sydney, now a month-old.

"She was conceived after we were reunited," says Kelly. "We had four boys and thought we were done."