

# A CHILD'S LIFESTORY BOOK

CONNECTICUT COUNCIL ON ADOPTION

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August 1996



## FOREWORD

Childhood is the most vulnerable period in a human's development. It is a time when we set out to explore the world within the safety net of our families, sure in the knowledge that they will be there for us when we return. For children in the child welfare system, such certainty is often not possible.

Parents who are faced with major stressors, such as alcohol or drug abuse, poverty, mental illness, and family violence, may no longer offer safe havens for their child. The parents' history becomes fused with the child's history in a complicated and inextricably intimate dance. The parents' every move affects the child in the present and sometimes due to trauma of separation and loss, forever more.

When our committee began working on lifestory development over two years ago, we hoped to develop a new awareness in the use of lifestory books for children. One of the members of our committee remembers working on a lifebook with an aphasic child in the 1950's. Books were being done on a limited basis as the exception rather than the rule. Nearly 40 years later we find that not much has changed in the field. Caseload sizes and time constraints in working one on one are still factors to contend with.

A strong desire to help a child better master their histories is a prerequisite to working on a lifestory book. Not only is commitment needed, but also an eagle eye for searching out information and piecing together bits of the past sometimes through sketchy narratives written by a number of previous workers. One of the most common questions asked by adult adoptees is "what did my mother look like?". How can a child be helped to know what his mother looked like when it was never recorded by the persons who had contact with her? A simple description such as "she had pretty blue eyes" can do much to fill in the blanks of a child's lifestory book supplanting fantasy with reality and fact.

All facts do not have to sound grim. As one practices talking with children about emotionally laden topics it becomes more comfortable to discuss the topics in a positive, non-judgmental way. Always keep in mind that no matter what a parent has done, it is necessary that the child be allowed and encouraged to maintain their feeling of love for and being loved by that parent. This is a crucial part of the healthy development of a child's self worth.

We hope that you will find the process of writing the book with your child gratifying and this guidebook specific to your needs for understanding.

# A CHILD'S LIFESTORY BOOK

## WHAT IT IS - HOW IT HELPS CHILDREN

A lifestory book is an individually made book covering the child's life from birth to present. It provides a tangible record of the past, of what has happened to the child and why. It chronicles the movements of the child and helps the child to understand them. It can contribute significantly to the development of a solid psychological base for the child by putting together the pieces of the child's experiences in a concrete and sequential manner and by helping the child connect past and present life experiences.

A lifestory book provides a way for the child to come to terms with life experiences and to identify what has contributed to those experiences. It gives significant adults involved with the child (birth parents, foster parents, therapists, social workers) an opportunity to discuss the child's life events in a manner that encourages the child to bring out feelings. A lifestory book helps the child to sort out realities and fantasies and to fill in the gaps of memory with information to clarify experiences that may be confusing. It helps the child develop a sense of self and of self esteem.

Non-judgmental and concrete in its language, a lifestory book presents the life events of a child in simple terms. It provides graphic evidence of how the child has been cared for and cared about. Its intent is to give the message to the child that the child is valuable. Photographs, drawings, and other mementos show the uniqueness of the child.

Lifestory books are safe tools. While some of the material being dealt with may be painful to the child, children are more apt to be hurt by what they do not know about their lives than by what they do know. What they don't know, they will assume or make up. They may not be completely convinced that things actually happened as they did, but reading it over and over and having others read and accept it will help the child to accept it.

Preparing a lifestory book can also help the child prepare for the future. Here are several examples of when the book can be a useful tool in helping a child:

- a). If a child is to return to the birth parents, the parents are provided with a link to the child's placement experiences and the child's developmental changes. The child has a concrete and visual history of his time away from the home and this can be shared with the parents.
- b). If the child goes into an adoptive placement, the lifestory book provides an ongoing link from birth parents to foster parents to adoptive parents. It helps the child bring something of self-worth and value to the adoptive home. It provides an opportunity for the child to work through feelings about life experiences, to accept the reality of these experiences, and to acquire the energy and perspective for being open to new relationships.

- c) If the child remains in foster care, the lifestory book provides the foster parents with a tool for contributing to the positive self-identity of the child who shares a unique relationship with them.
- d) For the children who move to independent living, The lifestory book provides them with a firm grasp of childhood details and memories and of the people with whom childhood was shared.

