

Only Three Days

“Given the level of abuse she has experienced, she may never be normal again.” “She will be hard to place. Maybe she should be institutionalized”. The words of the police and social worker reverberated in my head. I was 12 years old and I was sitting on a hard bench in a sterile office listening to a state worker calling home after home to find me a placement. She did the best she could, but I was a tough sell. I was scared, angry, bruised, malnourished, lice/scabies infested and worst of all, pregnant. It was no wonder that no one wanted me. My own birth father didn't want me. Hadn't I heard for as long as I could remember that I was worthless, ugly and wouldn't amount to anything? Maybe they were right. Maybe no one would want me. As each phone call ended the same way, I sank lower on the bench. I alternated between hope that someone would finally say “yes” and fear that someone would and then I would have to go live with them. I hated my home. It was a place of fear, pain, abuse, neglect, but it was still my home. The place where my mother had passed away.

This wasn't my first time in foster care. I was three years old when my younger brother and I were placed in separate foster homes while our mother recovered from her first open heart surgery. After a year, we were returned home, but my mother never recovered fully from her surgery. The next 4 years were marked with oxygen tanks, hospital beds, and ambulances. She would go on to have two more open heart surgeries to try to repair her heart, but the last surgery led to a brain aneurysm resulting in her death.

At the age of 8, I realized that my life would never be the same again. While grieving the loss of my mother, I watched my father spiral out of control as he succumbed to alcoholism and gave full vent to his abusive temper which frequently exploded on my siblings and me in physically abusive ways. While my older brothers and sisters were old enough to escape his fists, my brother and I were too young and remained at home, living in fear of when he would return home. We were starving when not in school and resorted to stealing and begging from neighbors to survive. As an adult, I would still be able to recall vividly what hunger pains feel like. Five days before my 13th birthday, I had become terribly sick. I was dangerously thin and could not keep any food down. Under pressure from a neighbor, my father finally took me to the emergency room where the full extent and nature of his abuse was discovered. The following day found me in the custody of the state seated on an uncomfortable bench wondering if any family would want me.

After ten hours and in a moment of desperation, the worker again reached out to Evelyn and Ken Smith, a therapeutic foster home who had previously said no. They had one open bed in their home, but they were holding it for a girl who was soon to be released from juvenile detention. They were experienced foster parents and were up for the challenge that I represented, but they made it clear that they would only be able to keep me for three days. Little did we both know then that those three days would turn into six years and eventually lead to a guardianship arrangement.

Five months into my pregnancy, I lost my baby. Still a child myself, I struggled to process what was just another loss in a long line of losses. A short time into my placement with the Smiths, I had to attend my father's trial and relive the sickening abuse I suffered at his hands. Abused by men for most of my life, I struggled to trust Ken and lived in fear of him. Despite Evelyn's patient and loving attempts to reach me, I spent the first two years pushing her away. I was lost and unable to form healthy attachments and though I gave them many reasons to, they never gave up on me.

I did not know what “normal” felt like, but in the nurturing care of the Smiths I gradually learned what it was to feel loved and to feel safe. I was finally accepted for who I was and somehow I was made to feel like I was one of their daughters instead of a foster child. Their unconditional love would be the balm I needed to begin the healing process. Through their firm and consistent discipline I was taught how to trust and through their love, I was taught how to receive and give love; both essential to build the confidence of a child whose self-worth had been taken. Slowly the painful words of my childhood were replaced with loving words of affirmation. “You are smart”, “You are important and have purpose”, “We believe in you and will do everything we can to support you” were spoken to me daily. Over time I began to believe them and gradually the fractured pieces of my soul were rebuilt. You see, where others saw only a child too damaged to be helped, the Smiths saw the lost little girl on the bench who needed someone to believe in her.

If you are considering providing care to older children, please visit our [Teen recruitment page](#) of our website for additional information and to learn about resources available to caregivers and the youth they care for.

For more inspirational stories or to find out more about becoming a foster parent, visit our [Be Inspired](#) page.