



*Names have been changed to protect the identities of minors.

When I became a CASA a few years ago, I did not know what to expect from the children that I would be working with. The training exposed me to a whole new world of the realities that some kids go through in abusive families. While I was reading the petition for my case, the details appeared very surreal at times. Carl, a young child of eight years old, was removed from his home due to sexual abuse. His parents' rights were terminated in a previous case due to other sexual abuse charges and substance abuse by his mother. Carl was eventually adopted by his aunt who became his caretaker. Not long after being adopted, Carl was subjected to more sexual abuse by his aunt's husband, who fled the country after being charged with child abuse. I decided to take the case and advocate for Carl. One sexual abuse incident was bad enough, but I could not believe that in the eight years of his short life, Carl had two cases of sexual abuse history.

When I met Carl, he was not what I expected. In all honesty I guess that I didn't know what to expect. Carl was in a therapeutic group home and very outgoing from the first time we met. He was the typical eight year old boy who played with Transformers and Lego's. Carl had no problem starting a conversation or keeping engaged in different subjects. He explained how he knew what CASA was because another child in the same therapeutic group home had a CASA. He was happy to have his own CASA and in time we learned about each other through the weekly visits. Carl had good days and bad days with school and therapy. He couldn't understand why this had happened to him and had trouble with some boundary issues.

When Carl was ready to transition into his grandmother's home from the therapeutic group home with the intention of being adopted, the treatment team wanted to keep a close eye on Carl and ensure he would be protected from further abuse. It was up to his grandmother to break the cycle that had kept Carl unsafe for so long. It was challenging, but Carl's grandmother showed that she was able to keep him safe and be there for him. She supported him through active discussion and keeping him busy with many activities. She participated in consistent therapy and was committed to his treatment.

Carl's grandmother had endured a difficult life herself. She grew up in poverty and married young. She overcame many abuses in her own life and was a retired University Professor. She was saddened and disappointed at the events in her grandchild's life and promised to be protective of him. I witnessed her own growth through out the case as she became a source of empowerment for Carl.

Carl participated in the Kempe Center therapy after he left the therapeutic group home and came to work with a group of kids who experienced similar histories to his own. He also joined his school basketball team and his team won first place in the finals for his division! At the time, CASA had received a donation

for Denver Nugget tickets and Carl and his grandmother were able to celebrate in a big way by being the recipients of this tickets. Carl, who could not concentrate in class in his early life due to post traumatic stress disorder, was getting straight A's and learning to be a positive influence for his peers.

One year later, on the day of the adoption by his grandmother, Carl was dressed in his best suit and decided he wanted to take the last name of his grandmother. He looked at the judge at one point and said "I am where I belong." It brought tears to my eyes after witnessing the strength of this child after all the abuse he had been through. I did my goodbye visit shortly thereafter and told Carl that he was turning into such an upstanding young man. Carl's grandmother and I still keep in touch from time to time. They have a busy life and do a good job of keeping each other busy and active.

Shahira
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