

# The Children I Have Loved

by Barbara Scharwartz/Davis

A Story of Inspiration for Future Foster & Adoptive Parents

*Dedicated to Kimberly Laughton, whose friendship and compassion have enriched my heartfelt goals and dreams of helping children find loving homes.*

**The 3-year-old I was there to meet sat next to me, looking up at me with beautiful blue eyes and the face of an angel. “Crystal”, I later learned, was an angry child — far too angry for such a young heart. My goal that day was to meet the toddler, and possibly take her home as a foster child. When I entered the room she was one of a group of about five children who came rushing toward me. As a professional entertainer, I decided to perform a little for them because I know how children respond to stories, spiced with a bit of humor and love. Even though I wasn’t there to work, it felt right entertaining these kids. I sat down and told them a story which I had written for little ones.**

The home was an emergency foster facility, which would house the children until a more permanent home could be found. Through no fault of their own, the children living there were battling a host of problems: disabilities; abandonment, sadness, confusion, anger.

If only others knew how these children suffered, I thought, perhaps they would be willing to help too.

I did my part that day by taking the “Crystal” home with me. It wasn’t easy, as we both tried to surmount the immense anger she felt at being taken away from her mother, a heroin addict. But at age 3, she lived with me for a year and a half. She is now 17, and to this day we are very dear friends.

In an ideal world, children would



Barbara Schwartz/Davis, as her performing character Little, and adopted son Connor

always be placed into strong, loving arms at birth. Parents would be there to provide the deep wells of warmth and security that children need to thrive. Unfortunately, though, that’s simply not reality for many children. In the United States there are thousands of children waiting for families to adopt them.

When I became a foster mother more than a decade ago my life changed forever. My work with children in the foster care system actually dates back 15 years, when I was bringing performing arts workshops to a San Joaquin Valley elementary school. I developed strong relationships with the kids there. They would talk and I would listen. I brought humor, music, dance and compassion into their lives. They could tell I cared. Not all those children, though, were carefree. A large number of kids at that school came from homes where they were neglected or struggling with other problems, such as poverty or parents who had alcohol and drug dependencies.

I was especially struck by the story of one little girl, a kindergartner who I first met in the school nurse’s office where she was in midst of an asthma attack, gasping for breath. She was frightened, weak — and alone. The girl’s mother was in prison and the aunt who was supposed to take care of her was regularly nowhere to be found.

I was 29 and single at a time when skeptics still questioned the merits of single parenthood. I could not help that little girl — she needed help faster than I could give it but I could not sit by knowing there were children in danger. So, I became a foster mother.

My house was inspected, my friends had to vouch for me and I was fingerprinted. My background was checked, I learned CPR and first aid and I attended parenting classes. As required by law, I set aside a room in my house big enough for one or two kids to call their own. I worked hard enough to keep a two-bedroom apartment. The state helped cover

other expenses, such as medical care, room, clothing and food.

Within weeks of being licensed, I received a call from the Department of Social Services. They had a child for me. I was excited at the prospect. A child! This is what I was longing for. Then I heard the story — the whole story. The 7-year-old girl, “Stephanie” had been sexually molested, which resulted in behavior problems so bad she was being bounced from foster home to foster home. She had already been in and out of seven of them. Her mother was in jail and there were no relatives interested in helping. The social worker, who had heard about my previous work with children through entertainment thought I might be able to help.

I met “Stephanie” the next day. She had a wildness about her and seemed unsettled. Her eyes didn’t focus on any particular subject and her behavior was erratic. She had untamed energy.

Yet, I was excited by the prospect of having her come to live with me. I wanted to help — even though it was clear we wouldn’t bond quickly and had a long road ahead. I didn’t know what to say or do, so I turned to my old tricks. As we left the department of social services building that day, I took her hand, started skipping and began singing Zippidity Do Dah, Zippady A, my oh my what a wonderful day..... My father has always sang and danced with me. He is understanding and funny too. It calms my soul and helps me feel secure. So, this I gave her.

I soon got other on-the-job training. The No. 1 lesson “Stephanie” taught me was that I had to be selfless. I realize now that, like so many others, I had gone into being a foster mother hoping to fulfill my own needs and desires, mainly to be as close to a child as only a parent could. I was naive, as I had never dealt so intimately with such an injured child. The girl lied often. She had tantrums and talked back. She was sassy and defiant. She stole.

She showed me how severe the emotional upheaval that afflicts a troubled

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child can be. And I struggled, also, to find the best ways and means of connecting with this child and helping her. My challenge was, after all, to guide this child so that she ultimately could break through her pain and discover joy on the other side.