It is best if the book is started when the child is first placed. Birth parents, who may not be available later, should be asked at the time of placement to provide as much information as possible about the child. This information should include the child's birth and developmental history, photographs, etc. The birth parents can be enabled to realize that they are providing the child not only with material important to him but also with a vital connection between them and him. Other relatives may also be asked to provide any available material about the child.

Foster parents play a crucial role in continuing the lifestory book by compiling, collecting, and preserving pictures, cards sent by birth family members, school papers, report cards, the child's recorded ongoing development, and anecdotes about the everyday life of the child.

The child, depending on age, should have a major role in the ongoing development of the lifestory book. It is beneficial for him to write or dictate his part of the story, including how he was feeling about what was happening, and also to contribute appropriate drawings. He should also have a say in what he wants included in the book. Children are egocentric and will usually be responsive to the interest shown in them during the writing of the lifestory book. Some children may participate only minimally at first, but most of them become more interested as the process goes on.

The social worker serves as the facilitator of the process of putting the lifestory book together. The social worker has access to the birth and foster families, to agency records, and to other staff who may have known the child or the family previously. The development of the lifestory book can serve as a valuable therapeutic tool in helping the child understand the past, present, and future and in drawing out his feelings about all this.

Most children will be distressed as painful issues of the past are brought up. To a degree, adverse reactions are necessary and to be expected and are an indication that the child is assimilating the information. The caretaker must be prepared to accept these behaviors. Some of the child's reactions might be anger, bed-wetting, withdrawal, aggressiveness, depression, denial, self-destructive behavior, difficulty concentrating in school, hyperactivity, night terrors, or eating disorders. However, if the reactions are drastic or ongoing, they may signal the need to back off for a while. This decision should be made in conjunction with the child's therapist.

## WHAT GOES INTO THE LIFESTORY BOOK

### Child's Birth Information

Copy of the child's original birth certificate

-or-

Child's name and date, time, and place of birth

Birth history as obtained from the hospital: length, weight, any special medical conditions. Bracelet, footprints, and photograph if available.

### Biological Family

Parents (Include information about birth father even if he has not been involved)

Names, dates of birth, race, nationality, and ethnic background

Physical description including height, weight, build, complexion, eye and hair coloring

Number of years of school completed

Talents, hobbies, and special interests

Religion

General field of employment

Significant health information

Growing up experiences of mother and father

Length of time parents knew each other and what their relationship was like.

Reasons for their inability to care for the child and the manner in which they made plans for the child's future.

### Other Relatives

Names and birth dates of the child's siblings and the type of present placements.

Information on grandparents, aunts, uncles, and any other relatives with whom the child has a close relationship. Give descriptions, ages, education, and general field of employment.

Information on anyone else who may have had a significant relationship with the child.

Include pictures of the birth family labeled as to who they are. Also include letters, cards, and any other mementos from the birth family.

### Developmental Milestones

Age of first tooth, sitting up, walking, talking, toilet training, etc.

### Placement Information

Where child lived, with whom, and dates. Reason for moves. What it was like for the child living in each place, his memories, and his feelings about moving. What he may remember about the first visit to each place and what he was feeling.

### Birth Family Involvement

Frequency of their visits and other contacts including letters and phone calls. If the visits were infrequent, what the child felt about that and his understanding of the reasons for the lack of contact. What they did with the child when they visited.

### Schooling

Age child started school, what schools attended, teacher's names, and child's experiences. Special friends. Include school papers and report cards if available.

### Religion

Churches attended. Age of baptism, confirmation, and first communion if applicable. Copy of baptismal certificate.

## Health

Childhood diseases and other illnesses. Height and weight at different ages.

Other significant health issues.

Results of mental health evaluations (in non-clinical terms that the child can understand). Child's involvement in therapy.

## Other

Important experiences and special events.

