

She Offered Me Her Hand

"We found a place that'll take all three of you for just a few weeks." I nodded silently with a twist in my stomach wondering what this family would be like and if they would be different than the ones before.

I remember when I first met my dad.... of course, he wasn't my dad then. He was just some guy who picked us up to take us to our next foster home. "You're going to come stay at my house for a while, okay?" he told us. I talked a mile a minute on that long drive out into the wheat fields. I wanted to be sure he liked us. Maybe if he did, his wife would too and we wouldn't have to find a new home to take us.

The road was dry and dusty. I had never been out of the city before and I thought the dust devils that the car kicked up were real tornadoes. The house was hidden by trees, an island in the middle of big rolling hills and the driveway that led to it was bumpy which made my stomach feel worse than it already did. When we pulled up to the house, we were greeted by a collie dog and a group of people spilling out of the front door. Their enthusiasm made me nervous and I finally fell silent. There were more kids than I thought there would be.

Debbie, our new foster mom, had a soft smile and a little girl on her hip. Her hair was blond like my brother Kedron's, only lighter. After a flurry of introductions, Debbie looked into the backseat of the car at my baby sister Suzanna, asleep in her car seat. I felt threatened by this and wondered if she would try to take her from me like the other foster moms before her had.

That first day moved very quickly. My room was nice and had flowered wallpaper and a birch tree outside the window. I kept checking on Kedron whose room was next to mine to make sure he was doing okay. I was upset that Suzanna would be staying downstairs as it meant she would be far away from me.

Later, when Debbie called me for dinner, I hesitated on the stairway, unsure of if I wanted to go downstairs. It was then that this new mom did something I will always remember. To anyone else it probably would have meant nothing, but to me it meant everything. I don't even know if she remembers doing it, but I will never forget the moment that she offered me her hand. She did not tell me where to go. She didn't usher me by the shoulder in that way that said, "You're being cared for. Move along." And she didn't grab for it, the way my biological mom would have. She simply offered me her hand.

I don't remember much of the rest of that evening until the early hours of the morning when I went downstairs to check on my baby sister. I knew I would probably get in trouble. Our last foster lady had yelled at me for wanting to take care of my sister, but then she had wanted Suzanna for herself.

This new mom didn't know Suzanna and might not know how to get her back to sleep or worse, she might know her too well and want to take her from me. I looked at my little sister who was sleeping soundly in a pretty crib. She started to stir, probably from me bumping around in the dark. I was angry when Debbie came into the room, convinced that she was trying to take over my job of caring for my sister. I was also scared that she was going to send my brother and me away and keep my baby sister for herself. Maybe they would keep Kedron too since he was younger and had blond hair like her.

Flooded by my emotions, I started crying. The new dad came to give Suzanna a bottle while Debbie led me into the parlor. Taking a seat in an old wooden rocking chair, she gently pulled me into her arms. At first she did not say anything. She just held me and rocked me; the chair clacking not quite in time with the old clock in the corner. Then she told me I was okay. That it was okay to just be a seven year old girl. It's the first time I ever remember being rocked or held in a way that wasn't suffocating or forced. It's also the first time I thought her hair was pretty.

Those two weeks turned into seventeen years. I still think my mom's hair is pretty.

For more inspirational stories or to find out more about becoming a foster parent, visit www.fosteringtogether.org.