She helped me learn what I needed to know. She taught me patience. I realized early on in our relationship that if I reacted to her anger with anger of my own that her problems would escalate, making me as unhappy as she was. She taught me to be strong. She taught me to be peaceful when she had outbursts. I had no choice. I had to give her a foundation to make her feel safe and secure if she was going to progress.

In time, she changed, and our relationship grew. Within six months, she started to calm down and became more settled. She was one of my greatest

placed with foster parents who agree to consider adopting them.

The State has also established the Adoption Assistance Program, which provides financial and medical support to adoptive families who need it.

This program makes adoption possible for all families regardless of ethnic background or income level. Participants can be married or single.

There are some foster children who do go home again. In some cases, the children's birth parents remedy the problems that cost them their children in the first place, and the children are returned to their families. Other times, relatives step forward. All the above programs are designed to help foster children find permanent homes.

The future of a foster child can be forever changed by your

a different plan for us. After helping many older children, something very unexpected happened. Our attempts to conceive a child of our own were met with failed pregnancies which seemed an ironic twist of fate.

Connor who is physically challenged came to us as a foster child. The call asking Michael and I to care for him came on Valentine's Day. We were not sure if his stay with us might be short term or possibly an adoptive placement. The family who was caring for Connor was outstanding but with a home filled with many children it was difficult to provide the extra time and attention he would need. He needed immediate medical support.

He was in such a vulnerable position, unless he found the right family with determination to help him he would not become stronger and develop properly. It was important to find a foster parent who could advocate for him and move the mountains he needed to get better. This special needs boy has found a place in our hearts and the miracle of it all is he found good health also. We have been

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teachers in life; I learned more from her than any book or college education could have provided me. A year after we met, I wanted to adopt her — only to be told I couldn't because I was not married. And though I had a loving home — and the desire to be her mother for good — the girl was ultimately adopted by another family. Another needless disruption for a young girl who already had suffered so much.

The plights of foster children like Stephanie got government officials' attention, resulting in a new program called Fost-Adopt. The goal of the program, established by the U.S. Department of Social Services, was to minimize the trauma and disruption so many foster children endured by being shuffled from foster home to foster home. Achieving that goal became even more essential in California, as the state became overburdened with a growing number of children who lacked a sense of home or family. Keeping such children in foster homes also cost the state a great deal of money.

Under the Fost-Adopt program, however, children who have little hope of returning to their birth parents are

involved.

I plunged into being a foster parent somewhat unprepared and with little support. I had never had to contend with the hardships these children experienced, from having parents so filled with anger that sometimes they blamed you for all their misfortunes and mistakes.

No one warned me or my husband, Michael, who has stood by my commitment to help these children since our marriage, of the challenges we would face, or the hoops of fire we would have to leap through just to make daily living work. There are times we had no one — not even the agencies we were working with — to support us in our trials. We definitely learned the hard way.

It is essential that anyone considering being a foster parent investigate the agency they want to work with. Make sure the staff shares your sense of compassion and goals. Look for a supportive environment. Explore your options.

Now Michael and I are reaping a different kind of reward for our work — the adoption of Connor. I had always wanted a baby of our own but life had

blessed beyond belief.

We will continue to open our home to foster children, and help them move forward with their lives. Most likely we will adopt one more child, this time of an older age.

I specialize in helping children who suffer emotional trauma, because the need for people who will accept children with special needs is so great. But it should be understood that many of the children in foster care everyday children with unique personalities and needs. The stereotype that all foster children are difficult to raise is simply wrong. These are great kids who deserve a hand and a chance at a future.

*Barbara Schwartz/Davis is a Gold Parent's Choice Award winner. As a family entertainer, she is committed to helping young people find enriching & loving homes. Her performance workshops help to finance a project entitled "Somebody's Child" which educates people on the need for more adoptive/foster families. Her performances are highly motivating and entertaining. Check her out at [www.webscriber.com/little](http://www.webscriber.com/little) or CALL "Little" her childlike persona, at 415-482-0176.*

## Foster Parenting Resources

For a full package of Statewide information Call: 1-800-KIDS-4-US

To learn more, browse this website [www.childsworld.org](http://www.childsworld.org)

Locally the Adoption Network of Catholic Charities can be reached at 415-406-2387

State Department of Adoptions - Rohnert Park at 707-588-5000

It is essential when researching these options that you inquire if there is a fee.

The Department of Social Services does not charge to adopt but some private agencies must to support their expenses.

The author is in no way representative of the State Department of Social Services. She simply recommends these steps as resources.

