

When to Hold and When to Fold
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I was 5 years old when I told my parents that I wanted to be a veterinarian. I was 14 years old when I told them that I wanted to build my family through birth *and* adoption. I was fortunate enough to be able to accomplish both goals, but both of them came with a price. During the time that I was struggling to get through Vet School, I wouldn't have guessed that one day I would abandon Veterinary practice (and the appreciation of clients) in favor of the ego-building(?) experience of parenting unattached children.....

After our second child was born, my husband and I began to give serious consideration to the possibility of adoption. We were fortunate enough to have a healthy boy and girl, and we felt that we were ready to explore other family-building options. Our first adoptee was Anchulee, a beautiful, tiny, and very stubborn little polecat who was born in Thailand and arrived home in October of 1989 at the tender age of 21 months. Boy, were we in for a rude awakening! I had not studied polecats in Vet School; nor was I at all educated about Attachment Disorder. I was already parenting 2 normal, on-target kids, so I thought I had some idea of what this job was all about. I was totally unprepared for the control battles over the tiniest of things; the lack of "warm fuzzies" towards my new daughter for many, many months; the lack of understanding that I received from the other adults in her environment that she was so adept at conning. Intellectually, I was *sure* that I was ready, willing and able to love "another mother's child" as much as I loved my birth children, but I was emotionally not feeling that way about Anchulee. After many years of struggle and self-education, I came to realize that it was the *lack of reciprocity* in the relationship between Anchulee and her family that was the problem--NOT my "inability" to love her. It wasn't until her brother Tony joined the family at the age of 9 years that I had a real understanding of Attachment Disorder, and the effects that an AD child can have on the dynamics of a *normal* family.

My birth children, Adam and Laura, were 5 and 3 years old at the time of Anchulee's arrival. I, myself, was parented by a "drill sergeant" as defined by Foster Cline in *Parenting With Love and Logic*. My parenting style was pretty similar to the way I was raised. I told them what they needed to do, and, by golly, they had better do it and do it now! I soon found, however, that my new daughter was not at all responsive to that approach. She didn't *care* what I wanted her to do, and in fact, was just as happy to do the opposite of what I wanted. As my frustration escalated, it became obvious that there had to be a better way.

It would be a full 2 1/2 years before I stumbled into a group of experienced Moms who started me on the teachings of Foster Cline. I credit those ladies with saving my sanity, and I am a lifelong fan of the teachings of Dr. Cline. However, it would be another 3 1/2 years, after the arrival of Tony, before I would be given Foster Cline's book on Attachment Disorder. In other words, I used his parenting methods long before I knew anything about AD. We had taken Tony to see a therapist, because Tony's behavior was destroying our family. At our first meeting, the therapist handed me *Hope for High Risk and Rage-Filled Children*. He wanted me to read it and see if I recognized Tony in the descriptions. I will *never* forget how I felt when I realized that all the feelings I had experienced, all the bizarre behaviors, the community reactions, the guilt, were all *documented* in this book! They were legitimized, validated, believed! I wasn't crazy after all! That day was the beginning of the end of my plans to return to Veterinary Medicine, for I came to realize that there was a far greater need for people to be educated about AD than there was for another veterinarian. Besides, I don't believe my education has been wasted, for I was told by a well-known Attachment therapist that her best foster parents were horse trainers, and I am very good at "Basic German Shepherd", (another Foster Cline term!)

I still clearly remember the day we made the decision to adopt a second time; the decision that resulted in the addition of Tony to our family. We were on our way to a vacation in Colorado, and it was the summertime. Anchulee's behavior was very difficult even when school was in session, but summertimes were even worse. So here we were, discussing the addition of a second adoptee, when the first one was about as much in reverse as a kid could be. We thought we had it figured out, though. We would make *sure* that this time we would get a child with a *good attitude*. We weren't concerned if he wasn't cute or smart, but we wanted to assure ourselves that he would move in a forward direction at least *part* of the time. As I write this, it amazes me how unprepared and naive we were at the time. However, the fact was that we still had never even heard about AD, so we were not operating with all the facts.

Tony arrived in July of 1993. He had spent 8 of his first 9 years in an orphanage in Ecuador. He is very cute and probably smart, but we are not sure about that because his *bad attitude* causes him to be quite adept at

noncompliance. My "enlightening" occurred in January of 1995, when the therapist handed me Foster Cline's book. Prior to that time, in November of 1994, we had welcomed home Cindy, a 14-year-old from the Philippines. So now our happy household consisted of two birth children and three Attachment-Disordered adoptees, only we still didn't KNOW that we were dealing with AD. We just knew that these kids operated from a different frame of reference than our birth children. We knew that they were unmotivated, unhappy, and uncooperative. We also knew that they had experienced a great deal of pain in their young lives, but they seemed unable or unwilling to address those issues, and without their cooperation we were unsuccessful in our attempts to help them. After *years* of watching Anchulee charm the socks off of every human being over the age of 5, we discovered that Cindy and Tony were equally as skilled in that area. Of course, the ability to be charming in public while totally destroying your family in private is a well-documented characteristic of AD children. However, the other adults in the child's life have to recognize and understand what AD is before they will believe the parents that this charming child may not be what he or she seems.....

Ultimately, the incredible stress at home, the criticism and condemnation from the community (mostly the schools), and the increasingly negative impact on the more "normal" children precipitated the disruption of Cindy. Although I still felt that we could possibly make the placement work, Cindy was adamant in her vocalization of her desire to leave our family (with its attendant emotional requirements). I simply could not cope with her behavior, the school's negative contribution, *and* the behavior of Tony and Anchulee. Cindy was with us for 6 months, and we poured a great deal of time, money, effort and emotion into her. She walked out of our lives and we have not heard from her since. Neither Tony nor Anchulee *appeared* to be very affected by Cindy's departure. It hurt my birth daughter very much, although my birth son was not too affected. Truly, Cindy had contributed very little towards the family and had been protecting herself emotionally, so Adam was not that attached to her. Cindy and Laura were closer, partly because Cindy had a birth sister in the Philippines about the same age as Laura. Ironically, it was also that fact that caused Cindy to be *jealous* of Laura, because Cindy's birthmom made no secret of her preference for the younger girl. One of the many times we had to deal with Social Services was over Cindy's contention that "we treated the birth kids better than the adopted kids". Cindy left in May 1995, just in time for Tony and Anchulee to move into their annual summertime disintegration.....

By the end of that summer, I was emotionally and physically a wreck. The entire family was planning a trip to Colorado over Labor Day weekend, but I just couldn't do it. I could barely tolerate being in the same house with Tony, much less take a vacation and be stuck in a van with him for hours. I also felt that I was bearing the brunt of Tony's behavior *by myself*. (AD kids typically pick on Mom the most.) I told my husband that I would take Adam, Laura, and Anchulee to Colorado and he could stay home with Tony, or he could take the kids and go to Colorado while I stayed home. My husband chose the latter option; however, he had not bargained on the response he received from Adam and Laura. Neither child wanted to be with Tony either, and they both elected to *skip the vacation and stay home with me!* When I realized just how polarized and dysfunctional my family had become, I took more drastic action. Ultimately, all 6 of us DID go to Colorado, but only 5 of us returned. Tony spent 90 days being evaluated and treated in therapeutic foster care in Colorado. He was diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, severe birth mother issues, and possibly depression. We picked him up the day before Thanksgiving, and he started a control battle before we even got to our hotel room that night. By March of 1996, things were worse than before, and the family faced the fact that Tony needed longer-term placement. Financially, this has been a tremendous burden, but the family remains committed to Tony. We just can't live with him. He returned to Colorado, but this time he was placed in a group home with about 8 carbon copies of himself. He quickly earned the reputation as the child most skilled in creating chaos, and then stepping back to watch the others take the blame. Small wonder my other kids were having a terrible time being around him. Around the time of his departure, I was diagnosed with Shingles, in addition to the hyperacidity and migraines that I was already treating. The other children were clearly relieved at his departure, and the family dynamics improved tremendously.

As of this writing, Tony is still in the group home. We attempted to spend a week with him recently, on another family trip to Colorado. He did very well for 3-4 days before the family closeness became too much for him to bear. He ended up stealing money from Adam, returning early to the group home, and refusing to hug his family before we left. He doesn't write or call, even when given an opportunity to do so. After telling his therapists for the last 3 months that he thinks he needs about 2 years in Colorado to work on his issues, he surprised everyone recently by announcing that he thinks he is ready to go home now. A big part of me is thrilled to hear him say that, but an equally large part of me is wondering how a child who can't make it with his family for a week is going to be able to

live with them full time. I also know that I cannot and will not allow my family to become what it was when Tony lived with us before. As of now we are taking it a day at a time.

When to Hold and When to Fold, (Roots and Wings, fall 1997)

It has been over a year since I first wrote about my family. (Roots & Wings, fall 1996) Many people from all over the United States have called or written me to express their thoughts about my story. With the exception of one letter, the overwhelming response was appreciation that I validated what apparently many other people are feeling.

In that year's time, much has happened in my family, both for me personally and for the family as a whole. Our ongoing struggle with the aftermath of Attachment Disorder has enabled me to recognize and respond to similar pain in the lives of others facing the challenge of parenting these most difficult children. I am now on the Board of Directors of National ATTACH, and I have started the first Regional Chapter in Kansas City. Although my family is *reasonably* mentally and physically healthy at this point, it has certainly been a most difficult year.....

My husband and I had already added three international adoptees to our family before we completely understood the ramifications of our choices. Our birth children were 5 and 3 at the time Anchulee arrived from Thailand in 1989 at the age of 21 months. Tony joined us in 1993 as a 9-year-old, having spent 8 of his first 9 years in an orphanage in Ecuador. Cindy was our last placement, arriving at the end of 1994. Sadly, she spent only 6 months with our family before her adoption disrupted in May of 1995. It was during the time that all three children were in the family and seriously disrupting our lives that we finally gained a realistic perspective of the monster we were up against-- Reactive Attachment Disorder.

Although I had several friends who did their best to prepare me for the unprecedented challenge of parenting special-needs children, apparently I was not a receiver to the messages being directed my way. In fact, it wasn't until one of those same friends proofed my first copy of this article that I even realized what a poor receiver I must have been! I certainly was more "connected" to some knowledgeable people than many pre-adoptive parents. I have extensive education myself and I am a firm believer in researching and preparing before making significant decisions. In a recent conversation with my friend, she challenged me on the fact that she had tried to prepare me even before Tony joined the family! So why didn't I grasp the concept of attachment disorder at that time?

My husband's first response to that question reflected our general naiveté at that time. Since we had asked only ONE thing of the placing agency, we felt confident that our one criterion would be met. All we wanted, we told them, was a child with a good attitude. We didn't care if he was cute or not-so-cute, smart or not-so-smart; we just wanted him to say "yes" and cooperate once in awhile. We believed we were getting a child that met those requirements. What did we know of RAD? I am not sure what we thought we were getting with Cindy. It is my friend's belief that my husband and I suffered under the same misconceptions as many other adoptive parents. We were convinced that OUR love and OUR commitment and OUR parenting skills could fix many of the potential problems. We were wrong.

After Cindy's departure we attempted to rebuild the fabric of our family. Some of us were still reeling from the visits with Social Services, the false accusations, the tension and lies. Tony and Anchulee were on the brink of a predictable summer decline. By August, I could not tolerate being around Tony at all, and ultimately he went to Colorado for his first 90-day placement. At that time he was diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, severe birth mother issues, and possibly depression. He rejoined us around Thanksgiving, but by March of 1996 he was again headed for residential placement. This time we expected him to live away from home indefinitely. A weeklong visit with Tony in June ended abruptly when Tony stole his brother's money. We resigned ourselves to "parenting from afar".

Although Anchulee had the best few months of her life in the spring of 1996, she rapidly deteriorated that summer. By August, she preferred to remain in her room wearing the same underwear for a week at a time and not brushing her teeth rather than comply with the most basic of requests or requirements. Tony was gone, presumably not to return, and Anchulee behaved as if almost 7 years of love and investment were but a feather in the wind. Although I had learned to protect my emotions to a large extent, Anchulee's delightful and *real* demeanor that past spring had caused my wall to crumble a bit. Her rapid descent in July and August caught me totally off guard, and I was poorly prepared. She realized the power she had over me at that time, and it cost *both of us* dearly. Her rock, her brick wall

Mom, was vulnerable. I found it necessary to retreat completely in order to lick my wounds and prepare for the next engagement. It was a very dismal time.

Anchulee never really pulled out of her slump that fall, even after starting school and resuming a more rigid schedule. It took a couple of months before Anchulee's teacher recognized my daughter's shallow and narcissistic behaviors. Fortunately for us, the teacher did finally "get on board", and for the rest of the school year we were at least able to hold Anchulee fairly accountable for her choices. Although she performed well academically (she repeated second grade), her peer relationships were a clear reflection of her dysfunction. At home, with every movement and facial expression she exuded the message that being a part of our family was a fate worse than death. She was passive-aggressive and non-compliant at every opportunity. Her long black hair was cut as a result of her poor self-care. The majority of her Christmas vacation was spent moving firewood and "thinking about her life".

After Tony's poor visit in June, he spent the entire summer in a group home in Colorado. We flew him home for a visit in early September. He was distant and difficult. (He was so disruptive when we went to church on Saturday night that he stormed around the parking lot screaming every obscenity he could think of at his Dad.) When he returned to Colorado on Sunday, we were firmly convinced he was never going to live with us again.

Around Thanksgiving, we received a letter from the group home parents detailing the arrangements that needed to be made to transfer legal guardianship to them. It was a decision we had made intellectually, but it really hit me hard emotionally. I shared my pain with Kathy Ryan, my wonderful friend, who along with her husband Larry, had provided numerous weekends of respite care for Tony throughout our most difficult times. Within several days of our initial conversation, Kathy called to suggest an incredible solution. She and Larry were willing to bring Tony into their home on a more permanent basis, with the idea of re-integrating him into our family to whatever extent he could tolerate. They had spent enough hours and days with him to have a realistic picture of what they were getting, and they would enter into the arrangement with no expectations that he would attach to them. They would be agreeable to being the "group home environment" during the times he was with them, and we could be his family. I was amazed and in tears. To me it was a clear answer to prayer, for I had really chafed at the idea of not being a tangible part of Tony's life, yet I could see that it was not possible to have him in my home full time. Against everyone's advice, including Tony's, we flew him home 8 days before Christmas. He left the airport with the Ryans after totally ignoring my family and me. For once I was not at all emotionally damaged by his rebuffs, for I realized that at least I was going to have the opportunity to be a presence in his life. When he lived with us full time it was impossible to ignore his constant efforts to keep everyone at a distance, but with *two* families to parent him, it would be much easier to ignore the barbs. We figured that even if we had an angry houseguest every weekend, it was still better than not being around him at all.

His first visit with us was the weekend before Christmas. As soon as he entered the house, I sat him in his favorite spot--in front of the TV. I handed him the remote control, told him to have a good time and then I left the room to continue my Mom duties with the other three children. We treated him as a guest that first weekend and did not require *anything* from him. He spent Christmas Eve with us and he seemed to have a wonderful time. He spent Christmas morning with the Ryans but came back to our house by early afternoon. The most amazing thing was the fact that early on, Tony expressed a real desire to be with our family. He considered his time at the Ryans to be simply marking time.

Given his anger and obscenities during his last visit home, as well as a repeat performance on the phone when told he was returning to Kansas, we were clearly skeptical that he was, indeed, glad to be home. However, his attitude continued to seem genuine, and clearly he was making a great effort to get along with everyone. Very soon, he was spending weekdays with the Ryans and every weekend with us. One of the most memorable scenes from those first few weeks occurred after school during the middle of the week. Kathy called me on my mobile phone and asked if I could come to their house as soon as possible. She indicated that Tony was having a very hard time right then and that he had something he wanted to say to me as soon as possible. When I arrived, Tony was pacing in the hallway upstairs and in his room, and he was crying profusely. Tony *never* cried of his own volition, and if he did cry, it was never with the emotional intensity of what I was witnessing at that moment. As soon as he saw me, he whirled around and blurted, "I have been faking it!! I have been faking having fun with the family!" Obviously he caught me quite off guard, but I motioned for him to sit next to me on the bed while we talked. I started recalling several specific incidents where I had witnessed him having what I *thought* was a genuinely good time. I asked him about each one, and each time I said, "Were you faking it then?" Each time he answered, "No, that was real then." Finally

I said, "Tony, I think what you are feeling inside that is so confusing to you is the feeling of being *happy*. Have you ever felt happy before?" Through his tears he peered at me and shook his head "no". As we continued to talk, and as he happily snuggled with me on the bed, I became more and more convinced my assessment was correct. He was terrified and confused by the feelings that were welling up inside of him. As he struggled to understand and identify what was happening to him, his list of possibilities sadly did not include anything positive. He returned home with me that night even though it was mid-week. He was spending more and more time with us.

