



Foster parents
Arnold and
Donna Eby with
their children.
*Photo courtesy
of Arnold Eby*

WE'RE THE LUCKY ONES

By Arnold Eby

How one long-term foster family views their role in the lives of the children in their care

Foster parenting can be a thankless job, and we are often reminded by strangers that they could never do what we do. I am often told, “Those kids are so lucky to have you” or “I could never do that; I would get too attached.” But so often, we do not share the depth of the struggle, or our disappointment in the misunderstanding of, “They are so lucky to have you.” We often brush off comments like this with a sad smile and a thank you as we hurry away to the shelter that is our reality — because we know if we tried to explain the rationale behind foster parenting, the conversation would end quickly with, “I could never do that.”

Sometimes, we are asked, “What do you need?” or “What can we do to help?” As I recently reflected on this

question and pondered my answer, I realized that the deepest, most satisfying form of thank you I can receive is found in the exchange between me, the foster parent/caregiver, and the child in my care.

Recently, one of the kids in our home glared at me across the dining room with her arms crossed and said, “I will never love you.” She had been with us for more than two years, and before coming to us, she had been the bearer of her family’s secrets: the older sister, mom’s favorite, the one who had to bear witness to trauma beyond her age.

Nearly three years later, she still never trusted and never talked. She vehemently guarded any information that her younger siblings said about those times, loudly interrupting any

reference, however minor, that they expressed in casual dinner table chatter.

There were no emotions, no tears — only her Teflon shell. But that day, the walls began to crack, even if just a little — emotions and tears were bursting at the seams.

Her anger, emotions and tears carried her up the stairs where she declared one last time. “I will never love you or Mrs. D. either.”

I stood there; a bit stunned by the intense outburst. At the same time, I was suppressing the intense urge to celebrate. That moment was so intense, gratifying and life changing for me. It was much like watching a butterfly shredding the bounds of its cocoon. The new life emerging from the ugly past.

I was so convinced that I would never have the strength to break down the walls that blocked her from growth

and freedom. In that moment, her growth, courage, strength and vulnerability were momentous.

I also thought about how I am so lucky to have her. I discovered a deep sense of gratitude for finally being able to help her begin the long walk to personal freedom. Foster parenting is a long walk, a journey of peeling back hundreds of layers of baggage. And I had the honor to start that. Truly, there is nothing anyone can say that can make you feel more accomplished than seeing a child begin to heal from their hurt.

When you sign up for the job of foster parenting, it is important to understand where the most important thank you’s come from, and how life changing they are. So, when people tell me, “They’re so lucky to have you,” I quickly respond, “I am so lucky to have them.” Every day I learn from them, gaining energy and motivation from the resilience they show daily. It is my opportunity to understand

and drink from the deep well of the human experience.

I no longer need much fanfare from external sources. The deep sense of satisfaction that comes from the opportunity to make a difference and change a life, one layer at a time, is enough. It’s just like the old country song: “Thank you, world, for letting me contribute to the cause.” •

Arnold Eby has been married to Donna for 30 years. They have been foster parents for more than 20 years. They are the parents to three daughters and three sons, four of whom are adopted from the foster care system. Eby is the current executive director of the Maryland Resource Parent Association and has been involved with MRPA for the past 17 years. He is also the past chair of Maryland Children Justice Act Committee and serves on multiple other national, state and local government committees. He is the current public policy chair for the National Foster Parent Association.

kids in waiting

Corey, 15, is fascinated by technology. He loves to play video games, and he enjoys operating and fixing technology. When there’s a problem with something, he likes to analyze the situation and figure out how it can be repaired. Corey also is good with animals. “I love them and they love me,” he said. “I think animals are adorable.” Corey can be very friendly, sweet and personable. He would do best with a patient family that would work with him to build a bond. He would like to join a family who loves him and would allow him to have a cat or other animal. Corey would like to stay in contact with and visit frequently with his brother.

Anyone interested in becoming an adoptive parent may visit the Adopt Kansas Kids website at www.adoptkskids.org or email customer care@adoptkskids.org. CH-7272

