

*One family continuously opens their hearts and homes to children in need. Their commitment has been a 15-year journey to help foster children.*

# Still Room for More

The smell of filth assaulted my nostrils as I opened the car door to catch a glimpse of our newest guests with their matted brown hair and dirt smudged faces. At 18 months old, the twins were sleeping soundly in their car seats before the caseworker and I roused them to carry them into the house. Their huge brown eyes missed nothing as they entered our world leaving behind the neglect and abuse they had suffered at the hands of their mother and her boyfriend.

God brought the twins into our home 11 years ago, and on their third birthday He blessed them with an incredible new family — a mom and dad who claimed them as their own. The twins are now in middle school and we continue to pray that God will direct their lives, and that their painful start is but a distant memory.

Our journey as a foster family began more than 15 years ago while in Houston, Texas, after hearing about the desperate need for foster parents one night on the news. A 6-year-old boy carrying his baby brother was picked up by police along the freeway where he was looking for his mom who had abandoned them. The older child was taken to a foster home, but with no foster homes available for the baby, he was returned to the hospital. How could that be — no homes for children in need? I knew that happened in

other places, but not where we lived. We could take care of babies. And so we made a call the next day to start the process to become a foster family.

A precious 2-month-old baby girl was our first guest. She arrived suffering from failure to thrive and malnutrition as her young homeless mother struggled to care for her and her seven siblings. On her first visit with us to our church, she would meet her future father — a nursery volunteer who showed up on the “wrong” day, but decided to stay anyway. Little did we know that he and his wife were waiting to adopt a girl from foster care, and they wanted to name her Christina. This little baby girl’s name was Christina. “Coincidences” such as this continued to happen during the next two years as God was clearly at work leading this family to adopt little Christina. With a miraculous and joyous story such as this to get us started it was impossible to not keep traveling the foster care journey.

Since that time God has allowed our family the opportunity to welcome abused, hurting and broken children into our home and love them as the details of their lives are sorted out. Whether their stay is counted in days, months or even years, it is always a tremendous blessing to watch each scared and scarred soul blossom into a beautiful, happy child as he or she moves toward hope and

healing. Each child arrives as a “guest” in our home but leaves as a member of our family, taking with them a piece of our hearts, as well as our love and constant prayers.

As a result of our family’s foster care journey we have a treasure trove of memories. Our little boys were ages 3, 6 and 9 when we first made the call to become foster parents. As men now in their 20s they have been big brothers to more than 50 children of all ages, shapes, sizes and colors. Our boys can change a diaper, fix a bottle, play Dora or dinosaurs, brush hair into a ponytail and calm a crying baby. The far reaching realities of other people’s bad choices were evident in our home each and every day. We didn’t have long talks about drug use or premarital sex. The boys were there as we rocked a newborn going through drug withdrawal and when we talked to a 14-year-old mom about the importance of cream on a diaper rash. They also celebrated the developmental milestones of our four-pound preemie, practiced their Spanish with many of the children and learned how to rap from a 3-year-old beauty. God has used every child who came into our home to teach our family about true love and compassion.

Navigating the foster care system has not always been easy. Revolving caseworkers, slow court proceedings, government bureaucracy and underfunded programs are the pitfalls that make up a less than perfect



**The Rives Family has opened their home to many foster children. Pictured from left to right are Wray and Julie, and their daughter-in-law Mindy, and biological sons Josh, Wes and Jacob.**

system. But regardless of the frustrations or imperfections in the system, we are always reminded that it is not the children's fault. Children in foster care are there because of abuse, neglect and abandonment, and our goal has always been to provide them with a safe, loving family experience while the system makes decisions about what is best for them and their future.

One of the biggest emotional struggles for us has always been the long and winding process that these kids must take to find permanency. Many times I have wanted to just "hand over" a drug addicted or attention starved baby to a couple wanting to adopt — and yet I know all too well that this is not how the system works. It is a constant reminder that while this process is important, it is often far from easy or efficient.

One situation stands out from the rest as our most difficult and painful experience as foster parents. It was the return of two of

our precious foster children after their adoptive placement failed. We had talked to and advocated for these specific adoptive parents, believing them to be the answer to our prayers for the two siblings who had been in our home for three years. While we thought it was the perfect match, only three weeks after they left for their new adoptive home they were back in ours. A disrupted placement is one of the most hurtful things for a child, and it is especially so for a child who comes from an abusive or difficult start in life. And yet, God was still at work in the details of their lives to bring about hope and healing.

Just eight months later these two precious children were adopted by an incredible woman. Not only does she love these children unconditionally, accepting them right where they are; she also values the relationship and bonds that were formed with us. She continually calls, visits and sends photos of the children. She even allowed me the wonderful honor of standing beside her and her family

as the judge granted her final custody of the children. What a beautiful reminder of the role that we as foster parents hope to fill — a link between a child's broken past and a hope-filled future.

Each time our phone rings with the promise of a new guest we begin to pray for not only their time with us, but also for their home-going — whether they are adopted into a "new" family or returned to an "improved" family that is safe and whole once again. Our prayer is that someday the phone won't ring and there won't be a need for foster families. But until that day comes we want to be ready to answer God's call to take care of these precious children. ❁

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Julie Rives is married to Wray and her idea of a perfect spring afternoon includes plenty of sunshine, a large Sonic iced tea, a 6-pack of peanut butter eggs and a good book by the pool.