

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

### ROOTING FOR ONE ANOTHER

“I’m rooting for you.” With these four words, our relationship began.

I first met Jennifer at court in 2009. I was caring for her 6-month-old baby boy in foster care. When I introduced myself, I handed her a professional photograph of her son. As she burst into tears, I instinctually hugged her.

Our relationship slowly grew with eye contact, hellos, and good-byes as I transported the baby to Department of Human Services office visits. With permission from the caseworker, Jennifer asked if I could supervise her visits in the community with her baby. She did not want to visit in the same office—the same room even—that she sat in visiting with *her* mother as a child.

Listening to snippets of her story, my compassion grew. I knew if I had lived her life there was a good chance I might be in her same shoes. I thought about how I’d want to be treated.

Three years went by. We eventually adopted her son. Jennifer and I had gentle yet overt conversations about life, love, healthy boundaries, and family. Our relational ties always remained, despite the ebb and flow of connection related to her addiction and sobriety.

Then Jennifer had another son. We fostered him before there were court orders to return him to the treatment facility. This time we were considered *relatives* to this child because we had adopted his brother. We continued to root for her. We were the only ones who showed up for her treatment graduation.

Jennifer successfully parented this son for 4 years. We engaged with her, inviting them over to our home to share in Sunday lunches and holidays.

Addiction struck again. He was back in care with us for 9 months before going home to her.

Being a relative and knowing someone’s life intimately brings extra complexities and emotions—more than when you’re caring for a stranger’s child. I felt heavier walking into the same courtroom, now spanning two boys and three separate court cases over 9 years.



Through honest conversation and intentional reconciliation, we joyfully remain “family” to this day. We are “Mommy” and “Daddy” to one son and “Auntie” and “Papa” to her next. We are a caring and unique blended family. And we continue to support and root for one another.

To learn more about Every Child, a partner of Oregon’s Department of Human Services and workplace of the author, visit [everychildoregon.org](http://everychildoregon.org).



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