



Barbara Davis with her husband and son Connor.

Photo courtesy of Barbara Davis

The Children I Have Loved

A Story of Inspiration for Future Foster & Adoptive Parents

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. “Brianna,” 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 my foster child.

When I entered the room she was one of a group of about five children who came rushing toward me, including the little boy, no older than 2, who struggled across the floor to greet me. His arms came to an abrupt end below his shoulders. His legs ended at his thighs. But he knew how to move, inching himself forward using the shortened limbs he had. Such an incredible boy, struggling with every ounce of strength he had just to sit next to me for a few moments of attention, a simple desire that

every child deserves. I picked him up and held him close. Tears streamed down his face as he cried “Mommy, Mommy.”

My heart broke into a million pieces, knowing that he had been taken from his parent, maybe forever. If only others knew how these children suffered, I thought, perhaps they would be willing to help.

Many people have shared with me over the years that they could never be a foster parent because they could not love and let go. I knew I had to learn to, because if I could not then more children would be left without care. It is important to look outside of oneself and go past our own personal needs for love and connection so others will not suffer.

The home I was at was an emergency foster facility that would house the children until

a more permanent home could be found. These children were battling a host of problems such as abandonment, sadness, confusion and anger.

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 I found my character persona to be a fun way to interact and make them happy. I sat down and told them a story I had written for little ones hoping to comfort their hearts. It was a big success and enjoyment filled their faces.

I did my part that day by taking “Brianna” home with me and becoming her foster parent. Our adventure 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



Photo courtesy of Barbara Davis

Barbara Davis with her son Connor about the time she adopted him.

lived with me for a year and a half. She is now in her thirties, and to this day we are very dear friends. Her mother too remained my friend, grateful, not resentful. The beauty of her mother's life is that she made better choices as her life progressed.

In an ideal world, children would 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 foster or 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 36 years ago, when I brought performing arts workshops to California elementary schools.

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 the midst of an asthma attack, gasping for breath. She was frightened. The girl's mother was in prison and the aunt who was supposed to take care of her according to the nurse was regularly nowhere to be found.

I was 29 and single. I could not help that little girl, she needed help faster than I could offer 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 challenging 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 a unique approach may 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. We 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 "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah, Zip-a-Dee Ahh, My, Oh My, What a Wonderful Day."

I soon got other on-the-job training. The #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 child can be. And I struggled also to find the best ways and means of connecting with this child.

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.

I realized early on in our relationship that if I reacted to her anger with anger of my own that her problems would escalate, and I too would become unhappy. 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. A year after we met, I wanted to adopt her, only to be told I couldn't because I was not married. This has all changed now. Single parents can adopt. And though I had a loving home and the desire to be her mother, the girl was ultimately adopted by another family, another needless disruption for a young girl who already had suffered so much.

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

I plunged into being a foster parent somewhat unprepared and with little support. I had never had to contend with the hardships some children experienced, nor had I dealt with difficult parents so filled with anger.

My husband Michael has stood by my commitment to help these children since the onset of our friendship which was within weeks of my first placement.

Connor, who was medically fragile, came to us as a foster child. 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 deserved. He needed immediate medical support.

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 precious boy found a place in our hearts and the miracle of it all is he found good health, also. We have been blessed beyond belief.

Today, all these years later, we continue to open our home to foster children, and help them move forward with their lives. At age 65, I'm looking back on 35 years of serving foster youth. I have seen the outcome for children and parents in crisis. Some have soft landings while others do not.

I have specialized in helping children who suffer emotional or medical complications, because the need for those who will accept children with special needs is so great.

But it should be understood that many of the children in foster care are vulnerable 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 loving home and a chance at a future. We all hear stories upon stories of children who have foster home backgrounds and rise above to make great progress in their lives.

They went on to become Olympians, teachers, social workers, loving parents, artists, doctors, researchers and more. We have been given a beautiful opportunity to improve the lives of children and teens. It is my hope that my words will inspire you to not give up and withstand the storms we encounter as foster parents. Spending time with a young one in foster care is a gift beyond measure. ❁

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Barbara Schwartz/Davis is a Gold Parent's Choice Award winner. As a family entertainer, she is committed to helping young people find enriching and loving homes. Her performance workshops teach parents how to foster with humor and deep understanding. Her performances are highly motivating and entertaining. Recruitment and training materials are available for agencies upon discussion. Check her out at LittleLiveShow.com or call "Little" Productions at 415-482-0176.

For more information or support in navigating the world of foster care and adoption, visit the North American Council on Adoptable Children at nacac.org.

Names and story content has been changed to protect privacy of families.

(kids in waiting)

My'Racle, 7; Ibrahim, 6; Passion, 5; and Marquise, 3, are closely bonded and want and need to be adopted together. The oldest of the group is My'Racle, she likes to read books and watch movies. She also likes to ride her bike, sing, dance and play outside. My'Racle likes school and enjoys going, her favorite subject is reading. When she grows up she wants to be a teacher. My'Racle is proud of who she is and for watching out for her siblings.

Next up is Ibrahim, he enjoys playing outside and playing sports. He also likes to ride his bike and play games. Ibrahim's favorite class in school is reading. When he grows up he wants to be a policeman. Ibrahim is proud of being able to read and ride his bike.

Passion loves to play with her siblings and watch movies. She also likes to ride bikes and spend time outside. Passion enjoys being in the classroom and being around the other students whom she considers her friends. She doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up.

Last but not least is Marquise. He is learning new things every day and enjoys playing with his siblings. Marquise likes to watch movies and play games. He enjoys drawing and is quick to share what he creates with others.

All four children need a committed family that can offer a lot of one on one attention to each of them. They will require a lot of structure, supervision and stability along with guidance and support. A loving family that will always be there for them no matter what is something they want and certainly deserve. To learn more about adoption visit www.adoptkskids.org or call 877-457-5430. The children's case numbers are CH-7426, CH-7427, CH-7428 & CH-7429.