Likes and dislikes

Personality description

Hobbies and activities

Pictures of the child, foster parents, their families, and other foster children, friends, classmates, buildings important to the child such as the hospital in which he was born, houses in which he lived, schools, etc. If negatives are not available, pictures may be copied at agency expense and returned. Be sure the pictures are labeled.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

### Techniques

Lifestory books are written with the child if possible and in the first person tense, using I instead of you. For example, rather than writing you were born on July 1, ... you would write I was born on July 1,... Reasons for the move into adoption ,as well as for previous moves need to be clarified. The child may have been told why he moved, but he may no longer remember. Perhaps, he was never told. A discussion with the child can help to clarify things for him so that his recollections of what happened to him, coincide with the facts. This will also help him understand that the moves were not his fault. Children, particularly those who have suffered loss and separation, often assume blame for whatever happens to them and adults need to be sensitive to this fact. Children also need to understand that they can care for more than one set of parents and that they are not being disloyal by doing so.

Use non-judgmental terms when describing parents. While parents are responsible for their behavior, they should not be assigned blame for their behavior. When discussing negative behavior of the parent it is appropriate to say that they made wrong choices or bad decisions. It is not that the parents are bad people, but that they made bad decisions.



Always include the child's feelings in the lifestory book. This usually is the most difficult part of the lifestory work for the child, the social worker, and the caretaker. Writing the book with the child is a good time to talk to the child about his parents and to encourage him to bring out his feelings about them. The child may need permission to remember past events and the feelings connected with them. It is important to validate his feelings and to let him know that other children in placement feel the same way he does. Sad feelings and angry feelings are to be expected. When you meet with the child again, have him repeat what was said to him in the previous sessions to be sure that he has interpreted the information correctly.

Begin the lifestory book with the child's birth unless the child has a need to start elsewhere. A child in a residential placement, for example, may need to understand why he is there before he can deal with other material. It is important to cover his birth and early history at some point. Many children in placement do not believe they were ever normal little babies who were cared for and nurtured.

Photographs enable the child to see what he looked like when he was small. For some children, it may be the first time that they have seen pictures of themselves as infants and toddlers. Pictures may also help the child to see that those in his past have loved and valued him. Photographs help the new family acknowledge the child's past and the importance others have had in his life. The child can draw pictures if there are no photographs available for certain parts of the narrative.

Remember to discuss events in simple terms and in language a child will understand.. Don't use labels or complicated concepts.(See section on Parental Behaviors)..

The lifestory book needs to be done at the child's pace. He may need time to process previous material before he is ready to go onto something new. There will be times when he will resist discussing particularly painful material. If this happens, let him know that a blank page will be left so that it can be put in later as it is important that it be included eventually.

A lifestory book can help the child understand why previous social workers were changed. Often the child thinks the workers left because they didn't like him. Include photographs of previous workers when possible.

When the time comes to introduce the idea of an adoptive family, a "growing up" family, the child should be asked to identify what he thinks he needs to grow up. Let him speculate about how these needs might be met by other parents. There is no painless way for the child to realize he is losing his birth parents. The grief is necessary and the lifestory book will help the child to face his loss, to understand it, and to accept it. This must be done before the child is ready to make new attachments.

Even if the child is not happy in the foster home, he will probably want to remain there. The known is preferable to the unknown. The child will usually not respond to the idea of a new family positively, but will be sad, confused, angry.

Children need to have a say in what they want to put into the lifestory book. They may want to show other people the book and there may be things they do not want others to know. It is helpful to give children a way to explain to others why they are not with their birth families. (See reading list Kay Donley "Cover Story".)

When talking about parental roles, ask questions such as "what do moms (or dads) do?" "What makes the jobs so hard?" The child can also be asked to make lists under headings such as "What do moms do?" and "What do children need?" (See section on Roles and Responsibilities.)

During the writing of the lifestory book, the child should be helped to understand the role of social workers and the courts (See section on Roles and Responsibilities.)

Tie events to the child's age, a holiday, a school grade, etc. in addition to using the date that the events happened.

A lifestory book should be written objectively and should not reflect the feelings of the social worker or therapist. Use quotes or "My worker says..." to separate information others have given from the child's own memories, thoughts, and feelings.

## Tools

### Materials suggested for the development of a Lifestory Book

- magnetic-type photograph album, loose leaf binder, or scrapbook
- markers, crayons, pen, pencils of different colors
- plastic "see-through" pages for documents and other memorabilia
- string, ruler or tape measure to demonstrate child's length at birth
- magazines and catalogues for children to cut and paste to make collages and posters
- glue, scissors, hole punch, scotch tape
- stickers and labels
- popsicle sticks, clothes pins, or tongue depressors, or other materials to make puppets to help child understand and talk about the past
- paper-both plain and ruled for drawing and for writing the child's story

The lifestory book can be put together in a variety of ways and with a variety of materials. It is not necessary that the person doing it be creative or artistic. What is important is the material that the book contains.

