

# GATES-CHILI POST

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## YOUTH

### 'They needed TLC and a lot of it'

A Scottsville native opened her home to more than 100 foster children

Opening her home to more than 100 foster children wasn't a difficult decision for Jessie Wackerman.

The Scottsville woman, who now lives at Westwood Commons in Chili, and her late husband, John, who died in 2007, met when she moved to Rochester to work for Eastman Kodak Co.

The couple was married for nearly 60 years and raised their family in a four-bedroom home in Scottsville. After trying unsuccessfully to conceive, the couple decided to foster children starting in the 1950s.

"The children were

there," she said. "They needed care. Especially the ones I got. They needed TLC and a lot of it."

There were so many children in her care, she said, that they were never able to narrow it down to a firm number. Dawn Schottmiller, one of Jessie's two adopted daughters, recalls the count exceeding 100 when she moved away to Texas in the 1970s.

"We had children a lot," Jessie said. "I don't think we ever had just one. People would literally drop them off like puppies."

Their foster children referred to them as Aunt Jessie and Uncle John.

Bedrooms contained two or three beds, bunk style. Just like how Wackerman grew up on a farm in Livonia, everyone pitched in.

"Love and rules came together," she said.

Sometimes the Wackermans would be lucky to get money to support their foster children through various agencies. If she got \$20 a week, that was a lot, said Schottmiller.

"Mom could stretch a meal and make it fun and enjoyable," said Jessie's other adopted daughter, Wendy Swinney. "We all had enough to eat."

The couple would learn

of many of the children through their church. Some would stay with them on the weekends; others would stay for longer periods of time like Dorothy who lived with the Wackermans from the time she was about one until she was 16 or 17 years old. She continues to stay in touch.

"Mom and dad named her their bad penny because she always returned, but she was a lucky penny," Schottmiller said.

The Wackermans would be caring for up to 10 foster children at a time, sometimes even babysitting for



Jessie Wackerman, center, poses with her daughters Wendy Swinney and Dawn Schottmiller. Wackerman and her late husband took in over 100 foster children in Scottsville. SUBMITTED

neighbors. Wackerman took in Swinney's grandfather for a while, and would volunteer to host Fresh Air Kids from New York City.

"There are a lot of people out there who owe their lifestyles to mom," Swinney said. "She raised

so many kids who were in bad situations. I'm so grateful for the life I had and there are so many kids mom and dad shaped and helped to form and they had much better lives than they would have without mom and dad."