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# PARADE

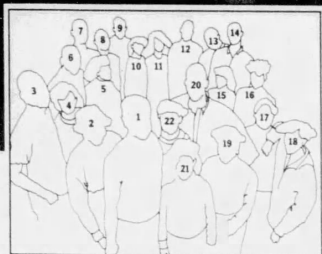


**Kent  
Amos  
Says  
42 Kids  
Are Easy  
To Love**

# 'THEY ARE ALL MY CHILDREN'

BY SHERRY HENRY

## How Kent and Carmen Amos and 42 kids became a family



Meet a few members of this growing family! Clockwise, from No. 1, Kent Amos—in “Best Dad” shirt; 2) Lisa Dickey; 3) Stanley Wright; 4) Michele Brown; 5) Debbie Harvey; 6) Royal Richardson; 7) Fred Davy; 8) Clenteous McCoy; 9) Wesley Harvey; 10) Linda

Lawson; 11) Mrs. Carmen Amos; 12) Byron Hawkins; 13) Anthony Riley; 14) Anthony Graham; 15) Tia Martin; 16) Valarie Bryant; 17) Kwanza Jones; 18) Wanda Bell; 19) Shawnte Best; 20) Derrick Price; 21) Delinda Dixon; and 22) Adrienne Garrett.

# LOVE WITHOUT MEASURE

BY SHERRY HENRY

**A**N AFFLUENT ENTREPRENEUR IN Washington, D.C., gives new meaning to the concept of the extended family. Six years ago, Kent Amos and his wife, Carmen, had only two children—Wesley, now 22, and Debbie, 17. Today, they have 42 girls and boys and, if Amos has his way, the number will soar geometrically. Why? "The capacity to love is without measure," he says, "and so are the children who need help."

The first Amos family additions were accidental: Basketball players Wesley brought home from Calvin Coolidge Senior High School after practice stayed for dinner and conversation one night and kept coming back for more. Typical inner-city kids, many were from broken homes or no homes, with most of the disadvantages that entails.

Milton Newton was one of them. He had spent most of his life getting into trouble—until he met Kent Amos. "Milton needed a lot of help," Amos recalls. "I'm not sure where his father was. His mother was in the Virgin Islands. He needed family. He'd failed eighth grade and was having a rough time with ninth after his grandmother had sent him to live with an aunt here in Washington. I took a liking to him. For the last five years, he's called me Dad."

Milton and his friends soon became regular after-school visitors to the Amos home and were asked to stay for dinner almost every night. A routine was established: dining as a group, then a two-hour study period. Says Amos: "During this period, there is silence—no phones, no television. They are required to do their work and study and read." Eventually, group discussions ensued about long-range goals, and then came private dialogues about their personal concerns. Soon, all the boys were calling him Dad, and Kent Amos was living the part.

He saw their teachers regularly, checked their report cards, attended their games and began to love them as his own. He also set rigorous standards for behavior and scholastic achievement, pledging college as a reward—and they met the challenge. Milton, now 22, graduated from high school with honors and a full athletic scholarship to the University of Kansas, where he is completing his junior year. In addition to Milton, there are now 13 more "children" in college.

"The first kids just evolved," says Amos. "But then Carmen and I made a conscious decision to broaden what we were doing. We decided our house could accommodate 20 to 25 kids a night. So we went to the school and said we would take them on."

Kent Amos kept his expanding family running smoothly by tapping into his business skills: He is a trained systems and management expert and was the youngest corporate director in Xerox history. A second refrigerator was purchased for the house; another pantry was added for paper plates, canned goods and fruit juices; shelves were stocked with school supplies, thesauruses and dictionaries. On most school nights and almost every evening in the summer, eight to 10 boys and girls gathered at the Amos home for what they could find in no other place—constant attention and continuous affection.

Initially, Carmen cooked for the group. But when

the rapidly growing number became unmanageable for this homemaker with a demanding job as a customer-service representative for Xerox, Kent sought out a sympathetic home-economics teacher at Coolidge High who agreed to prepare dishes in class if the Amoses would provide the food. Twice a month, Kent spends several hours in a supermarket stocking up. "I take four or five kids to the store," he says. "Each one takes a shopping cart. We use a separate checkout lane just for us, and I spend from \$400 to \$500 every two weeks on food."

Kent Amos' favorite word in describing his relationship with his children is "consistency." He admits

and has a job. A worse fate befell André, slain at the age of 17 by a drug dealer against whom he had agreed to testify. André was killed in the autumn of 1985 in the same house in which his father had killed his mother 10 years earlier.

Most of the children have only a single parent, or they live with relatives in large groups of siblings or half-siblings where father figures, if present, often are involved in illegal activities. A few have stable homes, but most face overwhelming financial disadvantages. One boy—a top-ranking student from a strong, solid home—lost his father to cancer.