By Valentine's Day he was making no secret of the fact that his goal was to return to our home full time. Goal? My RAD son had a goal? A goal that revolved around commitment? I was giddy with enthusiasm and excitement. The Ryans were equally optimistic. Some of the rest of my family was a little more skeptical, however. In spite of a few misgivings, Tony moved home full time in February. He was fun for *me* to be around; he was reciprocal to *me*; he was funny and appropriate. *I did not see his selectivity at that time*. The months of February, March and early April gave me some of the most cherished memories I will ever have of Tony.

And what was Anchulee doing during Tony's amazing progress? Her birthday in January was a muted event. It is so very hard to celebrate *with* a child or *about* a child when that same child is so incredibly difficult to be around. I suspect there are those who believe that a child's birthday should be celebrated no matter what; I disagree. I believe the real world will respond to my child's behavior with real responses, and throwing a big party for a child who has been non-compliant and sour-faced for *months* is not a real response. By March of 1997, her behavior was having a very negative impact on the family. Being the charitable friend that I am, I did not want the Ryans to get out from under the burden of co-parenting my children, so when Kathy offered a few days before spring break to give the family some respite from Anchulee's 24 hour a day pout, I leapt at the opportunity!! Anchulee had only been at the Ryans for a couple of days when Kathy reported, "You know, for a cute kid, she sure isn't very cute!!" Anchulee remained at the Ryans for 6 weeks, acting the entire time as if her *family* was the one with the problem, and all she needed to do was wait us out and surely we would come around. Anchulee's apparent unconcern at being apart from her family raised her teacher's awareness considerably. Periodically I would swoop in unannounced to Anchulee and take her places with the family. She steadfastly maintained her pout during these visits. It appeared nothing was going to change.

After a phone conversation with a therapist in Evergreen, I realized the message I was still sending Anchulee was that *I was still holding the units of concern for her life!* When we did see her, I always asked her if she was thinking about her choices; I pointed out errors in her thinking; I made a point of telling her what the family was doing. The therapist made me realize that although my *overt* message was one of, "you make your own choices", my *covert* message was, "we want you to work on your life; you should work on your life." The next time I picked her up, I immediately turned to her and said, "I have been going about this all wrong. You don't want to work on your life, and I have been trying to make you. You need to know that it is OK with me if you want to live away from home. We have another child that lives away from home, and I am OK with loving him from afar. I can love you no matter where you live. From now on I will not ask you to work on your life." Four days later, at Tony's birthday party the third weekend in April, Anchulee asked to come home. I asked her to describe to me what a little girl who wanted to live at home said and did to convince her family she belonged at home. She told me family members loved each other, contributed to the running of the house, treated each other with respect and apologized when they were wrong. (Not exactly in those same words!) She then agreed to apologize individually to each member of the family for the pain and sadness she had caused over the past 8 months. She moved home that day.

Tony had a terrific birthday party, and with his blessings we celebrated 11 instead of 13. He didn't feel 13, (11 was still a big stretch), and we intended to have him repeat 5th grade instead of heading to Middle School. He was happy that day, genuinely happy. My parents were there, and I fixed a special dinner with joy in my heart instead of resentment. We bought Tony a terrific portable CD player. Truly it was a memorable day.

Shortly after Anchulee returned home, I finally made the critical decision to have her evaluated by a psychiatrist. I had avoided this step thus far for several reasons. First, although I had the names of several psychiatrists on my KC Attachment Network mailing list, I had not heard glowing reports of understanding and support about any of them. On the contrary, as a profession they were more apt to be known for their rebuttal of RAD as a legitimate diagnosis. Since I was not convinced that the issue of Reactive Attachment Disorder would be acknowledged, my second concern centered around my belief that the first impulse of the psychiatrist would be to medicate my daughter for some *other* diagnosis, most likely depression. I had not yet come to my own conclusions about whether or not she

made bad choices because she was depressed, or whether she was depressed because she made bad choices. In my mind there was a difference, and I sincerely wanted a mental health professional to help me sort it out. My fear was that the psychiatrist would merely jump at the first opportunity to see if there was a magical drug to make her symptoms disappear. Before we made that initial visit, I needed to be at peace with the decision to try drug therapy, even if it was only as a diagnostic tool.

The first appointment went very much as I expected, although the doctor appeared to be more receptive to my thoughts than I had anticipated. It wasn't until after we left his office and various comments came filtering back through my head that I realized how condescending he actually had been. My daughter did leave with a prescription for an anti-depressant. It did, in fact, have a profound impact on her affect and demeanor within a couple of weeks of starting therapy. I am glad that we took that step, although the effect has tapered off considerably this past couple of months. I still believe she functions better with it, and she will remain on it for awhile at least. Because of my knowledge of Reactive Attachment Disorder and because I had been so discounted for so long I had developed extraordinarily thick skin, I challenged the psychiatrist about his assessments when my daughter had routine medicine evaluations. It was on one of those visits that he told me he never made an official diagnosis of RAD "because it gives parents an excuse to blame their children" for their problems. (He had her diagnoses listed as depression and "NOS" - Not Otherwise Specified.) In addition, he stated he believed that RAD was a form of depression, relating back to Freudian views that a child suffered depression as a result of loss of the birthmother. When I tried to pin him down as to how many acting out RAD kids responded to anti-depressant therapy, he quickly ducked the issue. Needless to say, we don't see him anymore.

Although Tony's birthday party was a delightful event, there were several incidents in April that indicated things were beginning to unravel. The first and third weekends of that month I traveled out of town to attend meetings. Tony did not handle my absence well. He questioned my husband endlessly about plane crashes and accidents. He became disruptive, volatile and uncharacteristically emotional. When I called home, he sobbed into the phone that he missed me. Although he appeared to recover upon my return, he was acutely aware of his newly developing vulnerability. In my opinion, he decided at that time that he had two options: continue to allow himself to feel, acknowledge and express emotions, or shut down, distance everyone and return to the familiar "dead zone".

It was with profound sorrow that we watched Tony choose the latter option and systematically destroy all the good bridges he had built. It brings tears to my eyes even now as I document his decline. With incredible rapidity he reverted to the Tony of old, only this time as a result of my own parenting growth and education, I was much more difficult to provoke. Tony found it necessary to "up the ante" to get a reaction, and so he did. He refused to get in the car at a shopping mall one day, resulting in his lying to two local policewomen about where he lived and why he was wandering around. I provided them with a thorough explanation of Tony's troubles and added their names to my growing list of contacts. A day or two after that he resorted to throwing things at me at home and kicking me as I tried to restrain him, so again I phoned the police. I was blessed to have a most impressive, most helpful Mexican American sheriff who immediately got the picture. He sat Tony down and told him in no uncertain terms that there was enough evidence to take him to jail immediately. He spoke to Tony in Spanish as well, although Tony ignored his efforts. The sheriff listened carefully to all I had to say about what we have done for our son and what we were planning to do (we were scheduled to have family therapy in July with Martha Welch, nationally known author of *Holding Time*). He looked around at our home, our acreage and our numerous dogs, cats and horses and said, "I don't get it! What kid would not be happy here?" He stated that he did NOT want to take Tony to jail because, due to the assault issues, Social Services would need to get involved. The sheriff commented, "You guys are on Square 20 and Social Services will start you on Square 1!" Ultimately it was decided we would not press charges, and the sheriff told me our best bet would be to make a private hospital placement if we needed some emergency intervention in the future. I was unsure of how Tony would behave when the sheriff left, but I felt we had no other choices at that time. Ironically, the sheriff turned out to have a Master's Degree in Psychology, and as he was leaving he told me he felt Tony exhibited characteristics of Borderline Personality Disorder. After the sheriff left, I had to drive to pick up the other children at school. Tony was quite out of control when we first left, but he calmed down within about thirty minutes. Incredibly, he processed so little about the events of the day that he had no qualms about asking me to buy him a milkshake at McDonalds within an hour of the sheriff's departure! Reactive Attachment Disorder at its best. It was a most eventful day.

Soon after that, Tony returned to the Ryans for a "cooling off" period. While he was at Ryans, he repeatedly articulated that he wanted to return to Colorado, that life was too hard here, that he didn't want to be in our family

anymore. We had long held the belief that many of those choices *were* up to Tony, that we could not make him be a family member if he had no desire to be one. When he returned home mid morning the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, I called his bluff. I showed him the long letter I had written to the group home parents detailing Tony's escapades, and I handed him a paper that had flight information to Colorado. Tony began to come unglued. By the time we were attempting to eat lunch, he was acting so bizarre that I put him on my lap and held him while the others finished eating. As his behavior continued to escalate, it became clear we were going to need some help, so I suggested to my husband that we hospitalize him. My husband agreed, and he took over the restraint of Tony so I could make some phone calls. At one point, my husband released Tony when he insisted he was under control. Tony then grabbed a kitchen knife and proceeded to huddle under a blanket and make weird noises. My first call was to (where else?) the insurance company, to see what our options were. The agent could hear Tony carrying on in the background, and he told me to call 911. We did, and soon a man/woman team of officers appeared at our door. The woman was in charge, and the man joined my husband on the floor to aid in restraining Tony, who was by now shouting obscenities, kicking, spitting, etc. The woman officer decided that there was too much risk (translation: too much liability) for the officers to transport Tony to the hospital, so *she* called the EMT's. The result was that, as the rest of the family watched helplessly, Tony was strapped to a board and carried out the door to an ambulance, and then transported to the psychiatric ward of the local hospital. Was it really only a few weeks ago that we had celebrated Mother's Day and Tony's birthday?

At that point, Tony completely gave up any effort to regain control of himself. His decision was final -- return to the dead zone and not venture into the scary and uncharted waters of emotional attachment. His behavior at the hospital was typical. He appeared pretty normal to them, although I am not sure how normal it is for a child to kick his Dad in the leg in front of all the staff. He stayed through mid week, and then returned for a few days to the outpatient program. One of those return trips was precipitated by Tony's attack on both his parents with a coat hanger. My husband restrained him while I drove to the hospital, but at one point Tony broke loose. He either lunged at me or attempted to jump out of the moving vehicle before my husband recaptured him. Although the hospital staff did not really "get it", I gave them no opportunity to interfere in what we were doing. A part of me had to chuckle when they asked me, several days into his hospitalization, just exactly what services did I want them to provide for us?? My answer was simple. I said, "Just exactly what you are doing so far: a safe place for him, respite for us, and no interference with our approach!" I am sure they felt as if their little daily programs did him a world of good, but that is their misconception, not mine.....

After that terrible experience, my family could clearly see the writing on the wall. One of the most significant memories I have of those few days was the fact that, within 24 hours of one another, Kathy Ryan and I came to the same conclusions about Tony. We were both very committed to him, and we both think very much alike. Independent of one another, we both drew the same conclusion. Tony needed to be in the group home where no emotional demands were placed on him. Not even *two* families could make it work. We discussed the details with the group home parents and in early June, Tony returned to Colorado. He actually spent the last few days before he left with us instead of the Ryans, and he seemed relieved not to have to work at it anymore. The night before he left we had a family picture taken, wearing the matching outfits I had made for my family. He chose not to take that shirt when he left.

I write Tony much more often than I did during his first placement. There is no expectation that Tony will ever return home to live with us. I am incredibly sad I will not be the day to day parent in Tony's life, but I am *100% convinced* I did everything I could to make it work. In fact, I worked much harder on Tony's life than he did. I simply will not sacrifice my entire family for the sake of one child. No one would win in that scenario, for I do not believe Tony is happy in the environment of a close family. Truly, Tony is not "happy" in any environment right now. I write often with the news of the family, but I have no expectation that I will ever get a letter back from Tony. I write because I want to, because I am still his Mom, because I care about him no matter where he lives.

Interestingly enough, in a family therapy session just last week, my husband expressed sadness and guilt that he did not miss Tony very much. It was revealed in that session, not for the first time I'm sorry to say, that Tony's enjoyable behavior around me *was at the expense of much of the rest of the family*. In the beginning of Tony's time with us I was the clear target, and the rest of the family had a much different view of his behavior. At the end, I was the one with the rose colored glasses. How terribly sad that my good memories were to some degree at the expense of my other loved ones. My husband never saw the good behavior that Tony presented to me when he moved home in February. The "happy" kid was just an illusion -- all the old anger was still present, just redirected. I do

remember my husband having doubts and saying so at the time, but this time I was the one not hearing the message. I saw what I wanted to see and believed what I wanted to believe.

Tony's departure of course had a major impact on the rest of the family, but there was a peculiar sort of *déjà vû* about the experience. The birth kids were as thrilled as I was when Tony appeared to be doing well, but he started unloading on them even when he was still stable around me. Anchulee was struggling mightily with her own issues, but she still could see the error of Tony's thinking. There was not much doubt that Tony was choosing to self-destruct. The hospitalization experience was the finale for us all. I still have many talks with Anchulee about Tony and my hopes for and questions about his future. I am at peace with the decision to place him in long term residential care. We have visited him once already, and we will continue to see him as often as we can. At our initial visit he started off angry and ignoring us, but warmed up to be fairly personable by the end. It hurts that he is gone, but it is the way it has to be.

With Anchulee on Prozac and Tony gone for good, we moved into the summer still reeling from the storms just endured. In April I had made arrangements for family therapy in July with Dr. Martha Welch in New York State. The original plan was for there to be 6 of us going. Even though I *thought* Tony was doing well, I was not so naive as to think there were no issues present. Clearly we still had issues with Anchulee, and the marriage had suffered along with the children. Anchulee maintained better than in past summers through the month of June. We spent July 4th with family in Indiana and traveled on to New York after the holiday. Although we only had 8 hours of therapy with Martha, the benefits were tremendous. Her approach to holding therapy is very family centered, and a great deal of bonding occurred between all of us. Even the birth kids were very impressed, and they love to have holdings even now. My birth daughter has a tough time expressing her feelings, and Martha's training has given me another tool to use with her. Martha's assessment of Anchulee added to what we had already learned about her, and we returned home empowered to prevent Anchulee's behavior from ever deteriorating to the same extent it had in the past. So far, we have been fairly successful in that effort.

Martha spoke at great length to our family therapist here in Kansas, and he continues to meet with us regularly and assess the family's well being. In a recent session I was forced to face some difficult truths. My birth daughter's insecurity about divulging her feelings in part stems from the disruption in her own attachment that occurred as a result of the addition to our family of these troubled children. My birth son enjoyed a peaceful 4 or 5 years before the family dynamics began to deteriorate, and he is definitely a more secure child. What a bitter pill to swallow! While I believe my birth children have also benefited from the hard lessons we have all learned, it is a fact that a tremendous amount of our time, energy and resources have been devoted to the disruptive family members. It certainly seems unfair. I am optimistic that there is a great deal I can do to repair and increase my daughter's attachments, but it grieves me that I am in the position of having to fix it at all. Martha will tar and feather me if I even think of adding a foster child or another adoptee! So would my parents!

At this point, my husband and I do not intend to pursue another adoption, although in all honesty if the Lord placed a child in our path we would not likely say no. But we certainly are not looking. We have discussed running a group home in about 10 years when the present crew is out of the house. (Although I guess that means Anchulee will have to get through each grade in one year instead of two!) We do respite care on a moment's notice for other members of our group. I am very tough on these little kids, especially when they threaten me with the "real kitchen knife" they have at home and that threaten to use to kill me. Although I am not an officially trained therapeutic parent, I have attended many hours of workshops and experienced untold hours of personal practice. I have the right disposition for the job and the tenacity of a bulldog. I cannot think of a better direction for my energy than the life and well being of a damaged child.

When I am overwhelmed, I often think of a comment I read on the attachment disorder support group on the Internet. Someone reminded us all that even Jesus asked that the cup be passed from Him. As I stated at the beginning of my story, I am in much, much better shape than I was a year or two ago. I have a wonderful support network from which to gain strength. I am able to differentiate the things that I have the power to change from the things over which I have no control. Through my involvement with ATTACH and KCAN I have the ability to advocate in a larger way for these children as well as their exhausted, underappreciated, and unprepared families. My husband's comment after reading these words were that there is much less angst in what I write.

