

Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

Help, Hope, and Healing for Birth Parents

Almost 7 years ago, we moved from Australia to Richmond, VA, in hopes that God would grow our family through adoption. We started this journey by attending a Richmond City Department of Social Services foster care orientation. After hearing about the need for foster families in our city, we began foster care training. At the same time, we also decided to simultaneously pursue private adoption. We knew we wanted a forever child and did not want to give the wrong impression when taking in a foster child, recognizing the priority is for a child to return to his or her birth family if possible. On July 27, 2012, we got the call for our first foster placement. She was a 2-day-old baby girl, and we stepped out in faith, said yes, and our lives changed forever!



In our journey of fostering, God did something we didn't really expect and broke our hearts for the biological moms of our kids. Patty was the mother of that 2-day-old baby girl. The baby went home to Patty 7 weeks after she came to us, and Pete and I felt called to reach out to Patty and continue a relationship with her and support her to be the mom we knew she wanted to be. Eventually, Patty shared her story with us. It was a story no one should have to tell, and it was layered with her own pain and trauma. We felt determined to be stable, loving people in the lives of Patty and her daughter. We were grateful to connect her with our wider community and some good resources and eventually move her into safer housing. As we wrapped around her, we started to catch a glimpse of how far practical help, a healthy community, and genuine love could go. However, Patty's story didn't go the way we thought it would, and 9 months after meeting her and just after we were starting to see glimpses of powerful change in her life, Patty came down with the flu. Just 24 hours later, after being discharged from the ER, she tragically died from complications.

We were in shock. This is not how we thought her story would end. It was heartbreaking, and we felt so confused. Fast forward a few years, and Pete and I can truly say that out of the tragedy of Patty's death, God birthed a vision of hope. Patty left us with a deep commitment to hear the stories behind each of the mothers of the children we fostered or adopted. And we felt challenged to offer grace and compassion, rather than judgment and criticism. We realized that

God loves the birth families as much as He loves their children. Over the course of the past 6 years, we have now fostered seven children and adopted three. We have had the incredible opportunity to engage on a much deeper level with multiple birth mothers and fathers. Although it has been very hard and heartbreaking at times, it has been worth it. Eventually, we realized that these women usually needed more help than we could provide on our own. With the help of many others, we stepped out in faith to start a nonprofit in honor of Patty—Patty’s Hope—with the mission of offering help, hope, and healing for biological mothers of children in foster care.

For further details about Patty’s Hope or our story visit www.pattyshope.org.



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