

Letter from a Foster Mom to Camp# 133 Cuyahoga Falls, OH. 2018

Dear Church, Staff, and members,

I don't know where to start other than to say "Thank You". Those two words are so simple, but you have no idea how much weight I am putting on them.

Last Sunday, I dropped my son off for camp. This comes after months (and years) of struggle. We had never been away from each other for 4 nights since he had come to live with us. The trauma, PTSD, mood disorders, ADHD and extreme behaviors have been something we have been trying to get through for 6 years.

Most recently he was asked not to return to school to finish the year after a total of 32 days (that is 6 weeks) of suspension for one reason or another. Even more recently than that, he had jumped out of his second story window 2 days prior to camp and ran away. He was found not far from home a few hours later - but it was still a scary moment for everyone involved.

I thank God for our family, friends, and neighbors who have joined our village to help raise our kids. The network of families I have met through fostering are priceless. Being able to start a conversation with "Well he got suspended because he threatened to strangle the principal" is so much less stressful when you don't have to deal with the shock and appall of others. We don't want to feel judged, or looked down upon, or pitied. The support we have among each other is so strong.

With all of the support we have between us- life is so stressful. Trying to keep a full-time career while getting called out on multiple occasions to pick up my child due to behavior or shuttling him back and forth because he has been kicked off the bus or caring for him full time plus working and teaching him because he is suspended, has been extremely difficult.

I will admit it. I was taking selfies out of pure joy at the church when I dropped him off last Sunday. I Snap Chatted it and even posted on Instagram. The thought of FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS sounded as great to me as an all-inclusive vacation in paradise! Everyone would be able to breathe a little easier.

That being said, I wanted him to have a great time. I wanted him to have his four days and nights of a little paradise as well. I'm sure I am not always a gem to live with either. :-).

Well, we made it through all four days without a phone call. I was nervous coming to pick him up. Was he going to be the same kid I dropped off? Was he going to be mad about something? Upset? Broken-down?

I came to sign him out and was told "He had a great time! He smiled and had fun." I was told "He was not without his challenges, but he made it through just fine." Well, I thought, that guy lies pretty well - because I know what people mean when they say "challenges."

I went to the next room to gather his crafts and medicines. When I told nurse Andi who I was picking up, she gave me "the look." That look of pity I get right before the principal tells me he is suspended. Here it goes....he won't be welcomed back next year. "Oh my goodness" she said. "He was just the sweetest boy! I just love him so much. He gave me hugs every day and helped the other campers. He has to come back next year!" As a natural skeptic, I looked at my friend with the "eye roll" - yeah right- she got my kid mixed up with another.

Next, we moved to the sanctuary where we waited. Kids start coming through the door. People are clapping. I waited. Suddenly, he comes through the door and his eyes meet mine and he smiled. I knew something was up when he didn't wave like the other kids, but soon realized it was because his hands were full. I gave him a big hug and he immediately pulled out the crosses he had made for his brother and sister. He took out his photo album that was full of wonderfully happy pictures. He was so excited. He was filthy! But he was so happy.

I will admit it. I was the one crying that day at the church...out of pure joy. My heart was ready to burst with how happy he was. He was loved. He wasn't judged. He was able to have his four days and nights of all-inclusive paradise. He was able to be a kid without the stresses of everyday life of a kid from the system.

Thank you. From the bottom of my heart...thank you.

