

FOR PARENTS

My Foster Daughter Kept Me Feeling Young

by Holly Wilson (Reprinted from the Bennington (VT) Banner)

QUECHEE, Vermont — Several years ago, I wrote about my beginning years as a foster parent and what effect my foster daughter had on me. So many comments were shared with me on that piece that I want to give you an update.

Never having had children, I became a foster parent in 1996. All at once, I was a parent and single mom, and really understood what that meant. For the first time, I learned the school routine, school-meetings routine, medical appointments, transportation, shopping, ugly-in-the-morning routine. I revisited what it meant to think that the world revolved around you and your wants and desires. I learned to be young again, which was fun. Then, we were still in the really-liking-each-other stage. Foster parenting was just fabulous, and I could not say enough great things about my foster daughter or the agency that brought us together, Casey Family Services.

My foster daughter came to me when she was 13 and decided to move on when she was 18. She went through a lot of stages, and I was not ready for most of them. Where the heck was my training guide? Oh, who am I kidding, you just have to go through some experiences, and a training guide would not really be the thing.

Who could have guessed that our love of animals could both bring us together and throw us wildly apart? We learned limits. Chasing the weasel out of the chicken coop in the middle of the night was a wild one. We learned together the care of small babies and the miracle of watching a gosling work its way out of the shell. Watching six baby goslings follow her around the yard was amazing.

As she got older, there was the stage of not wanting to do daily chores, not wanting to help clean out the coop, and the struggle for independence that evolves over time. If I said it might be green, it was definitely red, and the bull was charging the flag. Social workers call it "opposition behavior," but I just call it wanting to pick a fight, any fight.

I do remember that time from my own teenage years. I was just like that and not pleasant to be around at all. Her mood swings from "sunny" to "one look can kill you" were just as wild as my own used to be, and exhausting. I could not recover as quickly as she did, and so we kind of grew apart.

So, she decided that at 18 she wanted to reunite with her biological mom, live with her brother and sister, and hopefully have that family life that she kept dreaming about. They moved in together. I helped her move, and I kept the door open for her and stayed in touch.

For the first six months after she left, she did not want anything to do with me, really kept her distance, and although it hurt, you just have to let them go. She would work it out.

She started her 12th grade, senior year of high school, and really wanted to finish, but circumstances had the family moving three times in six months, and she dropped out of high school. She has a better understanding of her sister now, which is more reality based. Well, that is a good thing.

She is working full time now, is 19 and enjoys her work. She plans on registering for high school to complete the last few credits. After and during her moves with family, she reached out to me by letter and phone. When she had access to a computer, she used it to e-mail me and my sister in California and asked me about people she had gotten to know through me. And they all ask me about her. "How is your foster daughter?"

It was a hard year, with our being so close, and separating, distancing, and my feeling so rejected half the time. The social workers said it would pass. And happily, they were right. The dance is nuts, but it is still one I want to be in.

Now, I am happy to report that the "attitude" is gone. She calls me, writes me, and appreciates the things I do for her. She says "thank you" and "please" and understands more about relationships and limits. So do I.

I have several foster kids that I see now on weekends each month, and they are very different from my foster daughter. A new relationship and I will keep the door open for them, too. Foster care is a wonderful experience, and I hope I will always think so.

Cheers to all the foster parent/families out there!