After years of struggling with a school system that had no idea what was happening, I have been incredibly blessed this year. I believe one of the many reasons the Lord returned Tony to our home for 6 short months was to work us into the special school that Anchulee now attends. Her teacher is the exact opposite of those I had experienced in the past. Her instincts are right on target, and amazingly, she is pursuing additional training in Behavior Disordered children! She even plans on presenting research and papers to her BD class on Reactive Attachment Disorder. Her professor is enthusiastically supportive of her plans! In addition to the wonderful teacher, the principal is a blessing as well. The entire school is supportive and sends the message that parents may actually know something about their children. When I send Anchulee out the door, I hold none of the units of concern for her academic achievements or lack thereof. I am calm and confident that the school will hold her accountable and that no blame will be sent my way. That fact alone has lifted my burden tremendously.

I no longer worry about what others might think of the way I parent, the things I espouse or believe, or whether or not someone else "gets it". If they don't get it, they just need to stay out of my way. There are many things that I know nothing about, but life with an attachment-disordered child is something I do know about! Most of all, I have redefined what is worth stressing over and what is of little concern in my life. Child abuse, neglect and abandonment are worth effort and energy; flat tires, late appointments and dirty floors don't qualify. I think I am emerging from the tunnel.

When to Hold and When to Fold, (fall 1998)

For the third summer in a row I find myself compelled to sit down at the computer and describe my family's experiences with children suffering from Reactive Attachment Disorder. At the end of last summer, I wrote about our son Tony's return to the group home after our second attempt to reintegrate him into our family. When he returned to Colorado last June, we were sad but resigned to the reality that as long as he refused to address his issues, it would be impossible for him to live in our home. Although Tony is now chronologically 14 years old, his 9 years in an Ecuadorian orphanage caused extensive emotional damage. As of this writing, he remains in the group home.

Our daughter Anchulee arrived from Thailand at the age of 21 months. She is now 10½ years old, and she has also struggled for most of her short life with issues of loss and abandonment. In my second article I described our family's sojourn in July of 1997 to seek therapy from Dr. Martha Welch, author of *Holding Time* . It was a most positive and beneficial experience. Martha's techniques allowed us to pull Anchulee through the summer in better shape than we had managed in the past. Holding time also strengthens the bond we share with our birth children, 14-year-old Adam and 11-year-old Laura.

Although we were extremely disappointed and discouraged at our inability to keep Tony in our home, we were not terribly surprised, either. We had long since learned that what we *want* does not always translate into what we *get*. We had already experienced an adoption disruption when the placement of a teen girl in our home proved unsuccessful. It was difficult for all of us when Tony left again, but it was most traumatic for Anchulee. However, she did a great job of recognizing how hard we had tried to make it work, and she had her own difficulties in living with him.

Anchulee started school last fall fairly stabilized and moderately motivated. She was incredibly fortunate to have landed in the classroom of the most astute teacher I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. (Anchulee might not have felt so fortunate!) For the very first time in years, I sent my daughter to school knowing *the entire staff* would hold her accountable and see through her games and manipulations. She certainly did not set the world on fire academically even though she was a year older than most of the other children, but she did fairly well. In fact, she was appropriate enough in her behavior that she also resumed dance classes last fall. Past attempts at dance and piano lessons had demonstrated poor effort and performance, increased control battles, resentment that money was wasted, and no apparent investment on the part of Anchulee.

For the first time we felt as if Anchulee was actually making some real friends. She played on a soccer team last fall, and although she again seemed noncommittal in her attitude towards extracurricular activities, she did enjoy the company of her teammates. We were pleased to see her invited to a few birthday parties and overnights. In the past, she had never invested in any relationships enough to be invited anywhere.

As a family, we were applying our hard-learned knowledge to other troubled children and their families. I had

started a not-for-profit support and educational advocacy organization known as KC Attachment Network. The group was growing rapidly and we were finding ourselves besieged by stressed out families looking for answers. Our policy of providing respite care (and a boot camp environment) for these children resulted in us having an extra child around quite often. While each child was obviously quite unique, they all had some striking similarities, and their *families* were remarkably similar. What the families had in common was the fact that they were all at the end of their rope. We found it infinitely easier to deal with someone else's RAD kid than it was to deal with our own. Not *easy*, necessarily, but *easier*.

In November we were thrilled to receive a Family Service Award from Heart of America Family Services. We were honored for our work with RAD children and for starting KC Attachment Network. The award ceremony was the Monday before Thanksgiving and we were able to arrange for Tony to be with us. Tony was appropriate and fun to be around during the entire visit. My parents also came, and we had a delightful holiday. I have to admit, one of the highlights of the award ceremony was my delight at seeing a high-ranking official of the school district that had so effectively undermined and belittled me. Considering they had debunked the very existence of RAD, how sweet it was to be receiving recognition for our work with RAD children. Perhaps not a very Christian attitude, but it sure did feel good.

Thanksgiving rapidly moved into Christmas and we made plans to spend the holiday with my parents in Colorado. Tony joined us on the 26th. He seemed glad to be there, and somewhat disappointed that he had not been with us on Christmas day. His attitude was wonderful, just like during the Thanksgiving holiday. We all had a delightful time. The pictures I took showed a relaxed expression on the faces of all the children. Tony drove home with us for a few days and then returned to the group home.

Anchulee's birthday is the end of January, and for the first time she had *real friends* to invite to a party. We even discussed in advance her propensity to get out of control during exciting times, and she tried hard to maintain herself. In school, she persisted in her unwillingness to share any school information with me: grades, field trips, handouts, homework – whatever. I knew the school would inform me when grades dropped past a certain point, and I was equally at peace with their ability to handle her “stuff”. For once I could sit back and let it happen....

It DID happen, around mid March, when she suddenly decided that she was not going to take in a current events assignment. It didn't matter that she earned a weekly appointment with the principal and the opportunity to find an article in the principal's paper. It didn't matter that her friends looked at her as if she was nuts when she missed recess to make up the work she missed while visiting the principal. I informed her it was Dad's and my duty to insure that she could eventually support herself, and clearly she was choosing NOT to do that with her brains; consequently, I would make sure she had the opportunity to do extra household chores to enable her to be the best housecleaner she could be. It didn't matter. It also didn't matter that she shut down to such a degree that she forfeited her spring dance recital after 6 months of lessons and a paid-for costume.

In April, I presented an in-service on RAD for the entire school staff. At the time we scheduled it, Anchulee was not overtly bucking the tide. She was, however, completely down the tubes by the time I did the presentation. My emotional difficulty in watching her once again wreck her life was evident when I spoke. I spend so much time trying to teach my children how to show emotions, I never hide my own feelings anymore. Because I love her so much, and I so often feel helpless and incredibly frustrated at my apparent inability to affect any change in her, I often show strong emotions when I speak about RAD. In my presentation I have slides of Anchulee that show the unkempt hair, nasty-looking-face persona that we so often see at home, sometimes for weeks and months at a time. Very few teachers had seen that side of my daughter. Even so, they had all done a remarkable job of recognizing her special needs and following through on accountability.

Nothing seemed to work to jolt her back to “normalcy”, so we returned to some of Martha Welch's suggestions. I moved all her clothes downstairs to my closet, and I adjusted my expectations to that of a 4-year-old. No decisions to make, nothing to stress over, no worries over what to wear that day. I find she is more interested in acting her age when it is her idea.

It was in March that we received our first letter from Kathlene. Kathy was the middle girl of a sibling group of 6 that we knew from our time in Indiana. We had become extensively involved with the 3 girls from late summer of 1991 until we moved to Kansas on January 1, 1994. Kathy and her sisters spent many weekends and holidays with our family. Their mom was an alcoholic and their dad had died. They were needy in many, many ways, although things

had been significantly better for them before their dad had died. We had even attempted to obtain guardianship of them while we lived in Indiana, but we were unsuccessful. It was difficult to leave them behind when we moved to Kansas, but we made it clear to them that we would always be available to help.

Although I had heard from the other 2 girls several times, Kathlene had not written us at all. The news from the other two was usually dismal – the oldest girl had 2 children by the time she was 18, and another letter telling us that Kathy and her younger sister were in the Indiana Girl's School. When Kathy eventually did write us in March of 98, it was, indeed, from the Indiana Girl's School. Her letters stated that she had been there for the better part of the last year and a half, although she had been out briefly in the fall of 97. She had nowhere to go, no family members functional enough to take her. (Mom is one of 16 kids!) She was scoping out her options.

Her 17th birthday was in March, and soon after receiving her letter, the family piled in the van and drove to Indiana to visit her on her birthday in the Girl's School. (Luckily it fell over Spring Break!) We started the paperwork to bring her to Kansas, but not before spelling out clear expectations of what would be required for her to live with us. I wrote some very strong letters, detailing where my family had been before, and where we would NOT go again. She agreed, and stated she was very interested in improving her life, getting a high school diploma, and having a family. (None of her sibs have a high school diploma or GED, even though 4 of them are older. The youngest girl has been out of school and on the run since October 97. She recently turned 16 years old.)

Kathy moved in with us in early May 1998. In many respects, she possessed a 17-year-old brain, which made processing things so much easier. She found it very confusing at the beginning trying to figure out the dynamics of Anchulee and her relationship to the rest of us. It looked, of course, like we were scapegoating Anchulee. However, as Kathy became the recipient of Anchulee's maneuvers, the light bulb came on somewhat. Kathy had the most difficulty balancing her loyalty and concern for her family of origin with her developing feelings for my family and for me as her new Mom. She started the alternative high school program in the fall, and she attended KC Attachment Network support group meetings. We obtained permanent guardianship of her in July, although we stipulated that there be some easy options available to us if things should rapidly deteriorate. In deference to our request, she was left on probation.

Tony's Spring Break fell a week after everyone else's. He came for a visit in March, and since the other kids were in school he spent most of his time with me. He was decidedly unpleasant, apparently a continuation of his current attitude in the group home. The group home mom was quite blunt in her description of his behavior prior to his visit. She had never seen him quite so nasty for such a prolonged period. Although he had somewhat of a favored position in the group home because of his long-term status, he was perilously close to losing it. When he left, mostly we just gave a sigh of relief. How depressing to realize that is the way one feels. It was especially disheartening because we had been so optimistic after his 2 previous visits in November and December. It clearly reminded us who holds the cards when it comes to an individual's behavior.

Anchulee muddled along with little change until early June. We often attend Saturday evening worship, and on one particular day she had been her usual difficult self for a prolonged period. We have a special kid's sermon, and she went up front when the children were called. The topic was about turning anger into joy, and sadness into happiness – letting the Lord work to make those changes in your heart. She came back and sat down, and her Dad and I about bored a hole into her, indicating we sure thought the topic applied to her! The thought was not lost on her either, for she squirmed quite uncomfortably in her seat. As the regular sermon started, it was even MORE applicable to her, and she knew it! Imagine my surprise when my Ice Queen reached out and touched both her parents, showing on her face that the ice was melting just a little. I scooped her into my lap, and she immediately started to sob. After the service, she and I met with our pastor, and then we prayed at the altar and my daughter asked Christ into her heart. It was a profound experience for her. She is still a very wounded child with a myriad of issues, but at least we now have the foundation of being able to talk about the fact that God does not make mistakes. She is NOT a mistake.

After that experience, Anchulee's attitude improved significantly. Earlier in the summer, even while she was still a mess, we had decided to send her to culture camp. Personally, I was not all that convinced that culture camp was such a terrific idea, and I had some serious concerns about possible repercussions. (Translation: what does a week of successful manipulation of adults do to a RAD child?) However, I hesitated in letting my own biases get in the way of what MIGHT be a positive experience for her, so off she went in July. She returned home on a Friday. By Tuesday morning her behavior was so obnoxious that I did an impromptu holding and confronted her about what the

heck she was doing! All weekend she had sent numerous clear but nonverbal messages that she desperately needed me to retake control of her. Because she had been in charge of her own clothes while at camp, I decided it was a golden opportunity to allow her to move her things back up to her room. The very same day she moved her clothes, she “forgot” to wear anything under her shorts!! She had to turn around and move her clothes back downstairs, where they remained until the start of school.

When I started the holding, I asked Anchulee point blank what was going on with her. At first she said that while she was gone she had not missed us at all. I said, “OK, fine. Now WHAT is going on with you?” Suddenly she burst into tears and said she had missed us desperately, and she never wanted to go back to camp again. She went on to say that when she “acted bossy and powerful”, *no one called her on it and she didn't like how out of control that made her feel!* I promised her that she was safe again and that she would not have to go to camp next summer if she didn't want to. It was a powerful and productive session.

In spite of the catharsis of the “camp holding”, Anchulee didn't regain the security she had before camp. A couple of weeks later, the family made plans to spend a week with my parents in Colorado. My folks stayed at our house a couple of days before we left to join them at their home. During their overnight stay, my whole family sat around our kitchen table and explained to my parents what the dynamics were with Anchulee. We explained that after 9 years of facilitating and encouraging Anchulee to make half as much investment in US as we made in HER, we were tired and disgruntled. What that meant was that while we loved her very much, we didn't like her attitude at all, and we were not going to spend our vacation worrying about her. If she wanted to be a jerk, fine. We were not going to let her stinkiness slow us down, and she was not going to be doing much at all. She could read a book while we did the fun family stuff that she was thumbing her nose at. Basically, we told my folks that while Anchulee maybe had not changed that much, the rest of us had. We were taking a break from worrying about her. My parents struggled with that somewhat, but we left them little choice. They were instructed to keep their thoughts to themselves and let us “do our thing”.

Prior to driving to my parents, we detoured to the Attachment Center at Evergreen to enable me to present at their annual conference. Once again, my emotions were on the table for all to see while I presented, for once again my daughter was a mess. I think some people were offended by my stance that there seemed to be little one could do to help someone who was not interested in helping herself. After I presented, I spoke to one of the therapists at ACE and confided that although I considered myself a child advocate, sometimes I didn't feel very good about children. He completely understood what I was saying and how frustrating it was for me to feel so helpless. No one wants to give up on a kid, but unless the kid cares about himself, you're spinning your wheels.

The first 3 days at my parent's home went about as expected. Anchulee continued her pout and her victim stance, and the rest of us essentially ignored her. She did nothing and made no decisions. Tuesday night as I was putting her to bed I decided to sit and cuddle with her. Not that she was necessarily cuddle material, but she still needed to feel loved. It was like cuddling with a park bench. She was tied up in knots and very angry over how she was destroying her own vacation. She started to fight me, and soon we were in a holding. I had come to Colorado with absolutely no intentions of doing any therapeutic work, for I needed my own vacation, but I simply could not put her to bed that full of fight.

When my husband heard her yelling, he joined me upstairs. It was a classic holding, with Anchulee screaming that she hated us both! But how necessary it was, for the venom just came pouring out. Things took a distinct turn, however, when my mom came storming up the stairs and declared, “No more holdings in my house!” Apparently she had articulated to my other children that we were emotionally abusing Anchulee. I refused to allow my mom to stop what I knew my daughter needed, so we finished what we started. After Anchulee calmed down, we went downstairs together to talk to my parents. Anchulee explained that we were *helping* her, not *hurting* her. My mom did not want to talk to me, so I delivered a very clear message to my father. I told him I agreed that he and mom were well within their rights to decide what went on in their home and what didn't. Having said that, however, I also stated it was up to my husband and me to decide what our children needed. I told him I could not promise “No more holdings”, so if that was a problem for them we needed to know. I made it clear we would vacate their home if our decisions were uncomfortable for them. Lastly, I requested that he discuss this with my mom and get back to me.

By Thursday morning I had not received an answer from him, so I asked what they had decided. He told me he did not agree with what we were doing but was not going to prohibit us from doing it. I pressed him to be sure he was

speaking for them both, and he stood firm that we did not have to promise no more holdings.

