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LEGACY OF LOVE: FOSTERING CHILDREN

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CHAPTER 1 PREVIEW

My Sister: Home with the Family

My three-year-old sister, Nicole, is watching a cartoon, sitting on the shag carpet in the living room and eating dry cereal with her hands. I am on the phone with a friend in my room at fourteen years old.

My mom and grandma are in the kitchen having a pressured conversation.

Without warning, we have company. Multiple police cars are near the front driveway, but we did not notice their arrival. Suddenly one police officer walks through the front entry, and others come in the back door.

There is a brief introduction and explanation of the reason for the visit, and then a large, muscular man picks up my little sister and she screams in terror.

He briskly walks out the door with her.

This is my story. My sister, Nicole, never lived with me again.

My childhood, education, and experience have uniquely positioned me to write this book on foster care. I have experienced child welfare from many different perspectives and taken roles as a birth relative, foster resource, adoptive parent, and staff of the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare. In addition, I am a licensed clinical social worker. I work with birth parents involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), foster and adoptive parents, and counsel foster and adoptive youth in a private practice setting.[i]

I share much of my personal history throughout so that you understand my lens in viewing this sacred work of foster care. You will need to know upfront that I did not set out to write a book. Instead, it formed itself over numerous hours of processing the pain of my past and present circumstances to make sense of the love and loss of fostering children. I also recognize that wading through trauma is messy, not for the faint-hearted. Our memories tend to be vivid when we review painful events, and I am no different when writing in an emotional state. The following content aims to assist in understanding the many intricacies of working with those involved in child welfare.

Looking back on my childhood, child welfare involvement could have been expected. Substance abuse and dependence were of great concern in my family of origin. Addiction issues tend to impact all areas of one's life but are especially hard on the family. I often read posts on foster support groups that relate to the emotional battle faced with parents' drug-related actions and the impacts on the child(ren) in care. Many foster parents express their desire to protect the child(ren) while supporting the addicted parent in a healthy manner. However, it is tough to digest the heartbreaking stories about how substances used in pregnancy and beyond have left life-long consequences on a child's functioning and development...