## **EXPLAINING PARENTAL BEHAVIOR**

The following are suggestions for explaining parental behavior to a child. Explanations should be in child-like language and the examples should be ones to which a child can relate. They should include reasons as to why the parents could not care for the child. For example:

### **Substance Abuse:**

The child needs to know that his parents could not care for him because they drank too much alcohol or used too many drugs. This affected their ability to do the things that parents are supposed to do for their children. For example, getting them up and off to school, keeping them safe, paying bills, preparing meals, etc.

### **Parental Immaturity or Mental Retardation**

The parents were not able to take very good care of themselves and found that trying to take care of a child was too difficult. They looked grown up on the outside, but they were not grown up on the inside. Even though they really wanted to be good parents, they hadn't learned how to take care of children.

### **Mental and/or Physical Illness**

The child should be given honest information about the illness and how it made it impossible for the parent to care for the child. The child needs to understand that there was no one else in the family who could take care of him and the reasons why, if known. He also needs to understand that he was not the cause of the illness. Be careful when saying the word "sick" when discussing parental illness. The child may fear that he will be moved if his adoptive parents become ill. Also the child may think that maybe the birth parents who are sick will get better and be able to resume care for him. He needs to understand that this is not the case.

Mentally ill parents may have been scared, worried, unhappy, confused, upset, angry, sad. They may have said and done strange things and it was hard for them to think about what anyone else was feeling. Sometimes they weren't sure what was real and what wasn't real or what was safe and what wasn't safe. They felt very much of the time the way a child feels when awakening from a bad dream and isn't sure whether it was real or not. They needed someone to take care of them.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sometimes grownups touch children in ways they shouldn't. This is a wrong thing to do. The grown-up made a wrong choice and didn't understand that there are some things that are all right for grownups to do together, but should never be done to a child. Since the child was not being protected from sexual abuse, he had to be placed away from the home.

### Imprisonment

The parent broke a grownup rule and had to be punished just as the child is given time out when he has done something wrong. The parent did something wrong and had to go to prison, which is BIG time out. Or, just as the child has to stay in his room for punishment, the parent has to stay in jail and can't take care of the child.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Children often get confused about the many different people in their lives and may have many unanswered questions about them. There are many people involved in helping to raise a child, to teach them, to keep them safe. In addition to parents there are relatives, teachers, neighbors, clergymen, doctors, and others. Sometimes there are social workers and judges.

### Parental Roles

It is the job of parents to take care of their children, to provide them with a place to live, to give them proper food and clothing, and to keep them safe. Parents need to be sure that their children go to school, get enough sleep, and receive proper medical care. Parents need to discipline their children appropriately and to teach them how to get along with others. Their responsibility is to be sure that their children are secure and loved and to help them understand that the job of a child is to play and learn.

Birth Parents are the only ones who can give their children life, physical appearance, nationality, intelligence, basic personality, special talents, and inherited health history. Children often believe that if only they could have done more or had acted differently, they would not have had to leave the birth parents' home. The fact that their birth parents were unable to fulfill their parental roles and why needs to be discussed with them.

Foster Parents are the people who take care of children whose birth parents are unable to do the things they are supposed to do. The foster parents' job is to take care of the child until the child can go home. If that doesn't happen, foster parents continue to care for the child until an adoptive home is decided upon. Sometimes, for different reasons, a child may have to live in more than one foster home.

Adoptive Parents are people who want children to grow up in their family. Children become a permanent part of an adoptive family.



### Social Worker's Roles

Social workers are people who work for an agency that helps families and children. Their job is to be sure that children are safe and to help the parents be as good parents as they can be. Sometimes when parents can't do the things they are supposed to and the child isn't safe, the social worker may place the child in a foster home. If the parents cannot take the child home in a short period of time, the social worker must make a report to the judge at the court that is responsible for children.