Anchulee was in much better spirits after her holding, and in fact was so appropriate that she was allowed to participate in family activities. Kathy, on the other hand, had a rough day on Thursday. It was hard for her to be around us all the time with no space to get away by herself. She missed some fun stuff on Thursday, and was pretty moody at dinner. She soon loosened up, however, as we made plans for all of us, grandparents included, to go into town and get an old-time picture taken. While standing in the parking lot in town, Kathy handed me a note she had written expressing her feelings and thoughts on the events of the day. (It was much easier for her to write her feelings than it was to talk to me.) I looked at it briefly and told her I would read it after the picture was taken. I DID read it on the way back home, and then gave it to my husband to read. We both felt there were things we needed to discuss with Kathy, so we called her upstairs after we arrived home. The other children, not wanting to miss anything, came upstairs with her. We were not planning on any big, intensive session; in fact, most of what we wanted to clarify involved the family as a whole, so we easily decided to include all the children in the conversation. It started off as a normal family discussion, with my husband and me defining normal and appropriate ways to demonstrate caring and commitment to those you love and care about. We discussed Kathy's lack of experience in those areas. It was a non-judgmental, nurturing and supportive discussion. As the conversation progressed, some of it applied to Anchulee as well. She was already well aware that she, too, had much to learn in those areas, and her awareness began to express itself in her response. I made a point of clarifying to her that although her actions often caused difficulties for the family, we still loved her very much; always have, always will. She declared that she was UNLOVABLE! Her response was genuine, not manipulative, and she truly radiated a message that she felt unlovable. We all hastened to assure her she was incorrect. We hugged her, or at least we tried. She began to pull away and fight our attempts to hug her, all the while sinking further and further into her private grief. I asked her if she felt she was unlovable because her birth mom had made an adoption plan for her. I was obviously right on target, for she really began to wail at this point. Inadvertently I had also struck a nerve with Kathy, for she, too, began to shed silent tears.

When we adopted troubled children, we were not AFRAID of emotional pain, but we certainly were inexperienced in identifying its roots and dealing with it appropriately. There are simply no words to describe how hard it is to watch the people you care about deal with rejection and abuse issues. If we could take their pain from them, we would, but the best we can do is comfort and reassure them as they address their personal grief. At least for that moment, Kathy accepted the comfort we offered although it was a very emotionally draining experience for her. Still, she clearly recognized the unconditional love we were offering, and understood that it was hers for the taking. If only it was that simple. Anchulee, on the other hand, continued to simply feel the grief and fight the love and support we extended to her.

We all were caught totally off-guard by Anchulee's response. Never have we had a session where she accessed her grief totally on her own, with no catalyst from us at all. No one was angry or disgruntled with her; on the contrary, we had all noticed how much better her attitude had been since the holding Tuesday night. Her wailing was pure, unadulterated pain at the losses she had experienced, and the damage those losses had done in her life. We gathered around her and just held her as she cried. When it appeared that she was coming out of it, we sent the other children downstairs to prepare for bed. They were reluctant to leave, as they wanted her to know they loved her and were supportive of her, but we told them they should get ready and then come back upstairs. While they were gone she started arching her back, refusing eye contact, and re-asserting her opinion that she was not lovable. I had seen her in many states of grief, many states of awareness of her pain, and many types of resistance. I had *never* experienced such a mix of signals as we were getting from her at that time. All the while she maintained her "fight", she made no indication of wanting out of my lap. We were NOT physically restraining her at all, we were cradling and hugging her. It was at this point that my *father* burst through the door and angrily told us we had to stop, as we were devastating my mother. Anchulee looked up from her tears in surprise and shock at being told she had to rein in her emotions. She voluntarily quieted down somewhat, but we all resented the interference.

Soon Laura whirled in, for she had prepared for bed in record time so as to be there for the sister she loves so much. She asked Anchulee for a hug but was refused. Laura continued to ask, and eventually begged and broke down into heart-wrenching sobs. Laura desperately wanted a hug from Anchulee. It was very, very clear to Anchulee that we valued her very, very much, and she ultimately gave all three of us a wonderfully genuine hug. Kathy and Adam soon rejoined us, and they, too, were supportive of Anchulee and her place in the family and in our hearts. When it was all said and done, we felt extremely close to each other and we marveled at the progress that was made.

Clearly we were not going to be able to deal with our children appropriately while staying in my parent's home, so we resolved to leave first thing in the morning. The children, however, had other ideas, and they clamored to leave immediately. They were uncomfortable with the overt disapproval of their grandparents.

It was not terribly difficult to persuade us, and so we found ourselves packing at 11 PM. Anchulee stopped me and told me she wanted to talk to Grandpa but wasn't sure how to say what she wanted to say. I asked her what message she wanted to deliver. I found her response to be clear and articulate, so I told her to just repeat that to Grandpa. We approached him together, and this is what she said, "You guys want me to have a better attitude but you won't let my parents do the things that help me to get better. They are not hurting me and I know they love me very much." I was amazed at how clear she was in her delivery, the conviction in her words, and her complete eye contact while speaking. I KNOW she benefits from our efforts, and I know SHE knows that too, but she still amazed me at how convicted her response was to my father. When he suggested that we should have waited until we left to deal with this, her immediate response was, "You can't always keep your feelings inside you."

Although we had not planned on driving through the mountains at midnight, no one doubted that it was the right thing to do for us to leave. I love my parents very much, and I am extremely saddened by this event. Family relationships are vitally important, and no one is more aware of that than my husband and I. We are incredibly proud of our family and our children, as well as the difficult work we are doing. We have no apologies to make to anyone about the decisions we make or the methods we use. No where is there a family more dedicated to each other than ours is. That does not mean that we expect others to understand our methods, for we are clearly aware that many people are very, very uncomfortable with the concept of viewing or handling emotional pain straight on. I understand the depth of the commitment that is required to disassociate one's self from the worry about what others might think. We have achieved that goal because we feel that our children's needs are more important than the understanding of someone who has never walked in our shoes. It is because of the reactions of others that don't understand that we, as well as parents like us, have essentially removed ourselves from the company of people who *can't* or *won't* understand what we are about. I know of many, many families split over this same issue. Is it an issue of trust or propriety? It really doesn't matter in the long run, for we will do what we have to do. **We** trust what we are doing, and the issue of whether or not this is socially acceptable is not enough to prevent us from doing everything we can to heal our children. We love them too much to quit for someone else's comfort.

Since that night, Anchulee has basked in the validation she received as a very important member of this family. She realizes that not everyone can handle her issues, and perhaps she appreciates her family a little more because they can. Her behavior since our return has *mostly* been loving and appropriate. Anchulee's awakening emotions after our Colorado trip were evident after a brief playtime at a neighbor's home. This particular neighbor has daughters that are playmates for both my younger girls. Laura played over there frequently this past summer, but every time they asked for Anchulee to come over she was too much of a mess to go. When Anchulee was finally able to play at their house, she seemed reluctant to go and was apparently uncomfortable while she was there. Imagine my surprise when I was able to get her to articulate that she was *embarrassed* and wondered what they were thinking of her after her bad attitude! It was the very first time I had ever seen her give any consideration to what other people think. The start of a conscience? It was a moment to remember!

Tony visited us again in August. He was more appropriate in his behavior this time than he was in March, but we still found him provocative to be around. Our regularly scheduled family therapy session fell on the day he arrived. He promptly fell asleep at the beginning of the session, sending a strong message to the rest of the family. Later on, he initiated a conversation with me about why he blew out of our home last summer. He tried to say it was because he was so "stuck on himself". He seemed clueless that it had to do with a fear of emotional intimacy. When I again told him he was welcome to return home *as soon as he addressed his issues*, he shut down the discussion and went to bed. My husband believes Tony wants to be here to escape the mounting pressure and familiarity of the group home, not necessarily because Tony wants what our family offers. I am not sure. I think he has some attachment to me, but certainly not nearly enough to affect any change right now. We are waiting for his brain to mature and process things differently.

Kathy started the alternative high school program in mid-August. However, after her very first day there she told me she felt the student population was much too interested in when they were going to get their next cigarette break, and not interested in learning. It was her decision to transfer to the regular high school. By the time "Meet the Teacher

Night” rolled around a few weeks later, it was evident to our family that the pressure of conforming 24 hours a day was getting to Kathy. Although I was not prepared for the events that would soon unfold, my instincts prompted me to write a brief letter to Kathy’s teachers, providing minimal background and explanations as to her presence in our family. I personally handed each teacher a copy of the letter.

Although I had not heard the first complaint prior to Meet the Teacher Night, the very next day one of Kathy’s teachers phoned me in distress. Apparently my instincts had been right, for in class that day, Kathy had cussed and kicked a kid’s chair, and generally showed her street side to the class. My letter prevented the teacher from being totally unprepared for this eventuality.

Things rapidly deteriorated from there, culminating in Kathy’s total defiance of our family and our rules. Even a weekend in respite care did not salvage the placement. As we had made it abundantly clear from the beginning, it was NOT going to be our family doing all the work. When given the option of moving to a temporary group home pending return to Indianapolis, or *seriously owning and addressing her issues* and continuing to stay with us, Kathy elected to quit and return to Indianapolis.

While I was attending the national ATTACH conference in Tulsa, my husband flew Kathy back to Indiana and attended court with her. She burst into tears upon learning she was to return to the Indiana Girl’s School. Most likely she will remain there until she turns 18. She does not write or call. We are so sad that she refused this opportunity to so dramatically change her life. Sadly, her 21-year-old brother now writes us from prison, where he will spend the next 7 or 8 years. We send his children birthday and holiday gifts on his behalf. The youngest girl is still on the run in Indianapolis, and the older sister is attempting to get her children out of foster care.

Kathlene’s departure had a predictable effect on Anchulee, who immediately went down the tubes again. She began blowing off school, hygiene—anything and everything that required accountability. The school held her ultra-accountable, and we pursued vigorous therapy at home to ride out the storm. She was as defiant as she had ever been during a therapy session that occurred while I was in Tulsa. However, upon my return, she seemed to settle down to a large degree, although she still is doing very little at school.

I am once again optimistic that Anchulee is moving in the right direction, and for now at least, Tony seems to be maintaining. I am so grateful for the group home mom. Just when I think I have a handle on Anchulee, she throws me another curve ball. The truth is that I know her better than she knows herself, so when she throws a curve ball it is to BOTH of us. I have come to realize that many times she IS seemingly powerless to control her own behavior. Clearly, my children are still teaching me about life, and I am still learning. I love my children very much, and I am so proud to be their mom. I am proud of my husband and his contributions to our unique family.

KC Attachment Network has grown tremendously and is reaching many people. I am so glad I can be available to other distressed families. It helps to heal my own wounds when I can comfort another soul mate. Although there remain several large unknowns in our present existence, overall I keep myself focused on the fact that I am a very lucky mom.

Update, winter 98/99

Although Tony’s summer visit was not especially hopeful, we were thrilled to receive a couple of phone calls from him in the fall of 1998. In early December, I returned home from a workshop where I had just expressed my serious concerns about Tony’s future. Imagine my joy to find a letter from him in the mailbox! It was the ONLY letter we had ever received from him. It read, in part, as follows:

I miss you all and I think about you guys all the time. I'm looking forward to visiting during Christmas. It doesn't matter what I get, but what I want the most for a Christmas present is a big hug from all of you that will last me for a long time.

(He then shared his grades, all A's and B's except one C, and honor roll!)

Again, I'm looking forward to visiting you, even if it's a short time. I hope you guys are looking forward to having me there for a week.

Mom you are right, I am afraid of getting close to you. I think it won't work out. I'm afraid I will do something wrong and you won't like me for how I am.

I was afraid when you left for a week.

I didn't get along with the rest of the family. I put all my problems on the rest of the family and I fooled you I was doing good but in reality I wasn't and I'm really sorry. It might not mean anything or maybe it will, sorry again. I would like you to forgive me for what I have done to the family. I screwed you guys up and I'm really sorry.

Love, Tony Spoolstra

PS Love you guys forever. And never forget it.

Needless to say, this letter had a profound impact on us all. I stood in the kitchen and sobbed. We were so hopeful that Tony was starting to process things differently. We so desperately wanted him to be able to return home. I had told him during his last visit that returning home would not be possible until he addressed his issues. Could it be possible that he was ready to do just that?

We eagerly made arrangements for his holiday visit. We purchased a plane ticket immediately and sent it by Fed Ex to insure it's timely arrival. We had arranged for the longest visit ever—16 days. We were so excited for him to come home.

Less than two weeks later we received a late night phone call from the group home mom. She was clearly agitated, and this was a woman with tremendous strength and experience with difficult children. Apparently Tony had assaulted her young son that evening. Additionally, he had physically assaulted the group home mom herself. He was immediately sent to the psych ward, where he stayed for almost a week. While there, he admitted to several staff members that he had been having homicidal thoughts for several months. After his departure from the group home, other children came forward with horror stories of Tony having assaulted them. Nearly \$200 of stolen money was found in his room.

My husband's conviction that Tony wanted OUT of the group home more than he wanted to be IN our home was absolutely correct. The wonderful letter that Tony had written was merely a tool to reconstruct his bridges at home, even as he burned them in the group home. Finally, the entire family knew that our short-term hopes for Tony were impossible. His thinking errors amazed me. Did he really believe that we would allow him to live with us after he blew out of the group home in such a dangerous manner?

The group home mom terminated her guardianship of Tony immediately. I would have done exactly the same thing. We have nothing but thanks and appreciation for all she did for Tony and us. We deeply appreciate the entire staff of the agency that manages the group home. After several court hearings, Tony is now in the custody of juvenile authorities. He is on a 2-year probationary status with kidnapping charges against him. He is currently in foster care, residing with an older couple and no other children in the home. His caseworkers are optimistic for his future, as he is receiving therapy twice weekly for "anger control" and to "work on his other issues." We are not so optimistic. We are heartsick and numb.

Anchulee continues to struggle. She invests little in her life, her relationships, or herself. Although we have met with our pastor again, she is not allowing the Lord to work in her life either. She is doing very poorly in school. In a recent therapy session, she expressed the following thoughts, although not exactly in these words: "I don't want to flunk fourth grade, but I don't want to do anything about it. I don't want to get booted out of this family, but I don't want to make any changes." She is not as morose to live with as she has been in the past, but the "poor me" attitude is getting harder and harder to bear. While I have never been an *enabler*, I am finding it more difficult than ever to even *facilitate* change. I am taking little or no responsibility for the outcome of her life. That shift in my thinking is in no way related to how much I love her or how much I desire a wonderful outcome for her. It is a clear realization on my part that my love and my hopes are not the ultimate deciding factors.

At the time of this writing, we are about to embark on yet another therapeutic intervention with Anchulee. We begin an "intensive" tomorrow. It is our hope that we can break through the apathy and pity that surround her. She recently turned 11 years old. We have had several discussions about the vast amounts of her life she has wasted thus far. She

flunked yet another test today in school. She still regularly visits the principal's office to complete work or as a consequence for misbehavior. She has no friends. She has no hobbies. She has no future based on her attitude.

We have a former foster daughter visiting us this weekend as well. Amanda has been such a bright spot in the past several months. Although she recently returned home to live, we hope to have her visit us often. This weekend is one of those visits. She is 15 years old, and she has developed a wonderful relationship with all of us. Adam and Laura consider her their sister. What a joy she is to be around, and what a breath of fresh air for my family and me.

Over the past several months, my family has been under major stress as we faced the possibility of a move to the suburbs of Chicago. It is now a reality, and we are planning to relocate in the summer of 2000. I have already started networking in that area. I cannot imagine leaving the incredible support network I have created here in Kansas. Apparently, the Lord wants me in Chicago, but I am having difficulty not going kicking and screaming. My husband spends much of the week there now, and I find myself a single parent for prolonged periods. Still, we are preparing to request another foster child now that Amanda is no longer living with us. I guess I just can't get enough. Kids are such a wonderful investment, even when you think you are not making any headway.

I am struggling to stay on top of KCAN, but I rejoice at the good it has done for others. It gives me a sense of control over a disorder that I clearly cannot control in my own children. Perhaps together, we can save a few.

When to Hold and When to Fold, Spring 2000

It was just a little over a year ago when Liz Randolph arrived in Kansas to begin an intensive therapy session with Amy. Many folks go on vacations or visit relatives over Spring Break, but MY family was hunkering down for some serious emotional work. After years of contending with my daughter's apathy, depression, and negativity, we were facing what we *hoped* was the "last hurrah" with Muffin. We were hopeful that Liz could break through the wall and find a real child inside.

In the early days of "attachment therapy", it was believed that *rage* was the predominantly buried feeling in these angry-appearing children. Many have now come to realize that another major component is *sadness*. In fact, some people believe that sadness is the primary feeling, and anger is secondary. As Liz began her work with Amy, the goal was to reach whatever feelings were locked inside. For the entire 9 and a half years that Amy had been a member of our family, we had yet to see her consistently or realistically show any emotions. She presented as a shallow, narcissistic, immature and basically empty child.

My emotional state at the time of the intensive was rather mixed. Over the past 10 years I had vacillated from highly committed and motivated to help Amy, all the way to seriously apathetic and disinterested. I was about out of steam. Liz would observe me trying, yet again, to impact Amy in some *normal* fashion. She told me, "You have been doing that for ten years! Has it helped? Of course not! So QUIT DOING IT!" For once, I didn't need to be told twice.