After Kent stops by the school—first to watch his girls at cheerleading practice, then to measure the basketball team's progress and, finally, to check on one talented forward whom he once had ordered off the court until he'd improved his grades—he arrives home shortly before his children do. Carmen is icing a cake (two boys are celebrating birthdays tonight), and they have a rare moment to measure the personal costs involved in being responsible for so many lives. Kent insists the costs are minimal. The 14 young people in college all have scholarships that require only supplemental living expenses, although occasionally one of the youngsters has a pressing need, including clothing—from underwear to a topcoat. Kent estimates that he spends from \$15,000 to \$20,000 each year on his brood; hardly small change. But he looks around his tastefully furnished home and says, "I'm living in a pretty nice house. I have a good life and manage my money well... My wife and I each drive a Mercedes... What am I giving up—stocks?"

How about leisure time?

Kent shrugs away the thought of any

activity that does not include Carmen or the children. "They are my life," he says.

The children burst through the door at this point, strewing jackets across a giant pool table and carrying foil-wrapped platters of lasagna and bowls of salad into the kitchen. Carmen directs the table-setting and food-warming for tonight's group of 14, some of whom already are studying for exams. Kent soon is in the midst of them, firing questions. Though Carmen appears infinitely calm, she says that Kent has far more patience with this daily gathering of youngsters. "I'm more private than he is," she says. "Once I get everybody situated and fed, I'll take my quiet time. Kent thrives on having the kids around. He's the special force."

Her only major problem, she says, initially involved losing her living room to a study hall. But Carmen and Kent eventually set up tables in another part of the house so the kids could study and she occasionally could entertain friends. "If there are a lot of dishes, or if I'm tired, the kids'll do them," Carmen says. "They are also good about picking up after themselves. We share a lot of love. That's why the program works."

And it is a program now. At the beginning of 1986, Kent set up his own management-consulting firm, The Triad Group. Concurrently, with a major contract from Xerox, he orchestrated the nonprofit Urban Youth Investment Program, which already has in-

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Amos with "sons" who became basketball stars: (l-r) Anthony Jones of San Antonio Spurs, Kent Amos, Milton Newton of University of Kansas, Tim Anderson of Virginia Polytechnic.

**On the personal costs of being responsible for so many young lives, Kent Amos says, "I have a good life. What am I giving up—stocks?"**

that some youngsters are naturally smarter, cleaner, more attractive and more productive than others. "But that doesn't matter," he says. "I love and treat them all the same. They are all my children."

Still, being consistent with these children tests the Amoses for more emotional fiber than most middle-class parents will ever need. Kent had to go to court with one of his first boys, an 18-year-old who later broke probation after being arrested for burglary. He was sent to the prison where his real father and stepfather were inmates. During regular visits, Kent oversaw the boy's efforts to acquire a GED (high school equivalency diploma). He since was released from prison

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#### LOVE/continued

stalled \$250,000 worth of computer equipment in Coolidge High to train students for skilled jobs. Kent not only intends to expand his own parental responsibility to 200 children, but he also hopes to provide a concrete programmatic model for others who might wish to pursue his vision.

After dinner, Kent savors the quiet as the children study. Among his successes is Derrick Davis, 20, who once faced glum prospects. Just two years ago, Derrick was going nowhere. Then Kent arranged living space for him in a good home and took him into the Amos program. Today—after leading Coolidge High's basketball team to the city championship and being named all-American—Derrick is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, which granted him an athletic scholarship.

Derrick remembers the dark days, before Kent Amos helped him: "I was a street hustler. I wanted to make fast money. I was living with my father, and things weren't going right between us. I had a girlfriend... she had a baby... When I first came to Coolidge, I didn't have anything on my mind but cutting class, hanging out with boys who didn't go to class. Then Mr. Amos came to me and asked me what kind of life did I want. He said if I went to school, enhanced my study habits, I could have that. What I said I wanted—what I want—is a nice job, a nice family and to raise my own kids someday. After he talked to me, I said: 'Why throw that away when I can give it a chance?' When the guys I used to hang out with ask where I've been, I say 'in school,' and they say, 'Yeah, that's good.' Good that I'm trying to make something out of myself. Since my father's seen some of these people trying to help me, he's been coming back. This program made a big difference for me. Now I can dream of being like Mr. Amos—helping young people."

Kent Amos passionately believes in people and the power of love. "These kids don't need to drown," he says. "There are enough substantial adults out there—entertainers, athletes, professional people—who can make a difference and who—if they would just walk into the water and lock arms—would stop these kids from being swept downstream." There are, he maintains, vast numbers of children ready to be saved, and well-meaning people ready to help—if shown what to do.

"Kids are easy to love, once you get to know them," says Kent Amos, "and love is truly the answer." 

*If you would like to learn more about Kent Amos' program or how to establish one of your own, write to the Urban Youth Investment Program, Dept. P, 1625 K St., N.W., Suite 1210, Washington, D.C. 20006.*