### Judge's Roles

The judge works in the court that has to do with decisions that affect children. The judge's job is to make decisions about whether or not the child can return home and when. If the judge decides that it will never be safe for the child to return home, an adoption plan is then considered. Sometimes parents agree that this is the right plan for the child. Sometimes, when they can't agree to this, the judge will make the decision about adoption for them.

When the plan is for adoption, it is the social worker's job to find a family for the child and to help the child make the move to his new home.

## HOW LIFEBOOKS CAN BE USED ON AN ONGOING BASIS

A lifestory book will be used by the child over the years. It is a thread that will expand and go wherever he goes. It is the one place in which he can keep all the pieces that belong to his past and it will gain him a broader understanding of the events in the past. As he matures and his mental skills change, it will help him to go back over these events and look at them from his current perspective. It will provide continuity by helping him to see how the things that happened to him have led him to who and where he is today.

A lifestory book will help the child to clarify his memories. Even though his feelings about happenings in his past may have changed, the book will enable him to remember what his feelings were at the time.

The lifestory book can be a valuable tool for a therapist working with the child over the years. It can give the therapist a good picture of the child's history. It can help the child to express feelings and to recall memories as he and the therapist go through the book together.

The child can share the lifestory book with anyone with whom he feels comfortable. It can help him to explain his history to those to whom he is close. It can provide him with pictures to show his children.

The child can add to the lifestory book whatever he wants for as long as he wants.

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MY NAME IS SAM

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT ME



Drawings by Erin Dukacz

My Name Is Sam  
This Is A Book About Me

I was born on November 6, 1986. This is how I looked when I was a baby. I was a beautiful baby! As you can see, I didn't have much hair and my cheeks were chubby.

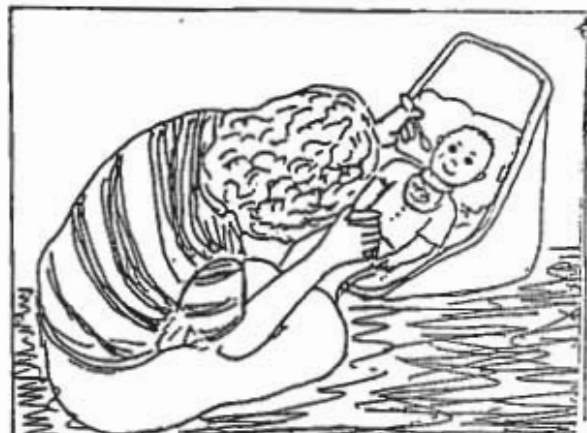


I weighed 7 pounds and 2 ounces and I was 20 inches long.

I was born at 10:37 at night in St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. It was fall and really windy outside.

After I was born, I lived with my birth mother. Her name is Kathy. She was 18 years old when I was born. She fed me my bottle and sometimes she played with me. I have an older sister Martha and an older brother Ronald. Martha was 2 1/2 when I was born and Ronald was one year old.

My birthmother has a nice smile and pretty blue eyes. She is about five feet, five inches tall and she weighs about 120 pounds. She has light skin and brown hair.





She left school in the tenth grade when she was pregnant with my sister Martha. The only job she had was at Burger King. She liked to read and to draw. She also liked to dance. She was in good health except she sometimes had headaches. She is part English and part Scotch.

Kathy was the older of two children. She had a brother who was two years younger. Her father, who was a truck driver, left the family when Kathy was four and she can't really remember him. Her mother worked in a factory and Kathy remembers her as always being tired. Kathy was left alone a lot with her brother and she had to take care of him. Kathy's mother, my grandmother, got married again when Kathy was twelve and she and her brother never got along with their stepfather. Kathy doesn't see her mother very often, but she and her brother are very close. I remember one Christmas when I was about four my grandmother came to see me and brought me a coloring book and some crayons. My uncle joined the navy as soon as he was old enough so I never got to know him very well.

My birth father's name is Ray. He is also Ronald's birth father. Martha has a different father. Ray and my mom met at a party. They lived together for a while, but they never got married. Sometimes they liked each other, but a lot of times they fought. My social worker said she thinks Ray was scared about being a father. After I was born he was probably even more scared. He didn't have a job and he didn't know how to take care of little kids. So he went away and no one knew where he went. Sometimes I think my mother felt unhappy because my father went away, but she never told me about him.