Amy was successful in accessing some of her sadness during the intensive therapy, but she was completely unwilling to address her anger. It is my opinion that Amy was so angry when she was initially placed with us, and so sad over her losses that she shut down her emotions before she turned two years old. Since one cannot selectively choose their emotional state, she has remained as a "flat line" since that time—unable to really experience ANY emotions, positive or negative ones.

Because she did make some therapeutic progress with Liz, we appreciated some improvement by summertime. Concurrently, she was entering puberty, and her fluctuating hormones were making it more difficult for her to keep her feelings locked inside. When she would show some real anger, I usually rejoiced! How NORMAL to show some adolescent angst! Although she continued to thumb her nose at academics, her interaction with the family was somewhat improved. She continued to view the world as if she were its only occupant, but at least the "3P me" (Poor, poor, pitiful me!) part of her attitude was a little better.

Liz felt Amy perhaps struggled with Bipolar Disorder. We had noted mood swings over the years. Her "manic" periods were really the more "normal" times, alternating with a chronic state of depression. We had addressed the depression briefly in the past, trying Prozac. After a brief improvement, Amy said it was not helping her. She stated she believed any real improvement was due to her effort, so we discontinued the use of medication. This time we tried Depakote. Her dad and I felt the medicine helped her somewhat, although it was not a profound change. However, Amy "cold turkeyed" herself off of it *without my knowledge* several months later. I didn't argue with her, as I had no intention of assuming long term responsibility for her meds. I just informed her the same rules applied. She could get herself moving with or without medication. She has also declined to participate in more conventional therapy, although she has been offered the opportunity.

It was during the summer of '99 that Tommy called us from Colorado. Admittedly, we were not actively involved in the decision making for his treatment. We had no more ideas—we had tried everything we knew to try. It was not an option for him to return here, as he was furthering his reputation as a sex offender while in foster care in Colorado. We also knew if Tommy considered it even a remote possibility that he could return home, he would make no effort whatsoever to address his issues and take responsibility for his own future.

The first time Tommy called, we were caught completely off guard. Within moments I was in tears. Laura had answered first, and handed the phone to me. Tommy had questioned Laura as to whether I would even

talk to him! I was thrilled, saddened and confused all at once. He called ten or twelve times over the next couple of months. Each call lasted no more than a few minutes. They were not collect calls. He *said* he was calling from the Boy's Club, and that he had permission to call. Although he was residing in a foster home, he said he spent over ten hours a day at the Club. Certainly, family intimacy would be less of an issue if he was never with the family!

It was during one of these calls that I asked Tommy if he was addressing his issues. He said, "A little, but not as much as they want me to." He said he understood that living at home was not an option as long as he was not safe to be around. I also asked him if he ever thought about his future? His answer was that he tried not to, but when he did, his thoughts always ended with the image of him being swallowed in a large, black hole.

Abruptly, the calls ended. My assumption was that he had again been moved, and no longer had free access to a long-distance phone. I was correct. More predatory behavior had landed him in a residential facility. After a very rocky beginning, it is my understanding that he has stabilized somewhat. We have no contact with him at this point. Perhaps that is not what is best for him, but for now it is what is necessary for us. With Tommy, there have never been easy, magical answers. I grieve for him, but I cannot carry his burden FOR him. I have absolutely no idea what the future holds for this very troubled young man.

Every spring the ATTACH Board of Directors meets for our annual retreat. In April of 1999, I shared a room with Gail Trenberth, founder of the *Attachment Disorder Parent's Network*. Gail lives in Boulder, Colorado and is also on the Board of Directors of the Attachment Center at Evergreen. Gail and I began discussing the feasibility of combining her organization with my group in Kansas. Over the course of this past year, we put our ideas into action. Our combined group is known as the ***Attachment Disorder Network***. Our bimonthly newsletter, ***Hoofbeats***, focuses mainly on supporting, educating and advocating for parents. We try and include informative articles that would also be of interest to clinicians, school personnel, and social workers.

The ***ADN*** has continued to grow nationally, and our newsletter is well received. Gail and I appreciate having a partner with whom we can share ideas and responsibilities. Since we both serve on the Board of Directors of ATTACH (www.attach.org), we have additional opportunities to advocate for families and children. We are very fortunate to be able to share ideas and work alongside some of the top experts in the country on attachment disorder.

In addition to our spring retreat, the ATTACH Board meets every October at our annual conference. It was right before the '99 conference in Washington, DC, that I first met Hannah...

Hannah was born in China, and came to America as a sad and angry 8 month old. Her adoptive parents, like so many others, were not adequately prepared for the issues that accompanied their new daughter. Additionally, Hannah's new parents were expecting a baby. Prior to traveling to China, they had asked *both* the local and national placing agencies for advice as to whether or not to proceed with their adoption of Hannah. Neither one advised against it. Neither one described attachment issues or attachment disorder, or discussed the ramifications of adding a biological child so soon after the arrival of an orphanage baby.

Mom tried diligently to bond with Hannah, but the baby's anger and lack of trust was undermining their attachment. Within 5 months of Hannah's arrival, her baby sister was born. Dad began providing more for Hannah's needs, while Mom tended to the new arrival. Both parents struggled to connect with their Chinese daughter. They sought counseling, but it took more than 2 years before someone recognized the attachment issues and referred the family to me. By then, a second child had been born to the family.

About the same time Hannah arrived in the United States, I made a memorable statement to my husband. I told him what I *really* wanted was a Chinese baby girl... I said this knowing we could not travel to China and bring home a child; we did not qualify for the Chinese restriction of having no other children; and we did not have the funds to do it even if we did have the time! But I was still serious about my desire.

Soon after that statement, I began noticing I had a very strong desire to have a toddler in the home. As a licensed foster home, that was a much more feasible option. I discussed it with our licensing agency, but somehow we never got around to actually getting a placement.

Soon after Hannah's parents contacted me last fall, Hannah came to our home for a weekend of respite care. Both Hannah and her adoptive family were in serious distress. Clearly, the placement was not working. My family has provided respite for numerous children over the past few years. Never had we felt an inclination to make the placement more permanent. With Hannah, however, it was different. Laura and I immediately felt convicted that this child would fit with our family. My husband and teenage son were not as sure. Amy suddenly felt threatened, and told me to forget all the times she had complained that she was the only one in the family who was Asian!

We knew first hand how expensive it could be to raise an emotionally damaged child. My husband's concern focused mainly on the financial implications of taking responsibility for another child at this point in our lives. We believed this little girl would ultimately end up in the child welfare system if there was not a "planned" intervention. Consequently, we decided to pursue adopting her through our state system so that we might apply for a state subsidy to assist in her care. I had serious concerns about this approach, for several reasons...

My most pressing concern was my awareness that our local Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services (SRS) was not one of my biggest fans. I had written many letters on behalf of other parents. Some letters were sent directly to our county SRS, while some went to the State Commissioner. The most recent case involved a family that had been accused of and validated for child abuse by our local county agency. The foster children who had allegedly been "abused" came from the adjacent county, and *that* SRS agency *supported* this family! I heard through the grapevine that the Commissioner told *our* county to drop the case. Regardless of how it happened, the accused family was exonerated. I believe my involvement in this debacle cost me dearly.

Within a couple of weeks of Hannah moving to our home, we started court proceedings. In spite of my horrible standing with SRS, there were social workers in the county who supported my organization and me. They were willing to facilitate Hannah's placement. We tried to have our "ducks in a row" before we went to court. The judge knew me from past foster children, from our newsletter, and from conversations about attachment and the work I was doing. We had a private attorney who had spent numerous hours reading past newsletters and doing his homework about me. Hannah's original family was willing to place her *only* with my family—not abandon her to the system in general.

In mid-November '99 we went to court. The following people were present: Our attorney, the original adoptive parents, an appointed Guardian ad litem, a representative of the foster care contractor (Kansas has privatized their system), a social worker from our county SRS agency, the judge, and Hannah and myself. When it came time for the SRS worker to speak, she stated SRS's position was my home was "not safe" for Hannah, and my parenting techniques were "abusive". She recommended removing Hannah from my home. (Never mind the diagnosis of Attachment Disorder—let's move her around some more!!) This woman had never personally met me. I believe she came to this court hearing with specific instructions from her office. No one from the local office had been to my home since our numerous dealings over Tommy several years ago. Their only interaction with me had been from my advocacy for other families.

When the judge inquired as to why my home was not suitable, this worker made a clear reference to the controversial case of the summer before. It appeared to me that I was being punished. The judge stated that Hannah was not to be moved without going through him first. His support of me quieted the social worker, and no changes were made at that time.

Immediately after the court hearing, the Guardian ad litem began receiving a barrage of phone calls, demanding that he come to the SRS office and see the "huge file" on me before he made any decisions. Finally, to get some peace, he did. He called our attorney afterwards and told him SRS had wasted his time. He stated they were on a "witch hunt" and there was nothing in my file except all the stuff on Tommy

several years before! Additionally, the file explained the origins of the reports about Tommy and the fact that none had been validated.

SRS also wrote a letter to the judge, requesting Hannah's removal from my home. They contacted the State District Attorney and asked him to file Child in Need of Care charges against me on behalf of the State of Kansas. They were quite serious about pulling Hannah from my home. Still, no worker had yet visited me personally or evaluated Hannah. We were still a licensed foster home, and had actually switched our license to the main foster care provider to expedite Hannah's adoption. This agency was calling me constantly, asking me to take OTHER kids, including a 4-year-old boy diagnosed with Attachment Disorder. Meanwhile, SRS was still trying to pull Hannah!

Although we were very reluctant to assume total financial responsibility for Hannah, we were even more unwilling to have SRS play Russian roulette with her life. Our attorney spoke to the DA, and he agreed to delay even *considering* filing charges against us if we could have a home study completed ASAP. I received this news the Monday before Thanksgiving. I started making phone calls, and the end result was we spent many hours over the Thanksgiving holiday meeting with a social worker, and paying dearly for the privilege. The social worker was a delightful woman who thoroughly enjoyed her holiday interactions with my family. She left with newsletters and packets of information about attachment. She wrote a wonderful home study and unhesitatingly recommended us to adopt Hannah. We withdrew from our attempt to adopt through the state and began private adoption proceedings. Of course, by doing so we forfeited any chance at subsidy, now or later. So much for all my efforts on behalf of *other* Kansas kids...I have to admit, it really bothered me that my family had to pay such a price.

With the state out of the picture, things proceeded quickly and efficiently. We finalized Hannah's placement in January 2000. SRS essentially lost interest in or knowledge of where Hannah was living. Presumably, if they were truly worried about her safety, they would at least be following up on her? My friend who successfully beat the abuse allegations shared an interesting conversation with me. One state social worker that supports my work believes SRS has "lost" Hannah. Furthermore, she apparently said that if they "find" her in my home, they will "investigate me at least twice before we move". Maybe I should be lying low?

One of the many ironies in this whole mess was the fact that I wrote a letter to the judge well before we initiated any proceedings. I did so because I was concerned about the state's hidden (or not so hidden) agenda, and I wanted certain things to be on record. I predicted the sequence of events perfectly. I was not surprised the state went after me. I *was* surprised at how vengeful they seemed to be, and how much time, energy and money was apparently wasted in making my life difficult. It saddened me how little they appeared to care about what was truly best for Hannah. Was it all about power, and loss of control?

My attorney and I agreed that after Hannah's finalization, we would both visit with the State Commissioner of SRS and tell my story. Accordingly, I made an appointment with her. It was cancelled the day before we were to meet. I made a second appointment, which was also cancelled 24 hours in advance. They offered to arrange a meeting with another staff member. I declined. I emailed the Commissioner and informed her that we could discuss my experiences in private, or in a more public forum. I received another appointment, and this one was not cancelled!

The Commissioner and three other staff members were present at the meeting. We told them about my experiences with our county agency. They promised to investigate my concerns. We left copies of my family's overwhelmingly positive homestudy with them. The Commissioner assured us SRS cannot "target" an individual. I hope she is right. I heard nothing more from them. I did see the Commissioner in person when I testified recently before a legislative committee about the incredibly unfriendly climate in Kansas towards foster and adoptive families. I don't envy the Commissioner her job. In my opinion, there is so much not working in this state, I would not even know where to begin to make changes.

As of this writing, Hannah has lived with us nearly 6 months. When she arrived, she would not look anyone in the eye, especially me. Tickling her did not elicit a response, although her first family indicated this was

about the ONLY way they could get a reaction from her. If you held her she did not “snuggle in”, nor would she grab on and hold you back. She definitely subscribed to the “3P Me” philosophy.

Our teenage son, Adam, was unenthusiastic about adding Hannah to the family. He knew first hand the potential implications of living with yet another child who had serious attachment issues. The first night as I was rocking Hannah, Adam looked over at me and asked, “Tell me again if we have the option of changing our minds?” It was only 24 hours later that I first noticed a change in his thinking. By the end of the first week, he was complaining she didn’t like him! He was so enamored with her, she was able to manipulate him with just a look! She called him “Bob” and “Santa Clause” which made him crazy! Because of his years of on-the-job training, he was able to straighten himself out fairly quickly, and now they enjoy a very close but totally appropriate relationship. He is amazed and thrilled at the changes in her.

One memorable moment for me occurred the very first week. Liz Randolph returned to Kansas to evaluate several kids for attachment disorder. Liz stayed with my family, and Hannah was one of the kids she assessed. At one point, Liz was “testing” Hannah to see if she responded appropriately. To Liz’s amazement, I rescued Hannah!! I have known Liz long enough for her to know I am NOT a rescuer by nature, so my behavior was surprising to her. She said nothing for about 10 minutes while she processed what she had witnessed. And then, in her usual, to-the-point fashion, she confronted me and wanted to know if I wanted to raise another one just like Muffin? (I love Amy unequivocally, but one narcissist per family is enough, thanks!) And by the way, did I have a brain transplant? Shazam! I got the point! I had not even realized what I was doing, but Liz was right. From then on, I had more appropriate boundaries with Hannah. How fortunate I was that Liz set me straight so early on.

My husband has a killer schedule that keeps him away from home for much of the week. He, too, had concerns about what this commitment would mean to our family. During Hannah’s initial adjustment, he remained fairly neutral and deferred the parenting role to me.

Amy had a few squirrely weekends prior to Hannah’s arrival. On one particularly bad day, I told her I knew her attitude related to her worries over Hannah’s adoption. I asked her if she wanted me to cut her some slack, or should I make things hard for her to get her back on track? She replied, “Make things harder for me so I get over it.” So I did!

Hannah’s first 3 months were pretty rough. She slept in our room—a situation that changed only a couple of weeks ago. She fought over everything—getting dressed, making her bed, throwing napkins away after dinner, taking papers to the garage. She put her shoes on backwards most of the time (more on that later!!) and was generally passive/aggressive every chance she got.

She struggled over toileting issues, and was angry because she didn’t like any of the options I presented her. I did not hassle her to use the toilet, although she was plenty ready to do so. However, I made it clear that I saw no need to deal with her diapers, so if she chose to wear them, she could wear pull-ups. If she soiled them, she needed to take them off and put them in the trashcan in the garage. Of course, that meant taking clothes off, and shoes, and putting them all back on (backwards of course). On really contrary days, I picked out bib overalls for her to wear!! Although she hated to have BM’s in her diaper, she hated giving up the control even more. One day she managed to turn the laundry area into something resembling the dog run...

Since she didn’t feel like she was “winning” the diaper war, she decided to use the toilet, but then not ask for any help, play “dumb” or try and otherwise manipulate me. She would sit on the pot for long periods of time. If I should happen to pass by the bathroom (of course, she left the door open!) she would smile at me, or say “Hi Mom!” I would smile back and go on about my business. One day she fell asleep at the foot of the toilet! When she awoke with her pants around her ankles and her problem still a problem, she was NOT a happy camper!

She is as creative in discovering things to fight over as Amy has been over the years. One day as we climbed into the car for our afternoon school pickup, Hannah started to “bark” like a dog. “Woof, woof” all the way to the first school. On and on it went, trying to get me to respond. I ignored her, and a quiet word

to her older sisters removed them from the game as well. However, after both older girls were in the car, I asked if they were hungry? (A foolish question, I know, but necessary to set the stage...) Of course, they both said, "YES!" I replied, "Great, let's go to McDonalds! But it is SO SAD, dogs can't eat at McDonalds!" Immediately I hear a little voice in the back seat loudly proclaim, "I AM NOT A DOG ANYMORE!"

