

# When Will I Be Loved?

by Judy Howell, President MFCA

*I've been cheated,  
been mistreated,  
When will I be loved?*

*Linda Ronstadt - Heart Like AWill /  
The Everly Brothers - The Very Best Of The  
Everly Brothers, 1988 Warner*

Spring is beginning to poke green and freshness from the earth, it is a time of love, of Mother's Day, and of anticipation for summer vacation and no school. Each of these anticipations is met with different anticipation from the children we care for. To a child in out-of-home placement life is not fair, other children live with their "real" families, they feel cheated, to find oneself in foster care they have most often been mistreated. Love is one big four-lettered word.

*I've been pushed down,  
I've been pushed 'round,  
When will I be loved?*

The dreams of a child are to have a perfect 'real' family, when that doesn't happen, children join our homes in adoptive or foster placement. We may be the 'next best thing,' but we are not the 'real thing.' They feel pushed down and shoved around. They have little control over their living arrangements or the family who will care for them. The best interest of the child practice may have nothing to do with what the child feels or thinks is in their best interest.

*I've been made blue,  
I've been lied to,  
When will I be loved?*

Even in the most perfect of 'best interest in the child circumstances' the child loses something, even if it is only their internal goal for their own family to be perfect. Foster care and older adoption can bring shame upon a child because they are the 'product' of a family 'not approved' or 'not good enough' to care for them, they feel tarnished.

*When will I be loved?  
Tell me when will I be loved?*

Our job as foster and adoptive parent is to love these children. Yesterday, I received a call from a young woman, age fourteen, who just entered the foster care system. In a perfect world, this young woman will give it her best, as will her new foster mother and together they will navigate the trials of high school and adult transition. For this young lady, foster care represents an opportunity to begin to dream, she is now somebody's somebody. She is no longer a 'ho or a 'busdown or a 'bitch as she had been told day-in and day-out by her birth mother. She is herself, she is a young woman with opportunity. This opportunity will not come without hardship, she will have give as much and change as her new foster mother will.

She will have to give up the language of the streets and one hour relationships for a relationship with a vested adult of her own culture. She will have to quiet her loudness and find other ways to seek attention. She will have to come under the guidance of an adult and obey rules. Rules beyond police intervention will be new to her.

But inside I know this young woman, I have seen her spirit, I have listened to her heart, and she knows she has been given the

gift of foster care, the gift of another adult who will love and care for her, and hold her accountable. She has waited in the children's shelter for weeks for a qualified caregiver. This tough on the outside, marshmallow of a little girl on the inside is feeling like it is Christmas and her bondage of neglect and mistreatment may be over. On the surface, this is the best of starts for a new family.

In another home, a little girl is placed and in a love-hate relationship with her birth mother, her extended family dotes on her in pity, giving her whatever she wants to make up for the neglect and losses and pain she has experienced under her birth mother's care.

This little girl has become a master of manipulation - life becoming "my way or the highway." In her mind, life is either her way or needs to become her way, and she doesn't count the cost when she runs, tantrums or overreacts, making life very uncomfortable for everyone else in the home. For this little girl, love is only felt when she believes she gets her way, when in reality love sets and keeps firm limits, follows-through, is consistent and continues to be there no matter what.

Her present goal is testing the threshold of the family with "how bad can I be, before you kick me out."

For both of these children, their perception of what love is, is far different from the professionals and new families who try to love them. Yet love and compassion is what makes one of the differences in reaching these young ladies and often times people go into foster care thinking love is enough, but it is a falacy. To bring a child back to a point of trusting enough to love themselves and loving themselves enough to love another human being is 'hard work'

and involves more than just the new caregivers.

- ▶ It takes teachers willing to listen and communicate with the foster family and abide by the written IEPs.
- ▶ It takes social service professionals willing to support the new family and provide access and information to services to help all family members.
- ▶ It takes the community to learn to not judge but work on understanding.

- ▶ It takes mentors who are willing to go the extra mile, providing strength and limits and challenging the child with goals, not just things to do and special experiences.

And of course it take a family willing to love more than they ever imagined they could love another human being. Because that is the amount of love and commitment this child will need.

*God Bless, Judy Howell, President, FACAM*

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