

# He's Got The Whole World In His Hands

by Judy Howell, President MFCA

*He's got the itty bitty babies*

*In His Hands*

*He's got the you an me mama's*

*In His Hands*

*He's got you an me brotha's*

*In His Hands*

*He's got the whole world.*

Each one reach one. None of us is an isolated island. In choosing foster care we choose to become a fishbowl others keep their eyes on. News stories are sensationalized when complex issues happen to other people's children being cared for in a licensed foster home, kinship home or adoptive care. By choice we have chosen professional and public parenting paths. Perhaps we have chosen to remain silent about our parenting. If that is our choice, we find none too soon that our silence is exploded by the children we choose to care for in therapy sessions, doctors appointments, IEP's, teacher's meetings and community events. We often have very colorful personalities and very visible children.

The Minnesota Foster Doll Open Houses in November met with unprecedented success. Over fifty foster and adoptive families opened their homes to government servants and the public, welcoming them in to see "just" what our "different" families are all about. "**Our Families**" represents care giving adults from ages in their early twenties through seventies. All races are represented, a myriad of faiths and a conglomerate of levels of education. We represent single men and women and married and gay couples. We represent stay at home mothers and working mothers, stay at home fathers

and working fathers and stay at home parents in group homes. We represent janitors and construction workers and doctors and teachers and small businessowners working to support their families while giving care and love to children and Home Plus adults. Some of us have cared for hundreds of children, others have taken the time to care importantly for one.

**Our Families** represent the diversity of our country and though we are all vastly different, we are also similar. Each caregiving family has taken the time and made the commitment to reach out to one of God's creation in need – old or young.

I am always honored when I speak with families at the Fall Conferences and have a chance to get to know more of the wonderful people who share their homes and love with others. It always amazes me how easily it is to cross the cultural barriers society still chooses to erect. When we come together as caregiving families we reach a commonality and intimacy another foster, kinship or adoptive family understands. We often speak with fewer words because our hearts and minds are already joined. We don't casually meet at a crossroad or intersection.

We who care for others actually integrate on much more than a superficial level. Family becomes bigger. The meaning of family becomes those who we welcome into our lives abundantly – baggage or no baggage.

Adult life is segregated, we interact with those we share interests, beliefs and lifestyles. People similar to our own values are more comfortable to be around. There is less of a challenge, life is easier. Foster, kinship and adoptive families do not have that luxury. I believe it is for the best. Our

children and those we care for stretch our boundaries beyond our comfort zone. With these special people we walk in places we would not travel. We learn things we would not have needed to learn. It is the traveling and the learning – reaching out our hand and mind – that gives us the courage to limit our judging of others.

I remember a little girl whose mother told me "about" her difficult child. I listened with amusement to this young and poor mother, after all I was the trained future caregiver. Six weeks later, behavior by behavior I discovered the birth mother was telling the truth – the child was behaving in my home similar to hers. She was one tough young lady to parent. The difference in my parenting skills was age and experience with many similar children. The difference in handling her behaviors without as much emotion was available to me because I was not her "real" parent. In addition, I had a car to get to therapy and doctors appointments – they struggled by taking the bus. I had professional relationships with the school – I was on a personal name basis with "all" the vice principals having spent so much time with them because of the other children I have cared for. I was respected as a child advocate and if I needed something I had the resources to find out how to get what I needed – her mother didn't have a phone.

In my arrogance and ignorance I chose to take lightly that which was fact – poverty and its lack of day-to-day, take for granted resources – impacts the ability to parent some of our toughest children making the process of parenting even more difficult creating a vicious cycle. In this realization I changed my foster parenting when reunification was expected to occur. I focused on skills I could teach the child to help her

cope when she returned home. I worked to develop a mentor relationship with the parent and discover what behaviors were the most difficult to cope with and what would help to improve her life. I shared what I learned with social services.

Over time I have learned that is is not ME but “He” (whoever you believe you He is) who has allowed us the privilege of being the caregivers of keeping the whole world in our hands. It is a big world and we

have just a little part. Each of our tiny parts is very important to the dignity of another. I must constantly remind myself when I am being the hands for another it is my responsibility and choice to make a difference good or bad. Thank you for all your hands this holiday season.

*God Bless*

*Judy Howell, President, MFCA*

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