A couple of months ago, she seemed to settle down a bit. She would go several days with no problems before another "meltdown". Then it was maybe a week or so. Over the past few weeks, I have seen some pretty profound changes. She still has normal three-year-old tantrums, but they are more appropriate in nature. She now gets up, gets dressed, puts her pj's neatly away, makes her twin bed, throws away her wet pull-up, and comes down for breakfast. She puts the papers in the garage every day (still can cause some weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!!), and often puts the dogs in the run if we are going somewhere. Additionally, she may take out the kitchen trash, collect all the towels and put them in the laundry room, take her own clothes from the laundry and put them away, and do various other little chores. She still occasionally likes to ask for help on simple things, but doesn't seem all that surprised when she is unsuccessful in suckering me. When she is unhappy about doing a chore, she usually does as she is told (sometimes while crying loudly the entire time), and then comes back to me with her shoes on backwards!! Now I just make a joke and say, "Oh, I see you are MAD! Sorry about that!" Then she is frustrated that she didn't get a rise out of me, and she doesn't like to be called on her shoes, so often she fusses, "NO, I don't WANT my shoes on backwards!" and then she sits down and fixes them!

She is smiling much more, has much better eye contact, and has actually developed a pretty feisty nature. I really grin outwardly AND inwardly when I see her stomp around and demand things, for I am well aware of what a sense of self-value is required to be that opinionated. Amy still is not there... (And Hannah provides us with a springboard to talk about it.) Adam loves to tease, and sometimes he can just look at her and set her off. She folds her arms and gets this feisty look on her face and looks away with a pout. Several times in the past couple of weeks she has informed me, "I don't LIKE you MOM!" She really hates to lose a control battle, but I will give her credit. She is not as inclined to cut off her nose to spite her face as many other kids I know.

Hannah has started a gym class once a week. The first class she tried all the "old" stuff. She did not go where she was supposed to, but preferred to wander around, look lost, and get the coach to direct her individually. I talked to the coach immediately afterwards, then promptly went home and made a list of behaviors to watch for and appropriate interventions. Coach Loretta called me immediately after reading the list and wanted to know more. She has followed my suggestions, and Hannah has responded appropriately. Hannah is now doing a great job of trying everything and following directions. Her coach says she is quite competitive.

Her relationship with the older kids is really terrific. They all love her to pieces, although Amy shows it less. I am afraid Amy must love herself before she can really love the rest of us. Interestingly enough, Amy is the most *intolerant* of Hannah's attachment behaviors. (She once complained that Hannah was not very much fun to be around. I told Amy that lucky for her, that was NOT a criterion for remaining in our home!) My husband points out that Amy is the most intolerant of ALL of us. Adam and Laura are crazy about Hannah yet hold her very accountable. They insist on appropriate politeness and behavior, so she is unable to manipulate them at all. Considering that Hannah is not around ANYONE she can manipulate, she is coming along quite rapidly. When Amy was Hannah's age, I had her in Mom's Day Out, and Sunday school, and all that stuff. I lost ground every time she could "work" somebody.

With the older kids around, I get frequent breaks and I am not responsible for all the little stuff all the time. That makes a huge difference in my ability to be a good therapeutic parent. My desire to add another child to the family was a strong pull for well over a year before Hannah came into our lives. I believed we were an ideal family to meet Hannah's needs, but I also *hoped* she would meet some needs in me as well. (Side bar here—I knew better than to count on it!!) That has absolutely been the case. I have rejoiced in seeing the changes in her. What a refreshing experience for me to pour so much energy into a kid, and actually have the child RESPOND! Not to sound pessimistic, but I have come to realize it can be extremely difficult to turn a "zebra" into a "horse".

I have also come to realize that without Hannah here to consume my parenting energy, I would be *extremely* frustrated with Amy. Although she has had a better year at school than previous years, she has been gradually slipping again this past couple of months. Additionally, her total refusal to “grow up” and her unwillingness to use even the most basic math skills in every day life are getting to me. She was 12 in January, and is already a year older than her classmates. Let me describe a scenario that occurred recently:

I had already decided that from now on, any purchase I make for Amy would be handled by her. She will have to calculate the cost, the tax, figure out how much money she has to have, and make the purchase. This will include ice cream cones, clothes, whatever. When she needed a certain type of bottle for a school science project, we stopped at a gas station. She went in, found what she needed, and returned to the car, telling me it was 99 cents. I asked her what I needed to give her? She said, “Ummm, 3 quarters, and, ummm, a dime, and umm, another dime, and... 4 pennies. I think that is 99 cents.” I handed her the money and asked if she thought that would be enough? She looked momentarily rattled, and then said, “I think so!” and went into the store. Soon, of course, she returned, mumbling something about tax and needing \$1.06. She also mentioned that the 20-something guy behind her had offered to pay the rest, but she had told him her mom was outside. I handed her another dime and asked her how much I would be getting back? Again, she stood there in a panic, outside my car window, nearly in tears. Then the guy comes out, hands her the water and says, “Here you go!” and walks to his car!!! So I make her go give HIM the dime. When she returns to the car, she is bawling, and wants to get in the back and hide from me! Like her problem will go away! I pointed out to her that just a few days earlier I had asked her who would be her “handler” for her entire life, and would she find people everywhere she went to bail her out?

When we returned home, I discussed the concept of taxes with her, told her it was 7 cents on the dollar in Kansas, and then asked her how much she would pay if she bought a 50-cent item. She could not/would not grasp the concept of comparing the relationship of 50 cents to a dollar to figure out what portion of 7 cents she would have to pay. Finally, I walked her through it and then asked her how much tax she would pay for a 75-cent item? Stuck again! She kept trying to use the 50-cent number and the 4 cents tax she had figured out for the first problem! So, I got 4 quarters and 7 pennies. Still, we got nowhere. So I blew up at her, and asked her HOW and WHY she could be this poor in math? Was she paying attention at all? Did we need to test her for dyslexia or some faulty brain wiring? She said NO, she had no explanation for why she was so inept. I pressed for an answer, and finally she blurts out, “Maybe I work harder at school than I do at home!!” So I stood up and said, “No problem, why am I wasting MY time then?”

After she stormed upstairs, I called her teacher. I asked her repeatedly if she felt Amy had any processing problems or undetected learning disorders. She said absolutely not—just an unwillingness to apply anything she was learning to everyday life. Apparently, her teacher was similarly frustrated with her. I found out she was doing much of the old passive/aggressive stuff again, turning her papers in ONE DAY late, etc. (The message is: CONTROL!) As the year has progressed, the teacher has expected more self-starting behavior, and Amy wants to be led by the nose. She is fighting it hard. I will *never* understand this.

Hannah is giving and getting benefits from our family. She will **force** Amy to look at some of her own behaviors. The more successful Hannah becomes, the more trouble Amy will have in blaming everything wrong in her life on the fact that she is adopted. I am so very glad the Lord brought Hannah into our lives. I am *so* much more prepared to parent her than I ever was with Amy. Adam, Laura and Larry just enjoy her. They reinforce what I do, but mostly just get the pleasure of watching her blossom. And she IS blossoming.

Hannah has accompanied me to the barn several times to do horse chores. Amin, our tall, long-necked, leggy gelding, comes right up behind Hannah and puts his muzzle gently down on the top of her head. He sniffs at her, as much as to say, “Who is this little mite you brought out here?” Hannah is not the least bit scared. Secretly, I harbor a hope that she will like horses, will NOT be allergic to them as the other two girls are, and will end up being my riding partner. She enjoys the dogs as well. To this day, Amy is pretty

neutral about the animals, and that is hard for me to understand. What is not to love about dogs? (Probably a bit of a biased opinion!)

Most of my extended family was at our home recently to celebrate Easter. I am happy to report a significantly redefined relationship with my parents since our untimely departure from their Colorado home in August of '98. After several months of no communication, somehow we managed to smooth things over sufficiently enough that they came to our home for Christmas that year. Although it was an unspoken agreement, we all knew the rules were different when we were in our own home.

The following spring (April '99), we all gathered to celebrate my niece's high school graduation. The hot topic that weekend was my parents' impending Golden Anniversary celebration. They had rented a large cabin in Colorado with the idea that the entire family would "harmonize" under one roof. What they didn't know was that immediately after our abrupt departure the previous summer, we made our own reservations at the same place but in our own cabin. My husband slipped that tidbit of information into a conversation that spring weekend. It *appeared* to create very little controversy.

Soon after the graduation get-together, I began laboring in earnest on my anniversary gift for my parents. I created a photo quilt by scanning old pictures and documents, printing them on fabric and incorporating them into a quilt. I also used parts of my mom's wedding dress in the quilt. There were 20 "memory" panels, including their wedding announcement, marriage license, Dad's retirement poster, their wedding picture and the weddings of all 3 kids, baby pictures of them and all 3 kids, and photos of all the dogs of the past 40 years. I spent hours, days, weeks on this quilt. I ate in my sewing room, only because my kids served me food! I was desperate to complete it in time.

Less than a week before we were scheduled to leave in mid-July, it finally dawned on my mom that we were not staying in their cabin. She took it very personally, using my late "Happy Birthday" call to my father as her reason to scold me. (Of course, I hardly knew what day it was by this time!) A series of very painful telephone calls followed. It was especially difficult to be told I "made my family my last priority" when I had spent, and was still spending, every waking moment on this huge project. I did make a reference to the fact that I was consumed with creating their anniversary gift, but it fell on deaf ears.

Because I knew we had our own cabin, and because it was such a momentous occasion, we stuck with our commitment to attend the celebration. My mom had backed off somewhat by the last phone call, presumably because she knew I was perilously close to not coming at all. Although there was some tension the first night we arrived, it was not too bad.

We actually celebrated their anniversary on the second night. Gifts were exchanged. The quilt blew them away. In all fairness, I think they both had done some serious thinking about our situation, and our right to parent as we saw fit. By the time we left a couple of days later, things were significantly improved. I told my mom we played for some pretty high stakes. We did not intend to alienate them, but they were not our first priority. She seemed to have a new level of understanding. Ironically, Amy behaved well enough that theoretically we never really needed our own cabin. However, we had no regrets and appreciated the option of having our own space. We will all cherish the memories of the great time we had at their anniversary party.

My parents came to Kansas for Thanksgiving last fall. Mom inquired as to the likelihood of having Christmas at their home in Colorado. I stated the same rules applied. We could not promise smooth sailing with our kids. Of course, by now we also had Hannah, who was clearly an unknown quantity! Mom said, "I'll talk to Dad and get back with you!" When next she approached the topic, she invited us to be "their guests" in an adjacent cabin! Of course, my sister and her family stayed at my parents' home. It was a bit hard for my kids to have to go out in the cold and trudge up a hill to sleep, rather than stay in the cozy home of their grandparents. But it worked out so much better that way.

In September of last year, well before Christmas, I had a brief conversation with Amy. I informed her no longer was she going to *receive* gifts without *giving* any. Every year it was the same thing. She wanted all the perks with no commitment or effort on her part. I told her if we did not see tangible evidence of some

advanced preparation on her part for Christmas, she would not be a part of the gift exchange. (In other words, a hastily prepared home made card thrown together on Christmas morning would not qualify!) Again, we were faced with enforcing a rather unpopular consequence as far as my family was concerned. Nevertheless, we did enforce it, and Muffin spent Christmas morning watching the Nutcracker Suite by herself in my parents' basement. She told Laura she loved it! By the time she was invited upstairs to open her few gifts (and I do mean few), the rest of the family had lost interest and paid little attention to her. While a part of me really grieved for her, another side of me knew she needed to *feel* the consequences of her lack of investment in us. Considering Mother's Day is less than a month away, and considering she just spent her last \$6 on a pound of fudge for herself, I am not holding my breath for a fabulous gift!

As I mentioned previously, my parents visited again recently to celebrate Easter with us. The day before they arrived, Hannah and I had met with Hannah's original adoptive family. We have tried to connect every few weeks since her placement with us. Usually we meet for lunch at Chuck E. Cheeses! It is a bittersweet time for both Hannah and her former family. They are impressed with the changes she has made, but of course feel so sad and guilty at the same time. I have told them many times they did not "fail". My family is in a much better position to meet Hannah's needs right now. My approach to Hannah is so different from the way I parented Amy when she was a toddler, and when I also had two other young children. It is so unfortunate they had to search for nearly two years before finding appropriate assistance and understanding. We intend to keep this an open adoption. We also exchange letters and pictures with her previous grandmothers, and Hannah received lovely Easter gifts from both of these delightful ladies.

The first two times we met with her previous family, Hannah had a "meltdown" before we even left for the restaurant. It finally occurred to me not to tell her! Then I only had to deal with the fallout from the meeting. Even though it was painful for both parties, it was a necessary thing for Hannah to know her former family still valued her. Our last meeting was the most joyous. Hannah was so happy to play with her "little sister". Whereas Hannah used to follow the younger child around and mimic her play, this time they played together yet independently. Hannah gave "Dad T" the first real hug he had ever received from her. She smiled and laughed continually.

She had a minor meltdown that night. The next morning, she played numerous subtle control battles. She couldn't find this, or see that, or do this, or hear that... Finally I scooped her up as she raged and we headed for the chair. She settled down fairly quickly.

That afternoon my folks arrived. We had a busy and fun few days around the Easter holiday. Hannah LOVES to dress up, and with her gloves and purse and hair bow and frilly dress she looked and felt beautiful. Late Easter Sunday my sister and her family left. That night Hannah finally lost it. She raged for about 20 minutes, stomping her feet and clenching her fists. She was tired, and too many people had come and gone in her life the past few days. The raging and my reaction to it unnerved my folks a bit, but they said nothing. When I felt the storm had passed, I rocked her and gave her a bottle. She was relaxed and cuddly by the time I put her to bed.

Her attitude the past few days has been nothing short of awesome. She is talking non-stop. Few, if any, control battles pollute our time together. The pictures I took on Easter show a beaming, happy child. She tells me often and with feeling that she loves me and she will keep me company! I am too knowledgeable about this disorder to make long-term predictions about this child, but I am already amazed by what I see. Her sense of self, her feeling that she has value, her enthusiasm for life are not traits I could "teach" her. Her eyes sparkle when she looks at me, for she senses how much I love her already and how important she is to me. I don't know where we are headed, but I am so thankful to be along for the ride.

The addition of Hannah to our family has been a blessing for Amy as well, although perhaps she would not agree. Hannah models the fact that life CAN go on after bad things happen. Hannah also provides a wonderful outlet for all my parenting energy—energy that could easily boil into frustration with Amy as she continues to live life as a flat line. As much as I preach to other moms to "let go, let go, let go", I DO realize how hard it is to follow that advice. I love Amy very, very much. I chafe at how little enthusiasm she has for life. My chafing doesn't make a bit of difference, either. I don't get it, and I never will. I just continue to love her and do my best to allow her decisions to impact her directly. I have to admit in many

ways she has shown some real improvement. Although she invests little energy into anything or anyone, she IS more pleasant to be around than she has been in the past. She can be considerable help around the house if one is willing to point her in the right direction. Sometimes we see a glimmer of realization that others share her space. We all believe she truly does care about us, we just would like to experience some tangible evidence once in awhile.

Our move to Chicago is tentatively scheduled for this August. I am so sad to be leaving my friends in Kansas. However, it appears that some folks in Illinois and Wisconsin are in need of attachment information and assistance! I have learned not to question the Lord's plan for me and my family. I guess there is no shortage of these kids wherever one goes... I am thankful for e-mail connections. The ***Attachment Disorder Network*** will continue to serve as much on a national level as we do the local community. Gail Trenberth is in Colorado, Kathy Ryan and Sally Popper remain in Kansas, and I will be in Illinois.

I really believe we are on the threshold of change in the attachment field. The Board of Directors of ATTACH recently met for our annual spring meeting. We all left that gathering with a renewed appreciation for the work each of us was doing, and for the goals of the organization as a whole. While there is a nationwide scarcity of therapists, residential facilities, parenting assistance, and general understanding of attachment disorder, at least things appear to be moving in the right direction.

Hannah has brightened my life immeasurably. I am still hopeful Amy will find some purpose in her existence. I will love her regardless of how she chooses to live her life. She is at once a challenge and a blessing. Adam and Laura contradict the theory that teen years are terrible. I am so proud of who they are and how they handle themselves. My husband is working so hard I worry about his health. I look forward to an easier time for him some day. I am as healthy and content as I have been in a long time.

UPDATE, 2001

It has been 18 months since my family moved to a northern suburb of Chicago. Although we have finally settled in to a degree, we miss Kansas very much. We loved our Kansas house so much that we built the same home in Illinois!

