

## Mother for Another Mother

By Theresa Kim, Dane County foster parent

Just as he was finally getting old enough to peel himself away from me for stretches at a time. When the light at the end of the toddler tunnel was getting closer, and Kindergarten was feeling like a reality.

Just when I started getting the ever longed for business plan on paper, I heard the voice, "Mother for another mother."

I ignored that voice. My husband and I had talked about foster parenting, but felt like we needed to make some of our dreams happen first. There would be a right time.

But the voice kept on, "Mother for another mother" Dang it. I started feeling the voice might actually be coming from my Maker. He's the one voice I do my best not to ignore. (And as a mother, I'm a professional in ignoring little voices).

### Voices vs. Business Plans

So I told my husband about the voice, confident that we would talk and get rational and I'd get that next section of the business plan done by the end of the week. Instead his

jaw dropped that I'd been hearing this voice and keeping it from him?

So my husband and I, along with our young son sat down to take a vote. Do we keep things just like they are? Commit to starting a business? Or welcome a foster child into our home? The vote was unanimous. We jumped on the roller coaster and have been

doing our best to keep our hands and feet inside the car at all times.

### Horror Stories or Saints?

As soon as you put out to the world at large that you are planning on becoming a foster parent, you are hurled back horror stories. Has everybody's sister's

friend's cousin been a foster parent? And had a horrible experience?

After people have shared their stories and feel sure they haven't single-handedly convinced you to stop your crazy ways, many of them have a comment along the lines of, "You are saints for doing this."

I have wanted to be a lot of things in my life. Ballet dancer. Otolaryngologist. Guest on Oprah. But saint is pretty lofty.

*"My heart will break for his biological mother if he is taken from her. I am a mom and can't imagine how that would feel.*

*My heart will break for me if he goes back to his biological mom. He is my son now too, and forever will be in my heart."*

Continued on page 2

That doesn't give me room to be honest and crabby and raise my voice in the grocery store. You have probably heard me. While I was wrestling with making sure our motivation was right and trying to shake off the "saint" label, we got knee deep into our foster parent training.

### **Kids in Care Already *Have* Mothers**

The big missing piece of the puzzle when we naively took that vote was that foster kids usually come to you with mothers who **already** love them. Your job as a foster parent is not only to love and nurture and protect the little one in your care, but to help facilitate sending that child back to his or her mom.

What? We all know that foster kids go back, but I'm supposed to help? Can't I just altogether stay out of that mother's life? But so often her child **is** her life. Her life is focused on getting her child back to her. The initial goal is almost always to do just that.

But while you are trying to "save" her child, she might think you are trying to "steal" her child. That mother does not think you are a saint. She probably has an altogether different word she uses. And your job has changed from "mother for another mother" to "mother for and with another mother.

### **The Phone Rings**

And then the phone rings. Can they bring him in three hours? Frantic calls to get my biological son home before foster son arrives. Clean the house. Put together the crib. Shake my husband, who had had a medical procedure that same morning, into a more

conscious state. Scurrying and scampering and wondering who we thought we were that we could do this, how we're going to handle this, what this little boy is going to be like and what he'll think of us.

### **Supporting Another Mother**

As of this writing, our foster son has been living with us for nine months. We're expecting his newborn, biological brother to arrive any day. Nine months of mothering for and with another mother. My biggest surprise is that at times, the "with" part has been one of the more satisfying parts of the experience for me. I'm a mother supporting another mother. I know the love she feels for her son. I feel love for her son too.

And when he takes out some of his frustrations and scary emotions on me—because I'm the one who's there for him every day, that sings him his lullabies, finds his missing nay-nay, kisses his owies and isn't going anywhere right now—in turn, I'm allowing his biological mother to be the fun one. The one who spends her time with him coloring and playing instead of taking him for his shots or dealing with his diaper rash.

### **Court**

The court system will determine which one of us he'll be calling mom in the years to come—whose hand he'll be holding tightly when he goes to kindergarten or who will be cheering in the stands at his sporting competitions or who will be the one helping heal his first broken heart.

People assume I feel in competition with his biological mom and will fight to keep him. I

Continued on page 3

thank that same whispering Maker that that is not my role and not my feeling.

My heart will break for his biological mother if he is taken away from her. I am a mom and can't imagine how that would feel.

My heart will break for me if he goes back to his biological mom. He is my son now too, and forever will be in my heart. In the end, whatever decision the courts make, he has known the love of a mother and the love of another mother.



*Theresa Kim is a Dane County foster parent and initially wrote this for Listen to Your Mother, which you can find at: [www.listentoyourmothershow.com](http://www.listentoyourmothershow.com). This story appeared previously in a Dane County Human Services newsletter and used with permission.*