

# Being the 'Bridge' Over Troubled Water

by Judy Howell, President MFCA

*"When you're weary,  
feeling small  
When tears are in your  
eyes, I'll dry them all..  
I'm on your side, oh,  
when times get rough  
And friends just can't be  
found  
Like a bridge over trou-  
bled water  
I will lay me down"  
Simon and Garfunkel (1969)*

This summer I have watched my incredible son Michael face the changes of emerging adulthood. He has struggled in dealing with the reality that this fall he will not be getting on the bus, going to school or doing the same things he has done for the last twelve years. He has felt very small and insignificant in this new role of adulthood and I have been challenged to help him grow and change into a role our culture has forced him to be – an adult. After all he is of age and he has graduated from high school.

In high school Michael had a place - he had friends who knew and understood his challenges and he soared as he helped to manage the high school soccer team. Now all that has changed with the pomp and circumstance of graduation and summer. Michael has been lucky. Since a little toddler he has enjoyed the security of one family and support from adults who he knew loved him and he could trust. He has been

able to grow and change and begun to become the adult man we will all be proud to have as part of our American tapestry.

Other children in my care have not been so lucky. At the magic age of 18 or wave of the wand at graduation they have become independent. Foster care and the system they have tentatively learned to trust releases them to their own means and for many that means struggles for years in coming to terms with who they are and their place in society.

I sit quilting and remember Michael's first prom. I spent the whole year preparing my son for this life achieving event. We went to restaurants and practiced eating and ordering and paying the bill. We learned to dance and how to properly invite a girl to the prom. My wonderful Michael invited his beautiful girlfriend. I admired him and his accomplishments as he rounded the bend for a picture at the prom promenade. I readied my camera for that magic Kodak moment as he refused to stop and walked right by me. My trophy picture of accomplishment was never clicked. Later I asked Michael why he didn't stop and let me take that precious picture. He answered, "Mom, they told me to walk around the gym, NOT stop and let your mother take a picture of you."

My concrete thinking little boy - in a man's body will have to learn to navigate in his own river of life. For those of us who have adopted special children we understand the diversity of their life's river. There are times when their waters are stressed.

Jagged rocks and heavy white water rip and tear at the riverbanks. There are also times the waters spread out and flow gently. Peaceably meandering along grassy shores and providing life.

Unlike one of my more expressive and rageful sons, Michael turns his feelings inward. He builds dams which can stop the progress of his life's river. I must learn to cross over his dams, I must encourage him instead to let me use bridges to watch from and keep his waters moving.

Michael has had a difficult summer. Change is hard for him. I realized I had to go back up the river and find a safe place he could begin to reflow. "Michael, why don't you go back to work at the retirement center?"

"Will I have to interview again, mom?" he asked as he paced anxiously.

"No, sweetie, you can just pick up where you left off," I offered.

Michael was silent. The wheels were turning in his brain. "Mom, I think I was playing checkers with that old man."

I smiled, thinking "well Michael, I guess it's your move." This is your river.

*God Bless*

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We need more foster and adoptive parents as members. Get your friends to join MFCA and keep up the great job Minnesota!

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