

It's All Relative: Supporting Kinship Connections

A Life Full of Color: One Foster Mother's Story

A year and a half ago, I received the call that would forever change my life. I became the resource parent and now guardian for Amy, who is 12, and Alex, who is 16. Before then, I was living on my own with my dog, Chula, in a studio apartment. When I first came into contact with Amy, I was a Spanish teacher at an elementary school. With Amy in my class, I witnessed how this young girl struggled with basic social interactions. Never in a million years did I imagine one day becoming her legal guardian.

Due to their mother's mental health struggles, Amy and Alex needed somewhere safe to stay. Only knowing Amy as one of my students—and not knowing Alex at all—I agreed to have them both come live with me. Over the past year or so, we have gone through many bittersweet changes and a difficult, but much needed, healing process. I have watched Alex's guard come down to find that he is slowly beginning to trust me. Alex is very involved in sports, has a babysitting job, and enjoys taking his skim board to the beach. I love seeing how Amy picks up her trombone, rides her bike to school, and enjoys the herb garden that we planted together. Both Amy and Alex show unconditional love for my dog, Chula, and have transformed into reliable, trustworthy children.

I have watched how my family has opened their arms to Amy and Alex and have fully embraced them. Beyond my own household, Amy and Alex have gained a grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Amy was recently asked by her social worker if she wanted to get adopted; she said no. The social worker then asked her what she would do when she was in college during the winter breaks. Amy responded, "I will go to Santa Rosa," (where my mom and sisters live). At this moment, I realized Amy genuinely saw herself as part of my family.

Amy and Alex now have a chance at life. I know that once they are out of my care they will be fine. They both have aspirations to go on to college and have hopeful plans for the future. My life used to be opaque, but it is now full of color. I know that they love me—just as I love them. People thank me for what I have done, but I am the one who is thankful for all that Amy and Alex have brought into my life.

As a result of this experience, I have recently taken a position as a foster family recruiter. I hope that my story inspires others to step up and provide safe, loving homes for older children and youth in the foster care system.

To take the first step to become a resource parents or adoptive parents in Santa Cruz county, please visit <http://santacruzhumanservices.org/FamilyChildren/FosterCareandAdoptions>.



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