I don't remember my birth father, but my social worker said he was about 20 years old when I was born and that he was tall and thin with long blond hair and brown eyes. Both his parents were Italian. He had two older sisters and two older brothers. His father was a carpenter and his mother worked in a factory. They all were healthy. Ray graduated from high school, but never had a steady job. Sometimes he worked for an upholsterer and sometimes he worked with his father. He liked playing drums and he wanted to be a mechanic.

I think my mom was happy when I was born. My social worker said she was worried too. She had been very unhappy during the years she was growing up. She didn't feel anyone loved her and she didn't always like herself very well. Because of this it was hard for her to be a mommy and to take care of all of us. We were all very little. We needed to be fed, to have our diapers changed, and to be put to bed. We needed a mom to talk to us, to touch us, to snuggle, to kiss us, to play with us, and to take us for walks.

Sometimes my mother would spank me when I cried. She didn't know it was okay for babies to cry. She didn't understand that spanking me made me cry more. Then she would hit me again. Sometimes she would spank me hard and hurt me.

A social worker named Miss Adams came to see my mother. My mom told her that sometimes she got really angry and lost her temper when I cried. My mom didn't feel good about herself and she was unhappy because she didn't know how to take care of all of us.



My Social Worker  
Miss Adams

The social worker visited my mother to help her learn about taking care of little kids. While she was learning, my sister stayed with our mother. Ronald and I went to live with Pam and Jim Graham in Kensington. They were foster parents. I don't understand why Martha could stay home while Ronald and I couldn't. My social worker said that it was too hard for her to take care of three little kids. It was easier for her to take care of one. My mom thought she knew more about taking care of girls because she was a girl too. Also it was easier for my mom to take care of Martha because she was older and could do more things for herself like feed herself and pick up her toys.

So I went to live with the Grahams when I was six months old and I stayed until I was three years old.

There were a lot of people at the Graham house. There were mom and dad Graham, their daughters Jean and Marie, and their son Pat. There was their foster daughter Anne and Ronald and me.

Mom Graham and Ronald.

Dad Graham and me.



My birth mommy and Martha came to visit Ronald and me when we lived with the Grahams. I remember one time we went to the park. We played on the swings and the slide and we had a good time. My mom bought us ice cream. Ronald told me she was going to take us home, but she said she couldn't. She said that someday she would take us home with her. Ronald and I both cried when she left.



My mom  
and me  
on a visit.

I went to the beach with the Grahams and played in the sand. I liked to help daddy Graham clean up the yard. I spent two Christmases with the Grahams. I got lots of presents. The Christmas I remember best is when I got a big wheel. They called me Mr. Cool and thought I was hot stuff.

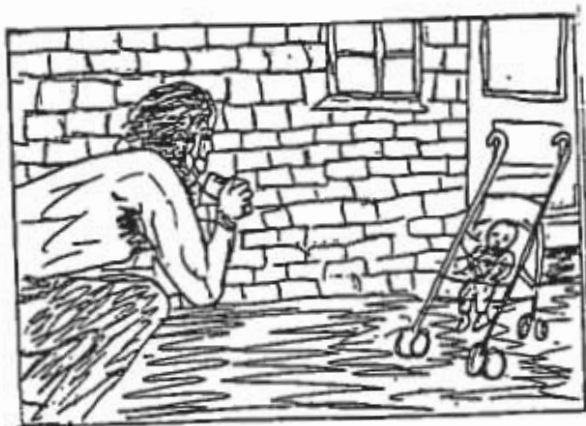


Here is Jean. She rode in horse shows.  
We went to watch her.



Patrick played football  
and we went to the games.  
It was fun

Baby Ann



This is Marie. She is  
taking a picture of me  
when I first came to  
live at the Graham house.



I was pretty happy when I lived with the Grahams even though I missed my mommy and was sad sometimes.

The Grahams kept a baby book for me. It says that I sat up when I was six months old, said "mama" at nine months and also cut my first tooth then. I started walking at thirteen months and was toilet trained when I was two and a half. I stopped drinking from a bottle at fourteen months. I didn't have any health problems.

On March 10, 1987, I was baptized in the Kensington Community Church. My birth parents were both Protestants but they didn't go to church. While I was with the Grahams I went to the church nursery school while mom and dad Graham were in church.