Adam is a junior in High School, taking Honors and Advanced placement courses as well as pursuing an active social life. He works as a waiter at a local family restaurant. He enjoys tennis, girls, golf and girls! He plans to pursue a career in banking, accounting or business. His dad says he is perfect for the business world—Adam achieves 98% efficiency with 80% effort! The reality that he will soon leave home is very hard for me to contemplate. He is really a joy to be around, and I am extremely proud of the young man he has become.

Laura is a freshman in High School, and she also has a full load of Honors courses. Both she and Adam are well advanced in math—a genetic gift totally from their *father*, with no contribution from their mother at all! She redirected her gymnastics skills by joining the High School diving team. Additionally, she and I have been spending innumerable hours riding the train into downtown Chicago as Laura pursues a modeling career. Again thanks to her dad, she is already 5' 7" and still growing.

Amy is still, well, Amy. She had a wonderful start to this school year (because they were *reviewing*, she told me later), and I actually was hopeful we had turned some magical, much-anticipated corner. However, as of last midterm grades she is failing in every sense of the word. Last year at this time, she wore the same black velveteen, too-short bib overalls and either a red or purple turtleneck to school for *two solid months*. Her hygiene and clothes management have been an issue since the dawn of civilization, and this particular "battle" was designed to require me to *tell* her to wash her clothes. I knew what she wanted, and I knew she had major staying power. Coincidentally, a school conference was scheduled for a few days after she started this little game. I suggested to her team of teachers that they make note of what she wore, and I assured them she had every opportunity to wash her clothes. All through December and January she wore her "uniform". Finally I DID essentially bail her out, thanks to suggestions from Liz Randolph. But she did manage to acquire the attention of her teachers. Sigh...

A year later little has changed. Shortly before leaving for the ATTACH conference in South Carolina in early October 2001, I told Amy this was the FIRST year I could tell everyone how well she was doing! And she really was on-target at that point. She had one or two friends, appeared to have a modicum of interest in her schoolwork, went to the local amusement park and actually had *fun*, and was doing a passable job on family chores. But as the pediatrician pointed out at Amy's recent physical, we were still in the "honeymoon" phase of school. Everything started to unravel by mid-October.

Shortly after school started, Amy informed me the policy this year on late homework was 50% credit if turned in *the day after it was due*, and zero credit after that although it still must be turned in. My response was a simple statement of fact that based on past performance she would be in serious jeopardy of flunking this year. She agreed.

Her last report card reflected two 3 F's and a C in her core classes. She IS getting an A in gym, a fact which I greeted with great enthusiasm and noted she would be strong and capable of hauling around her worldly possessions if she ended up living in a cardboard box under a bridge... The one friend she spent some time with quit calling for some reason. Amy never did her Science Fair project, which was mandatory. She said it was because she "couldn't get supplies." (Translation: she chose not to ASK for supplies.) My mom's comment was, "Remember, your dad gave you kids *suggestions* for Science Fair ideas!" (Translation: "It is YOUR fault she didn't do Science Fair!" When I mentioned Amy not even *asking* for materials, my mom's response was, "That's your *problem*, you want her to ASK for everything!" Another sigh...)

At home, she quit doing her basic chores (for the millionth time), with a myriad of excuses for why she couldn't make it happen. Although her room was pretty much bare bones already, she managed to trash the few possessions she still claimed. Her clothes were a heap of dirty and clean on her closet floor, and rarely found the laundry room. Weekly room chore responsibilities were way too much work. After threatening drastic consequences twice, I moved her downstairs to the basement, informing her she didn't really need a room, she just needed a hole. I long ago learned the best way to maintain my ability to be a calm, therapeutic

parent was to keep my resentment to a minimum. It was maddening to watch her trash her room and refuse to do even the most basic maintenance without prompting or coercion, while the rest of us lived far busier lives but still contributed to the well being of the family as a whole. Now when she trashes her living space in the basement I am far less bothered, and my resentment abates—a good thing for BOTH of us.

She has 7 different outfits and she washes everything every Saturday, although sometimes half of the outfits have not been worn. At the beginning I *told* her every Saturday to wash her clothes, but at least for now she is voluntarily doing her own laundry every weekend. Over the holidays she would go as long as 5 days without bathing, but currently she is bathing regularly. She comes straight home from school and does chores and an occasional homework assignment before hiding somewhere and rereading a 3rd grade book for the countless time. TV is not an option, and no friends call for her. She has no hobbies, no interests, no passions. She is 14 years old and physically a beautiful young lady, although her extremely negative aura and poor hygiene effectively kill her beauty. She has been with us over 12 years and although some things have definitely changed, many things are exactly as they were over a decade ago. Although I intellectually understand a great deal about attachment, grief, loss and adoption, in my wildest imagination I can't fathom living life as such flat line.

Recently Amy had a complete physical as part of the requirements for our family to obtain our foster care license in the state of Illinois. I knew there would be developmental questions, such as "How are your grades?" and "Do you have friends?" and "Do you have a healthy diet?" I hadn't made up my mind exactly what role I would play in this visit. I sat quietly at the beginning, listening to the half-truths uttered by my daughter, but finally I could stand it no longer.... NO, she DOESN'T eat a healthy diet, unless you count begging her "friend" to buy her French fries or onion rings every day for lunch because Amy still refuses to ask for lunch money. No, she DOESN'T HAVE any friends, rather than her version that her friends are just "too busy to call." As the truth started to unfold, next came the questions probing for depression, but Amy's answers were not indicative of depression, just a total unwillingness to own her life, or be the least bit inconvenienced over anything. Although at one point a diagnosis of bipolar disorder was considered, the current opinion of her family and her physician is she is just the poster child for apathy, plus the depression that comes as a result of her choices. She recently started a new medication—a sister drug to one we tried last year that wasn't effective—but we have not seen any change in her behavior.

As an example, she was having "difficulty" getting out of bed in the morning. When her room was upstairs with the other kids, she relied on the noise generated by their morning routines to arouse her from bed. She claimed to be out of time every morning and therefore unable to complete her 90-second morning chore of scooping the dog run. She stated she was not waking up to her clock radio when the music went off. Adam (who sets 3 alarms around his room!) and Laura suggested she use the buzzer to get the job done, and Amy's response was classic: "I don't LIKE my buzzer!" After she was moved downstairs, her inability to drag herself out of bed was complicated by the fact she couldn't hear everyone else moving about. She apparently did decide to set the buzzer, for I could hear it beeping for prolonged periods of time, yet she stayed in bed. One recent morning my husband, a veteran of the pledge house cold dorm wakeup duty, effectively aroused her with a refreshing touch of cool water! She seems to have found new enthusiasm for waking up these days! Additional methods to assist her in awaking in the morning include a bedtime of 9PM (even on weekends, as previous excuses for her inability to get going on Monday morning included being "off her schedule") and no naps to interfere with her ability to get to sleep at night. Isn't she fortunate to have a Mom who can help her with all her problems??

Lately she has been vocalizing to Laura how inadequately our pantry and refrigerator are stocked. I had also been getting not-so-subtle messages that there was "nothing around here to eat!" I informed her rather bluntly that in four short years when she was on her own, the food in our house and the warmth of her bed (even in the basement) would likely look pretty good to her. Given that she is a 14-year-old 7th grader who by all rights should repeat 7th grade (but we will see what the school decides!), it is highly unlikely she will have a high school diploma when she leaves our home. If in four years she is still as apathetic and unwilling to do anything as she is now, I will not enable her to delay the inevitable one more day. I have told her often this year, "January 29th is a cold time of year to turn 18!" I am sure that sounds harsh, but if we have put in 16 years of blood, sweat and tears—and therapy, money and pharmaceuticals—and she is STILL in the same spot, I can't see any good reason for doing it one more day past her 18th birthday. She will get a job as soon

as she is able, and we will save the money, and when she turns 18 I will set her up in her own apartment and as long as her money holds out she will be fine. After that, reality check. I really do love this difficult child, and I grieve for her apathy and attitude. But I long ago discovered what I want doesn't really matter. What matters is what SHE wants. And right now, the pain of change is greater than the pain of no change...

My folks spent a week here in January while Laura and I were in Los Angeles at a modeling convention. I knew they would struggle with Amy's living arrangements. Sure enough, a couple of weeks after they returned home, my mom called. She said my dad was "beside himself" over the way we "treated Amy" and certainly *I would never make Adam and Laura live like that!* She doesn't understand that I don't MAKE Amy live that way; it is Amy's decision. Apparently my mom and my sister had already discussed my parental failings over the telephone, and my sister "volunteered" to take Amy. Well, SHAZAM! I called my sister that very night. I told her taking Amy for the summer was NOT an option—if she really wanted to put her money where her mouth was, she needed to take her for at least one school year. Furthermore, I said, if you want to do all her homework and follow her to school to assure she turns it in, fine with me! Of course, I hope you don't mind a trashed room, unflushed toilets, poor hygiene, and no reciprocity at all. Funny, I haven't heard a word from my sister in over a month...

After twelve years, several drugs, 4 attachment therapists and two "intensives", multiple psychiatrists and psychologists, several adjunct therapies, and years of commitment and therapeutic parenting—in my opinion, it mostly comes down to Amy *choosing* to be happy or scowl, to put out effort or be lazy, to feel sorry for herself or embrace the many good things that happen to her. I recently read Deborah Gray's new book, *Attaching in Adoption*, and chapter 8 describes the developmental ages and stages of children, including the parent's tasks in each stage, the child's tasks, a checklist to determine if those tasks were mastered, and what happens when a child is moved during that stage. It was very clear that Amy arrived at age 21 months in Stage 2 (normally completed at age 20 months), *and has still not mastered those developmental tasks, or any that follow.* We knew she "shut down" when she arrived, and we know she has fought opening up, experiencing feelings, and owning her life. But to see it so clearly described was definitely an "a-HA" moment! In a recent conversation, I asked Amy how she planned to support herself after age 18? Of course, she had no answer. I asked *when* it might be reasonable to expect her to have given that rather weighty matter some serious thought? Sometime in 2002? "NO!" Perhaps 2003, when she was FIFTEEN? "NO!" What about 2004, when she was SIXTEEN? "YES, but DON'T COUNT ON IT!" I *assured her* I would *definitely* not count on it!

Some might argue that if she is operating at age 20 months, she truly *isn't* capable of making such weighty decisions. Perhaps, but time is marching on regardless! And I know how HARD my family has worked to get her up to speed, yet she claims no ownership of her situation at all. Not once has she said, "I WANT to get better, I WANT to go back to therapy." Even developmentally challenged children can show love to their families and participate in Christmas and birthday gift exchanges. Since we implemented Nancy Thomas's program of "No participating in Christmas if no effort is expended", Amy has not been a part of the last three Christmas gift exchanges (which really bothers my folks, of course). Nancy Thomas told me nearly all kids she has used that technique on have only missed one year. The first two years we allowed Amy to participate in nearly every other aspect of Christmas. Not this year. As I was putting lights on the tree, she said, "Do you need any help with that?" NEVER would she say, "I would LIKE to help with that." It is always framed in such a way that she is doing US a favor and she has NO investment. I declined her assistance, assuring her I knew she didn't much care for "family type" things. She slept until 1 PM on Christmas Day, and finally showered after at least a 5-day stretch of no bathing. Because she was clean, she ate Christmas dinner with us in the dining room. Had she not bathed voluntarily, she would have eaten alone.

Our former foster daughter, Amanda, spent nearly two weeks with us over the Christmas holidays. Amanda is now 18 and a senior in high school. In a year she joins the marines. It was *wonderful* to have her join us for Christmas. Her perspective on Amy was very, very interesting. Amanda saw how little Amy's behavior had changed, or in fact had worsened, over the past two years, and she also noted how little enthusiasm the family has for trying to change things anymore. Amanda very much enjoys visiting with our family because we are *a fun, intimate, supportive, nurturing and loving place to be!!* We truly have given Amy all we have to give.

Laura's birthday is three weeks before Christmas. Amy strolled up to Laura at the end of the day and said, "SO! You turn 15 today, huh?" Laura says, "Yes!" Amy replies, "I have a friend at school who turned 13 today! I wished HIM a Happy Birthday!" and she turns on her heels and walks off. Laura has been a wonderful sister to Amy, although admittedly everyone's tolerance is wearing mighty thin. I understand all the ramifications of jealousy and anger towards Laura for her successful life, biological kid status, many friends, etc. etc. etc. But in my opinion, to make a decision to be so nasty is exactly that—a decision. My birthday is two days after Christmas and she made a POINT of saying ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. On Amy's birthday, we all wished her a Happy Birthday, and I gave her a homemade card (the family joke is that on the two or three occasions over the past 12 years she *has* given someone a birthday card, it is printed off the computer *as we are sitting down* to the birthday dinner and has NO personal sentiment!) She had a card from my folks and a card from her paternal grandmother, who still sends her checks even though Amy NEVER asks to cash them and they just sit in her pile of stuff. We actually gave some serious thought to all going out to a Thai restaurant or to get ice cream, but Amy was SO nasty that day, we decided against it. Again, I understand birthdays can be hard, birthdays are a reminder of that other lady who "gave you away", etc. etc. etc. but for TWELVE YEARS we have been trying to get family status but to no avail! I have never felt like she wanted to celebrate her birthday anyway! In fact, I can't ever remember *anything* she "celebrates". Not friendships, not grades, not successes, not holidays, not family. For whatever reason, when we celebrated Larry's birthday recently, HE received a homemade card and it actually reflected a modicum of effort on her part. The new meds? A rare positive decision? Dads are OK but moms are not? Who knows?

At her recent school conference, it was the consensus of the team of teachers that Amy did not lack for intellectual abilities, and if she merely completed and returned her assignments (and did the occasional project like Science Fair, of course) she would be getting decent grades. Therefore, a new "plan" was developed. Upon her arrival home from school, Amy will take her place at the kitchen table where she will remain until 5 PM, giving her a full two hours to get homework accomplished. If she doesn't think she has two hours' worth of homework to do, she needs to bring a book with her to the table. Making a lunch has become one of her "homework assignments" since she hasn't been packing a lunch and is not allowed to purchase school lunches due to her unwillingness to notify her parents when the account is overdrawn. (While I thoroughly agree she will be able to perform better if she eats lunch, my husband and I were not as mortified as the school principal at the thought of Amy experiencing the "logical consequences" of not packing a lunch every day...)

We recently discovered her poor performance at school might have been affected by her new method of "bucking the system." Apparently she had been watching pay-per-view movies every chance she got, including after we had all gone to bed. Over 30 charges this past month alone. And I am not talking about Disney's Bambi, either... according to my husband, more along the lines of "Bambi does the Dallas Cowboys!" My mother's response was, "Well, with no outside interests and raging hormones, what else would you expect?" Excuse me? What ever happened to expecting integrity and morals? She is not the only teenager with raging hormones. I don't think that excuse would have worked for *me* when *I* was 14!! We have asked my folks to take her for the summer, as there is the possibility of a house-cleaning job in their area. Amy needs to repay us the \$400 she spent on movies. Since my folks are determined to lay blame on me rather than hold her accountable, any abnormal behaviors while at their home will no doubt be ignored or excused. It is very painful for me to be criticized and rejected by my parents, but I am in good company. I often talk to other families who have suffered in a similar fashion.

Whenever I receive an email or phone call from a family needing support, guidance or just good old fashioned hand-holding, I ultimately refer them to my story on the website. I usually tell them to note the "lessening" of my anger as Part 1 moves into the later chapters. However, there is clearly a great deal of emotion reflected in the words I just wrote about Amy. I am not sure if it is anger as much as frustration. In fact, about 6 months ago I visited our pastor to discuss my sense of still feeling *angry* much of the time. We discussed it, developed a plan to approach it, and I left his office with the name of a Christian counselor. I was unable to follow up for several months, but the counselor's name remained in my day planner. When I finally found the time to readdress this issue, I realized, to my surprise, that I no longer felt so angry. Perhaps just admitting the problem to God and myself was all that was necessary, for now at least. Perhaps the joy I feel as I watch Hannah blossom and the pleasure and positive reinforcement I receive from her and Adam and Laura have significantly healed my wounds. I don't know—I only know I no longer feel as venomous as

I have in the past. Previously, I was criticized after some of my speaking engagements if my vulnerability was expressed as anger. Parents who were living similar lives to mine felt *validated*, but parents just beginning their journey or therapists and social workers who had never lived with children like mine focused only on my anger. Some even suggested I discontinue reaching out to others until after my own anger abated. I chose not to follow that advice for several reasons. I believe it *is* my anger and vulnerability that convinces other families I have walked in their shoes. The ability to help someone else sort out their lives or their family, even to a small degree, gives me a modicum of control over a disorder which has wreaked havoc in my own family and over which I appear to have little control. Lastly, although I have learned a great deal in the past ten years, I still have much to learn. It is a privilege to work along side the terrific families and therapists that have crossed my path in recent years.

