



My Foster Parent Proved I Could Depend on Her Even After I Left the System

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By the time I was placed in the fourth foster home with *my son*, I was emotionless. The word “home” meant nothing.

I have thick skin: I can deal with moving from home to home. But my son was going through this, too, and for him I was more sensitive. In every placement, I had to explain (or lie about) why we had to move. I had told my son that the foster mother who asked us to leave was my aunt. I said that the next house we were going to was our last stop before our own apartment.

“Who will we live with?” Luis asked.

“A friend of my grandmother’s,” I told him: another lie.

I want Luis to live where he and I feel comfortable and loved. A place where he knows he is secure and where we can stay for a long time.

I tried not to get attached to my fourth set of foster parents, but they were great! They went out of their way to make sure my son and I had what we needed, and cooked food we liked. They invited us to their family events, and the foster mom, Ms. Perez, said she thought of me as her daughter.

What brought me out of my shell was something Ms. Perez said when I’d been there about three months. She said, “You don’t have to worry. Even after you age out, we can still think of each other as family. If you ever need someone to watch Luis for you while you work I’m available. If you need to come and pick up a plate of food you always can.”

Then I started spending more time in the house and speaking more. This foster home actually felt like home to me. My son felt good being there. I told him that our foster mother was my aunt. I

wanted to wait until he got a little older to explain foster care to him. He was too young and innocent to tell him about something so complicated as family letting you down.

Will We Be Homeless?

By this point I was 20, and about to age out. My caseworker submitted an Exception to Policy (ETP) to let me stay in care at least three months more while some of my issues were resolved. There was a lot to resolve: I had just found out that I didn't have legal immigration status, which meant I couldn't apply for housing. It also meant I couldn't work legally or get financial aid for college. Each day, I got more and more scared that my son and I would be homeless.

Thankfully, the ETP was approved right after my 21st birthday. The following month, I was approved for my green card. I still can't describe the feeling of knowing I was going to be OK in this country. But the clock was ticking: I had to make sure my paperwork and application for housing were submitted as soon as possible. Every day, I contacted my lawyers, caseworker, and anybody else I could think of to make sure everyone was on top of my paperwork. This was my future!

Most nerve-racking was waiting for the call letting me know I was picked for an apartment. It felt like I had played the lottery and was waiting for my number to hit.

My three-month ETP ran out. My caseworker submitted another, but it would be the last one I was allowed. My foster mother had been kind, but I couldn't be sure she would not kick me out when she stopped getting money for me and Luis.

I imagined myself as one of those homeless people I pass by in the street and look away from. The month after my caseworker submitted the ETP once again, my foster mother stopped receiving the checks for my son and me.

Helping Girls Like Me

I thought to myself, "This is it. I'm going to be put out on the streets." I told Ms. Perez to contact the caseworker, who told us that the ETP had not been approved yet. She said the approval, and the checks, could come the following month. I prayed for this to happen, but the following month came and still no check.

I felt like a burden, taking up space in someone's house and not contributing anything. Surprisingly, my foster mother did not complain. Instead, she said, "It's OK, I don't mind waiting, and I like you and Luis being around." I felt relief: There are some good foster parents that don't just do it for the money. I hugged her in gratitude.

Luckily, I had working papers that let me do seasonal work at a store, so I could get some of the things my son and I needed. Finally, in the same week, I learned the ETP was approved and that a two-bedroom apartment in Manhattan was available.

My mood lifted. We went to check out the apartment and with no hesitation I said I'd take it. In May, my last month in care, they cleaned and made a few repairs to the apartment. On May 29,

2016, my son and I moved in. I had enough saved up to buy furniture and the other supplies I needed.

That first day my son and I were in the house felt so unreal. The long chapter of feeling like a visitor where I lived was closed. We were beginning a new life.

Even though I have my own home now, I'm still in contact with my foster mother and visit her at least every two weeks. I can call her or stop by her house whenever I want. When I visit her, I feel the same love I did when I lived there.

This story was excerpted from [“Finally, a Home,”](#) a story written for [Represent](#).