

## Beth's Story

Beth is a 44-year-old mother of three, upbeat and happily married. But when you ask her what it took to get to this point, she shares her story of abusing substances, losing her children, fighting to get them back, and ultimately being reunited with her two sons with the help of a remarkable foster family.

Beth and her husband had substance abuse issues in their youth, "but we had gotten sober really young," she recalls. But as the years went by, their lives became busy with three young kids and they started slipping. "We got sober, but then we weren't doing everything you need to do to stay sober, like going to meetings, talking to other recovering alcoholics, being with sober friends," says Beth.

After a car accident Beth was prescribed painkillers, and she found herself in a downward spiral. Soon she was drinking, smoking marijuana, and before long, doing cocaine. "Within six weeks, I went through thousands of dollars," she says. "Life quickly became a living hell for my kids. I would be in the bathroom smoking crack and drinking Jack Daniels. My kids would be pounding on the door, wanting to be fed, and I'd be screaming, 'Quit bugging me! Stay away!'"

Eventually, Beth's in-laws, neighbors, and friends held an intervention. That day, Beth and her husband left for separate treatment centers. Beth was a model client at the treatment center, but when she went home several months later, her life was not so easy to reassemble. Her husband had met someone during treatment and was leaving her. Her in-laws didn't want her to get her children back. Eventually, her two sons ended up in the home of Olive Crest foster parents Shirley and Mark Stoddard. The long road to reunion was about to begin.

"When you say, 'I lost my kids to foster care,' it's the worst stigma you can have," Beth says. "But never once did Shirley treat me like I was not important, like I was not their mother. It was always, 'What can I do to help you succeed?'" Her children spent two years in the Stoddard home, with Beth welcome to visit any time. Eventually her visits lengthened, and then became unsupervised. Finally, the day came for Beth to take her sons home.

But the relationship with Shirley, Mark and their son didn't end. As Beth returned to day-to-day parenting, shepherded her boys through adolescence, and grieved the court's decision that her daughter remain with relatives, the Stoddards were there. With Shirley's encouragement, Beth continued to work on her issues, attend meetings, and stay in therapy, both individually and with her kids. Eventually, she remarried. Beth has 11 years of sobriety and her husband has 22, and they are committed to staying sober for good.

Beth's oldest son attended Bellevue Community College for massage therapy and when their younger son graduated from high school, the Stoddards hosted his graduation party. "They've come to every graduation, every birthday, everything," Beth says. "I still spend all my holidays with them."

"Beth is just a great example of somebody who was broken and was restored," says Shirley, her voice full of admiration. "She was humble but not humiliated, and was driven by how much she loved her kids." In addition to speaking to prospective foster parents, Beth also mentors women in AA whose children are in foster care. "No one can understand it until they've been through it," she says.

Although her recollections are sometimes painful, Beth's spirit and enthusiasm shine through. "You have to look for a gift in everything," she says. "I learned to advocate for myself and fight for my kids." Her one piece of advice to foster parents preparing to work with birth families is to "find hope where the parent is really trying, and do what you can to reunite the family." She is grateful for the help she received and that she is in a position to help others. And, above all, Beth is grateful for her beautiful boys, now happy and healthy young men.

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