As frustrated and disappointed as I am with Amy's lack of progress, I have to admit there are some positives to living with her. At the very core of the issue, I believe she *does* love me, at least as much as she is able. She is not completely unattached. She clearly has *huge* self-esteem, grief and loss issues that she refuses to address, but we do think she loves us to some extent. At least we know she misses us when she is gone. She makes a significant contribution around the house by doing chores. After a dozen years of training, we affectionately term it "point and shoot"—we can make a list of simple daily maintenance chores and she will usually do a good job with them. (Her expected routine chores of scooping the dog run and taking out the trash for weekly pickup can still be control issues!) Most enjoyable of all, she brushes my hair! The motivation for doing that pleasurable "chore" has varied from her volunteering because she likes to mess with my hair, to trading her brushing time for the perk of me "reminding" her to wash her clothes, to me just needing some positive reciprocity (we usually watch TV and this is about the only *legitimate* TV time she gets!) She traded Laura massage time for the privilege of having Laura check her bathroom to see if Amy was out of soap, shampoo, toothpaste or toilet paper. (The old "can't ask" dilemma!) When she is not scowling for weeks or months at a time, when her body and clothes are clean, and when she is not picking control battles, she can be *almost* pleasurable to be around. Conversations with any depth or purpose are still not possible. Any overt or shaded reference to her situation is off-limits. Her depression and lack of motivation still permeate every aspect of her life. But at least when she smiles and does chores she is not a total anchor. Sometimes, when I get a glimpse of who she *could* be if she just tried, it just magnifies my frustration. In spite of how difficult these past twelve years have been, I really do love this young lady and would so much like to see her "get a life." As I have told many parents in the past, if it was about *wanting* our kids to get better, they would *all* be better...

It is my firm belief that Hannah, who joined our family a little over 2 years ago two weeks before her third birthday, has played a significant role in healing my wounds. She disrupted from her first placement after being adopted from China at age 8 months. Her first adoptive family had struggled for over two years to connect with her. (See Part 4 for the complete story.) While many believed it was a wonderful thing for Hannah to find *me* (and indeed, she did benefit from my experience) the fact is, I needed her even more than she needed me. While she is not a child for the faint-hearted and does require a very firm hand, she has developed into a positive, enthusiastic, energetic, entertaining and witty child! It is so apparent to me how much I have changed from the parent I was ten years ago.

For instance, Hannah's motto is: "If you want to do it, DO IT but try not to get caught!!" As an example, she has a propensity to wander around her room at night and play until the wee hours of the morning, thereby completely disrupting her schedule. A motion detector strategically placed in her room successfully convinced her to stay put. As I was putting her to bed one night, she said, "SO! If I get out of bed, will something happen?!" Her position was very clear: "Just the facts, ma'am! Will I get nailed if I get out of bed?" Not a trace of remorse at acknowledging her desire to do what she knew she wasn't supposed to do. Ten years ago I would have taken that obvious "defiance" as a direct challenge to my authority. Now, I know better. Now I understand Hannah is merely being Hannah. She is not defying my authority per se; she is expressing her individuality and confidence in her own choices. In other words, it takes a certain degree of moxie to so openly defy someone (as opposed to endless passive resistance), and that indicates a pretty strong sense of self. And God knows you can't *teach* or *inject* a sense of value into a person. So mostly I rejoice at Hannah's sense of her own competence and value. I can usually determine the difference between a child who is defying authority specifically to test the authority figure and one who is just "doing their own thing."

Hannah's first six months with us were pretty rough. She challenged me and tested me on everything. She has a rough, scratchy voice from yelling and crying, and our ENT doctor confirmed nodules on her vocal cords. We nicknamed her "Carol Channing"! We spent a great deal of time in the rocking chair, and I did not separate from her for nearly a year. I clearly remember the point at which her view of me changed. It was 3-4 months after she came to live with us. We were rocking, after the typical morning of challenges and control battles. As I gazed into her eyes and she returned the gaze, I realized something was different about the way she was looking at me. She was looking at me as if I "hung the moon." At that point, I knew we would be fine. That is not to say we won't have our difficulties, but the message was clear—I loved her passionately and she returned that love.

As I mentioned in Part 4, Liz Randolph evaluated Hannah shortly after Hannah joined our family. At Liz's insistence, we took Hannah's favorite stuffed animal ("Guy") away from her. She was *attached* to Guy and that interfered with her ability to attach to me. Whenever she was stressed, she would grab Guy and self-soothe. It was painful to watch her call for Guy and search for him, but I believed it was the right thing to do. Nearly a year after she joined our family, I found Guy in the boxes as I was unpacking from our move. I showed him to her and she had *no recognition* of him at all. I was shocked. My daughter asked her about him the other day, and Hannah has no memory of this favorite stuffed animal or the critical role he played in her early life.

The second 6 months were slightly easier than the first. She was generally more compliant and her relationship with me and the other members of the family deepened. However, she still persisted in one favorite control battle. She constantly put her shoes on the wrong feet. They were wrong often enough it was clear this was no mistake! She came to us with this behavior, as it had significantly irritated her first family. My first approach was to try and ignore it, but I finally had to admit it bothered me, too. I hated to look down and see those shoes on backwards ALL the time. I tried several different approaches, but nothing had any long-term impact on her. Finally, I decided if I couldn't beat her, I'd join her!

One morning she came downstairs for breakfast with her shoes on backwards, as usual. When she climbed up to the table, she found her cereal in a cup, and her orange juice in a bowl! I smiled sweetly at her and walked away. She *instantly* knew what the message was, but said nothing. This approach worked for a couple of days, but she soon upped the ante by coming down with her shoes on backwards, acting shocked that they were, in fact, on the wrong feet, and changing them in the kitchen! So I assured her, no problem for me! If she wanted to have a "Backwards Day", I would help her with that, and I continued to provide a backwards breakfast. She found other ways to up the ante, and I responded in kind. The last day we played this game, she ate breakfast with the chair facing away from the table, her bib hanging down her back, and her food in the wrong dishes. She left for school with her coat zipped up the back and her backpack hanging down her chest. She was tugging at her backpack to get it off the second we walked into the preschool building, lest anyone see her backwards attire. (It wasn't lost on me that this was the same period of time Amy was wearing her "uniform" of bib overalls to school for two solid months, waiting on me to tell her to wash her clothes! Obviously, peer pressure is not effective with Amy!) After that day, Hannah lost most of her enthusiasm for wearing her shoes backwards.

As I have become more creative in my ability to provide "logical consequences," parenting has become more fun and less stressful, even when dealing with such psychologically challenging children. Even the children enjoy the goofy, creative approaches, and the laughter that is often generated breaks the tension and eases the pain of compliance. It certainly worked well in Hannah's case. Although she was developmentally delayed when she joined our family, she is currently on target or even slightly advanced in her maturity level. She has many friends, many interests, is very attentive to what happens around her, is empathetic and sensitive, and wants to have something to do all the time. She accepts correction for misbehavior or bad choices without a blink, and is usually very compliant. If she is well rested, she is almost never any problem. She is funny and has a sunny disposition. Her range of facial expressions is amazing—a far cry from the flat affect she demonstrated 2 years ago. She is, however, *very* intense in her approach towards everything. That aspect of her behavior is especially appealing to me, as I am such an intense person myself. I love her 150% approach to life. It is ironic that in many ways, Hannah is more like me than the two biological children, who have their father's low-key, more relaxed genetic contribution to balance my intensity. I guess Hannah is the

product of two total Type A's! Regardless of her origins, I have absolutely no doubt she is meant to be my daughter and I am meant to be her mom.

Hannah's first family continues to be a part of her life. We saw them every few months while we still lived in Kansas, and we make a point of seeing them when we return for visits. The disruption was very difficult for them, and their healing is not yet complete. About 8 months after Hannah came to live with us, at the last visit we had before we moved, I noticed a distinct difference in Hannah's response to their presence. She responded to them more as *good family friends* rather than as *parents*. On one return visit to Kansas, we had dinner at their home. It was the first time Hannah had returned to their home. I could tell when we walked into the house she was hit with a sense of "deja vu". She shook it off and scampered off to play. As we gathered around the table for pizza, she once again looked slightly confused. She leaned over to me and whispered, "Is this my first family?" I said it was, she appeared satisfied, and that was the end of it. I have not noticed any behavioral problems after visits since the last visit before we moved. Her knowledge of who they are and what role they played in her life is more from stories we tell than from direct, attainable memories.

Hannah attends preschool three days a week as well as dance and gymnastics classes. Her big sister and I hope she enjoys gymnastics enough to eventually make the competitive team. Last summer, Hannah and I showed my Arabian gelding in lead-line classes, wearing matching zebra vests (horses and zebras—what *else?*) that I sewed. Adam only rode horses during the time when he needed them for "chick bait." He no longer needs any assistance in this regard. Laura is extremely allergic to horses and cats, and the barn is totally off limits to her. Quite a while ago I tried Amy on a horse, but manipulation tactics are lost on a thousand pound critter and she was not very successful in becoming a horsewoman. Hannah has just the right disposition to be a good rider. She is confident and thinks everyone and every thing should do as she asks! This summer we intend to sell our more energetic gelding and replace him with a horse more suited to children. (We are still keeping my favorite horse, just selling my "spare"!) I said *children* because soon there will be another young lady around here who just *might* be interested in riding...

Hannah is doing so well, we no longer consider her a "troubled" child. She accompanies me almost everywhere except her dad's and my weekly dinner-and-movie dates. Adam is nearly launched. He has his own car, and with his social life, school, job and tennis he requires little time output from me except washing his considerable laundry and making sure there is food available for the weekly Bible study he leads at our home. Laura is not yet driving but has many activities with friends, diving and school that require a time commitment on my part, but it is a pleasure to attend diving meets and have her friends to the house. Amy has no extra-curricular activities that require effort on my part, and she clearly resists most of my other efforts to be her mom. So... my ears were alert to see who else might come along...

I attended the ATTACH conference in South Carolina last October. (It was with great sadness I resigned my position on the Board of Directors of ATTACH due to time constraints. After our move, the effort required to reorganize, fund and maintain the Attachment Disorder Network while settling the family into a new community demanded I lighten my responsibilities.) At the conference I learned about Amanda, a 9-year-old girl in foster care in another state. The agency that represented her is the prototype for how agencies should be, in my opinion! This young lady has had a tough time, like most of our kids, and she was in need of a home with some experience. Because I have so much respect for the person who told me about her, I was confident I was getting accurate information about this child and her history. I excitedly called my husband and my other kids to tell them about her.

She visited us for 10 days over Christmas (we had BIG Amanda and LITTLE Amanda!) I don't think she quite knew what to make of me. Her caseworker flew her here and flew her home, and spent a couple of days with us at each end of the visit. Amanda mostly "honeymooned", only testing me a bit at the end. She and Hannah had a lot of fun together, but their relationship will be very closely monitored. On the plane ride home, Amanda told her caseworker she felt like she "belonged" with us, and she had never felt that way in any of the many other homes she had inhabited. She has struggled to regulate her behavior while waiting for the paperwork to be completed. The professionals who have worked with her in the past are reasonably confident she can make the transition to a stable, therapeutic, experienced home. I talk to her often on the phone, and send her packages. As of this writing, she is scheduled to visit us again in two weeks, a visit

which will hopefully merge into permanency if we can complete the paperwork. We are all excited to welcome her to the family!

Tommy turns 18 in April. He has had a very rough time of it these past few years. After residing at the Pueblo Boy's Ranch for approximately two years and successfully completing their program, they attempted to place him in foster care. Three placements and about 5 months later, he started a succession of psych placements to help him deal with multiple suicide attempts and bulimia. He began initiating regular contact with us last fall. We had many productive, personal telephone calls and our family rejoiced at what appeared to be some real progress. I sent him a CD and a large box of new clothes for Christmas. He chafed at being in a psych placement over Christmas, but was anticipating his return to the Boy's Ranch, this time to the Conduct Disorder Unit. Sadly, his behaviors necessitated his removal from the Boy's Ranch, and currently he is in a group home. We were very sorry to see him lose his opportunity to reside at the Boy's Ranch, for in a conversation with his therapist there, it was my opinion their plan for Tommy was very realistic and very appropriate. If he continues to make poor choices, he will deplete all of his options and will be emancipated in two short months. He is not prepared to be on his own, and he knows it. He very much wants a "normal" relationship with the family, but at the same time he is terrified he can't make it happen. He once told me in a conversation he wants us to "do the things mothers and sons do." In a recent phone conversation he estimated he would be ready for me to visit in about three months. He is our son and we love him and want him to be successful, but he must make that happen for himself.

When I told Tommy of Amy's latest movie madness, he was silent for several moments. He then inquired if she had ever been molested, as he has struggled considerably with the aftermath of his own abuse. I told him we weren't sure, and would probably never know, as she was only 21 months when she came to America. I also told him we believed much of what motivates her behavior is her determination to "buck the system", or perhaps it is more her apathy towards going *with* the program. He wanted me to tell her he was disappointed in her and she was "better than that." It frustrates him to see her refuse to address her issues. He didn't either when he was 14, and I reminded him of that fact. Only time will tell if, at age 18, she becomes willing to own at least *some* of her behaviors.

I recently began training for the Chicago 3Day Breast Cancer walk that will be in June. This benefit raises money to provide low-income women the opportunity to get a mammogram. We will walk from Kenosha, Wisconsin to Chicago—twenty miles a day for each of 3 days! Each walker raises a minimum of \$1900. At this point in my training I am walking about 25 miles a week. My dogs are certainly enjoying the new routine. Since I am not successful in eating less, perhaps I can stay younger looking by exercising more? That and a good hairdresser!

Although I am no longer on the Board of Directors of ATTACH, I am still in regular contact with the national attachment community. I am doing more workshops both locally and nationally. The **Attachment Disorder Network** is growing and serving more needy families than ever before. My family's move to Chicago provided me with the opportunity to help Chicagoans build a local support network. I started a list-serve called ChicagoADN that allows families in the Chicago metro area to network without leaving their homes. They compare notes on therapists and other health professionals, help each other find respite care, and vent as countless parents do on other lists! Additionally, ADN's national list-serve, Little Zebras, continues to add new members and provide those families the ability to share their wisdom. Both lists are available through Yahoo groups.

My old Rottweiler just had major abdominal surgery where we removed about 4 ounces of spleen and literally 4 pounds of tumor. I assisted—the first time I had been in surgical gown and gloves in years. When we did the initial diagnostics, Laura went with me to provide much-needed emotional support. The veterinarian that performed the procedures graduated from the same veterinary school I attended, only 9 years later! We reminisced about professors and other memorable aspects of our training. She provided both Laura and me the opportunity to microscopically view the cancer cells we collected. It was like stepping back in time. Laura asked me if I missed it. I told her I had realized there were many excellent veterinarians in the country that could meet the needs of my pets, but there were far fewer people who understood the dynamics of emotionally disturbed children. I believe I am where I need to be. Sometimes I really miss veterinary

medicine, but many of the aspects of veterinary practice that I most enjoyed I still do today. I was a firm believer in client education; today I educate parents. I provided my clients with each and every option I knew was available when difficult decisions loomed; today I help parents make difficult decisions. My physiology and pharmacology training allows me to understand the medical aspects of these children. Lastly, I am very good at what Foster Cline affectionately calls “Basic German Shepherd—Come, Sit, Down, Stay, Quiet!”

There is still a black cloud over my Rottie as we wait to see if the cancer has spread. Unfortunately, this type of cancer has often spread by the time the primary tumor is found. My dogs do a wonderful job of “filling my tank” and this is a difficult time. But we have survived many difficult times and will continue to do so. In spite of the difficulties we face, we continue to focus on how blessed we truly are. We hope to return to Kansas in 2003, and have even purchased a lot not far from where we used to live. (Yes, I will be back in the same school district!! It isn't a *perfect* situation, but nothing is perfect!) We have found a nice church here but we all miss our Kansas church family. I miss my friends in Kansas. And from all indications, the child welfare system in Kansas is in worse shape than ever before. Guess there is still much work to be done!