

Fostering family: Romans 8:12-25

by [Rachel M. Srubas](#) in the [July 12, 2005](#) issue

The other day my husband, Ken, and I splashed and swam in a pool, then ate burgers and drank iced tea at a barbecue hosted by our friends Ann Marie and Patricia. We are pleased and proud of the honorary titles “Uncle Ken” and “Auntie Rachel,” bestowed on us by this couple and the children they are raising. I’m also thankful for permission to tell their story, which has taught me much about what the apostle Paul calls “a spirit of adoption.”

I have a special bond with Emily, Ann Marie’s precocious and athletic six-year-old cousin. She calls me “Mini Me,” and I call her “Big Me.” She can already read at a second- or third-grade level. Emily’s father is largely absent from her life, and her birth mother is glad to have Ann Marie and Patricia as co-parents.

Hailey, a blond, abundantly energetic toddler, looks like a small Olympian in her blue, “USA”-emblazoned bathing suit. She laughs delightedly when I talk to her in my chipmunk voice. Ann Marie and Patricia’s friends had been praying fervently for Hailey since she was just a few months old. At that time, she disappeared with her birth mother, a young, crack-addicted woman who was trying to escape intervention by Child Protective Services. Ann Marie worked for CPS at the time, and having recently wed her partner, Patricia (in a church commitment ceremony at which I served as celebrant), she decided to become a foster co-parent to Hailey, a child with special needs stemming from the chaos of her life’s earliest months.

One and a half years of foster parenting later, Ann Marie is Hailey’s legally adoptive mother. At the adoption hearing, the presiding judge honored Patricia by expressing his hope that one day loving couples like Ann Marie and Patricia will enjoy the legal right to *share* in the adoption of foster children who desperately need stable, nurturing families.

Our entire society groans while we wait for just and compassionate laws that will respond to the need: according to recent American Bar Association statistics, the U.S. is home to between 6 and 10 million children of gay, lesbian or bisexual parents. The Department of Health and Human Services claims that approximately

581,000 children currently receive foster care, with about 127,000 of those children awaiting permanent, legal adoption. Thank God for parents like Ann Marie and Patricia, whose determined advocacy for children is undeterred by homophobic legislation.

Mike and Kerry waited nearly two years to adopt J. T., now two, who romps around our church's playground with Hailey. Kerry, whom J. T. calls "Daddy," is his legally adoptive father, while Mike ("Papa" to J. T.) is his loving, stay-at-home—although not legally adoptive—parent. During one of J. T.'s recent midday naps, Mike told me about the yearning and anxiety that he and Kerry felt while they waited hopefully to become adoptive parents of an infant. "We wait for it with patience," writes Paul of hoping "for what we do not see." Clearly, Paul never experienced the anticipation and stress of waiting to adopt a baby.

Patricia and Ann Marie are raising a third child. Abby Rose was slated to play the infant Jesus in our church's Christmas pageant last year. But because her immune system was compromised by the cocaine her birth mother ingested during pregnancy, Abby Rose was hospitalized with a dangerous infection.

Like many parents whose children become wards of the state, Abby Rose's birth mother has, to borrow Paul's potent phrase, "a spirit of slavery." At 19 she became addicted to drugs, and she now lives in "bondage to decay" in a manner that Paul may never have imagined. For her, "groaning in labor pains" leads to another pain—she loses custody of children she is incapable of raising. Ann Marie recently received a call informing her that the birth mother's drug use had caused her to miscarry Abby Rose's sibling.

Ann Marie's cell phone is never silent for long. Often the calls come from the children's services agency that once employed her as a supervisor. Just the other day, a CPS worker phoned to ask whether the two women would accept two more foster daughters, newborn twins whose birth parents had already lost their parental rights. After some difficult moments, Ann Marie declined.

What made it difficult for Ann Marie to say no is what makes her a superb parent. She understands the profundity of children's needs, especially of those whose gestation has been toxic and whose childhood seems destined for emotional and material impoverishment. Parenting demands the highest degree of self-giving, and Ann Marie and Patricia already have one child who needs extra patience, attention

and hope. Other foster parents must be found for the twin girls.

I pray that a foster family will be led to them soon, and that their joyful adoption will come in due time. As long as the twins are adored and diapered, fed and read to, held and protected and allowed safely to discover themselves and their world, it will not matter whether their foster family includes a mommy and a daddy, or some creative variation on this culture's conventional image of family. What will matter is that the thousands of children waiting for adoption be treated, in the words of the apostle Paul, as children of God. "And not only the creation," writes Paul, "but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." The redemption of the body of Christ surely calls for the timely and literal adoption of every child who is waiting to be wanted, accepted and loved.