

Care To Share Your Story?

A Story by Sarabeth Abrams

The cancer took our chance of having a biological child together, although I have one adult child and two grandchildren. My husband, Edgar, and I talked about foreign adoption but even as a doctor and a lawyer the process was daunting, the expense out of our reach, the red tape too thick to cut. So it seemed the only way to at least temporarily share the joys of parenthood was through fostering, since we were convinced that our chances of becoming parents was over. We attended the DYFS training in 2004 but had no intention of being a foster-adoptive home. We would be an emergency placement home and then go back to our peaceful lives.

Our first group of three entered our home in November 2004. Wow! For 30 days our house was turned upside down with the entire gamut of emotions. When this group went to adoptive homes we questioned what we had gotten ourselves into but the call came for another group of three and we again opened our doors ushering them into our lives. When they left we were once again left with the sadness, elation, and loneliness of having and then losing a house full of kids.

We questioned whether we were mentally equipped to take in sibling groups and decided we should take a break before taking in one child at a time and sticking with children under 3 years. That is when we met Angel.

I received the call that a child was at Dooley House and ready to be sent to a resource home as he was no longer medically fragile. If I wanted to meet him I had to go to Dooley and the staff would decide who the appropriate placement was for this child. Apparently the first family DYFS called had declined to go meet the child having recently lost out on adopting one of their foster children. They were devastated and not ready to take in another child that was not expected to be adoptable. (As an aside, this couple has since adopted a DYFS child.)

When the nurse left to get this 3-month-old boy, who I'd been told had sustained a skull fracture at 2 weeks old at his mother's hands, she returned with a beautiful bundle in her arms. I said, "That is a beautiful baby, but I can't wait to see ours." She looked at me puzzled and said, "This is your baby!" This was exactly how 26 years earlier the hospital staff had presented my biological son to me and just as I did 26 years ago, I began to cry.

This child was so perfect in every way except for a somewhat prominent bulging skull where the swelling had yet to subside. To me it resembled a halo. Thus, I called him Angel. I looked at him and he looked at me and we checked each other out. He then placed his little head on my shoulder and fell asleep for three hours. The nurse explained that he had not done that with anyone and in fact was a fussy child. She said we were meant to take him home. I'd been told that he might not be able to hear, that he could have vision impediments, that it was too early to know all the consequences that could be

associated with a skull fracture and a bleed at such a young age. However, at that moment I knew if he became legally free I could not let him go.

On my way home I purchased everything a small baby could need or want. At home that evening I told my Edgar we were getting a baby. He replied, "I don't want a baby. I like the toddlers." I then replied, "Well, I'm getting a baby tomorrow and, by the way, he looks like you."

Angel arrived at our house the next day. Edgar took Angel in his arms and it was love at first sight for him as it had been for me the day before. We didn't put that boy down for 48 hours straight. We just held him, talked to him, stared at him, massaged him, photographed him, shopped for him, and smiled at him. After that we made it a contest to see who could get out of work first to pick up Angel at day care each day, not wanting to leave him for too long.

It took three grueling emotional years to finally adopt Angel. He has been ours since day one but legally for just over a year. He is sharp as a whip and seems to have no neurological deficit from his injury. We are so blessed to have Angel in our lives.

During the wait to adopt Angel, we were blessed a second time with another perfect baby, but this time a little girl we've named Anya. She is funny, smart, demanding, and beautiful. She has her brother wrapped around her fingers and she pulls his strings like a puppet master. She is fearless and strong. We adopted her May 1, 2009. There were no trials and tribulations with her because surprisingly her mother voluntarily surrendered her when Anya was 4 months old. Such a breeze after what we endured throughout the more than 2 years waiting for Angel to be free.

Edgar and I now realize how empty our lives were before Angel and Anya brightened our home. While we had no expectations of adopting, it just worked out that these children came to our home to be fostered and our hearts and theirs joined together to create a family we never knew we could have. The four of us have experienced such gut-wrenching angst along with the pinnacle of happiness. Together our family is more than we could have ever wished. Had we not taken that leap together to become foster parents for such amazing children in DYFS care, and I mean every one that has been through our home and that we've met through play dates and day care, we would have never experienced such rapture.

There is a child out there who needs us whether for a day, a month, or a lifetime. To be able to provide them with even a short time of worry-free living, how can we not continue to foster these deserving children even if ultimately they do not stay? The goodness we give comes back to us in each of their smiles, their hugs, their restful sleep, and their sincere gratitude. Become a foster parent for yourself, for the children, and for the karma.