Mommy and daddy Graham were getting older and after a while it became too hard for them to take care of two little boys. Ronald and I couldn't stay with them. We were sad and they were too.

I remember the day we left the Grahams. Our social worker picked us up and took us back to our birth mom's house. My birth mom thought that since Ronald and I were older, she would be able to take care of us. My social worker and my mom had decided that we would be safe there now. At first we had a real good time. Sometimes I thought about the Grahams. I missed them and I would feel sad. But I was glad to be home with my mom and Martha and Ronald.

Then mommy started getting real angry again. She yelled and spanked us all the time. Somedays she would make me and Ronald stay in bed all day. One time Ronald and I were jumping on our bed and yelling. Mommy got mad and hit me hard and I fell off the bed and crashed into the big chest. I got hurt real bad. I was afraid and I cried. I had to go to the hospital and get a big cast on my leg. The doctor said I had to stay in the hospital for a while.

The nurses were nice to me. They signed their names on my cast and gave me ginger ale and ice cream. I watched a TV. that was hanging from the ceiling. But it was scary to be in the hospital because I didn't know anyone and I missed my mom and Ronald and Martha.

My mom didn't come to see me in the hospital. I worried that she was still mad at me. My social worker said my mother had trouble being a mother. Even though my mother was grown up on the outside she wasn't grown up on the inside. She hurt Ronald and me by hitting us a lot, and no kid ever misbehaves so badly that they deserve to be hurt.

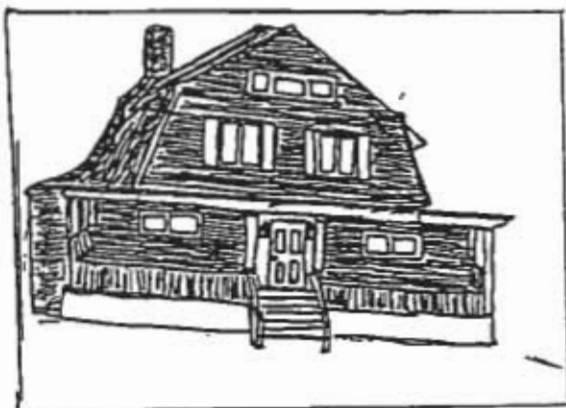
While I was in the hospital, Miss Adams brought my new social worker, Mr. Edwards, to see me. I thought Miss. Adams didn't like me any more, but they explained that she was going back to school.

Mr. Edwards told me I wasn't going back to live with my mom. He told me it wasn't safe for me there and he didn't want me to get hurt again. He said children are not for hitting and that parents have to learn to do something besides hitting when they are angry. Mr. Edwards told me he didn't know if my mom was ever going to learn to take care of Ronald and me and to keep us safe. She had been trying to learn for a long time, but she kept making the same mistakes over and over.

Mr. Edwards decided to talk to the judge who is supposed to see that children are safe and taken care of. The judge decided that Ronald and I were not safe in our mothers house and should go back into foster care.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin were my new foster parents. They came to see me in the hospital. They told me about their house and their children, Susan and Jeff. They lived in Windsor. They seemed okay, but I didn't want to live with them. I wanted to go home.

I moved to the Martins on March 18, 1990. I was scared and really quiet. I felt sad when I thought about my mom and Ronald and Martha.



The Martins house.



Me

Ronald didn't come to the Martins with me. He went to live with another foster family. I didn't like this. I wanted Ronald to be with me. My social worker told me the Martin's only had room for one child. He said he tried to find a family who could take both of us but he couldn't. I wish that could have happened.

My social worker said that since so many sad things had happened to me it would be good for me to have a special person to talk to. That special person is my therapist

Mr. Woods. We talk about everything and play games together. I like to talk about my happy feelings, but it is hard to talk about feeling sad and angry.

I have been with the Martin's for a long time now. I call them mommy and daddy because that's what the other kids call them. I had my fourth and my fifth and my sixth birthday here. On Christmas I get lots of presents and on Easter I get a basket of candy. I went to kindergarten last year. My teacher was Miss Mitchell. Now I am in first grade at Center School and my teacher is Miss Meserve.

Mommy and Daddy Martin



My first school day!



Me



I share a bedroom with Jeff. He is nine and in the fourth grade. Susan is twelve and in the seventh grade. Sometimes Jeff and I are friends and we play together. Other times we fight. He tells me I'm too little to play with him and his friends. I don't think that's fair.



Jeff



Susan

The Martins bought me a two wheel bike and Jeff taught me to ride it. I have a dog named Pepper.



Me on my bike.



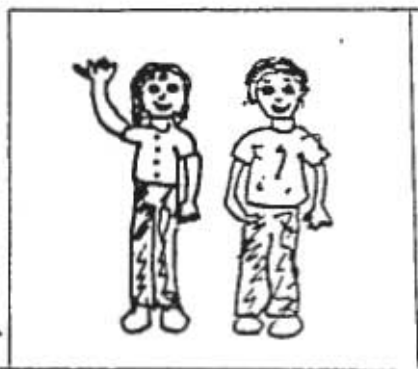
Pepper



Sometimes I'm happy at the Martins, but sometimes I do things that make them angry with me. Sometimes they scold me and I cry. Mr. Edwards says that all families get angry with each other sometimes.

I still miss my mom and Ronald and Martha. It has been a long time since my mom visited me. My social worker says that's because she is confused. She says she'd like to see me, but she finds it hard to visit. My social worker says my mom feels bad because Ronald and I don't live with her. Sometimes when she saw me, she would feel sad all over again. I don't want her to be sad, but I feel sad when she doesn't visit.

November 6, 1992, was my sixth birthday. Mommy Martin baked me a cake and my friends came to my birthday party. They brought me presents and we had cake and ice cream. We played games. The friends who came are Tommy, Billy, Jennifer, and Sarah. My mom and Martha sent me a birthday card. I was upset that they didn't come to see me.



Mr. Edwards took me to visit Ronald in his foster home. We went out to McDonald's and we had Happy Meals. I was glad to see my brother. Ronald lives in Meriden with the Mosher family. I hope someday we can live together again.



Ronald

Sometimes I'm mad at my mom for not taking care of me. Sometimes I get mad if anyone says something bad about her. Mr. Woods tells me that all foster kids feel that way sometimes.

Mr Woods says being in foster care is not easy for kids. I think he is right. He said sometimes children feel confused and funny about being a foster kid and don't want other people to know. They don't like it that their last name is different from the foster family's. Sometimes they think there must be something wrong with them and wonder what they did wrong.

Mr. Woods says it is not my fault I am in a foster home. Children can't take care of themselves. He says growing up is one of the hardest things to do. Children need adults who can care for them and help them through the growing up years. It's not my fault that my mom can't do this. My social worker, Mr. Edwards, told me the judge has decided that Ronald and I can't live with our mom. The judge says we need a mother who won't hit us. We need to live where we'll be safe while we're growing up.

Now Mr. Edwards is going to find me and Ronald a growing up family. He says this family will adopt us. Adoption is a way you become part of the family you will live with until you grow up.

I asked Mr. Edwards why I can't stay with the Martins. He said the Martins are foster parents who take care of children until they can move to a growing up family

Sometimes I feel sad and scared about leaving the Martins and going to a new family. Sometimes it seems there are too many problems to think about. Mr. Edwards told me that many children and even grownups have times when they feel that way. He and the Martins will help me. He says the waiting time will be easier if I talk about how I am feeling.

My sister Martha is not being adopted. She is going to stay with my birth mother. When Mr. Edwards told me that, I was really angry. I told him it wasn't fair. He said "You're right it isn't fair. I'd be angry too."

I told Mr. Edwards I would help him find a growing up family by telling him what kind of a family I would like. I would like a family that:

- has a mother and a father
- has a big backyard with a swimming pool and swings
- can take Ronald too
- can take Pepper
- never yells
- doesn't hit
- has a farm
- has a TV in every room

There are other things I want, but we only wrote down the most important. Mr. Edwards says he may not be able to find a family that has all these things, but he will find a family that has parents who really love children and want children very much. They will be people who asked to be parents and who really understand kids. If you have problems they will help you with them.

The waiting time before I get to meet my new family is very scary. I know it will be good to have a family of my own, but until I meet them, I can't help being nervous.

