



Hi, my name is Nathan; Carol and Derek are my permanent foster carers but I like to call them 'mum' and 'dad'.

I have been living with my mum and dad for nine years. I really love them because they always love me. I'm really happy here because my mum has really helped me. When I first came into care, I was hiding under tables and I really wasn't good at my school. My behaviour completely changed and now I am at college – I couldn't have done it without them.

My mum and dad have practically adopted me and I have changed my second name to Moody. My mum is so kind, helpful and loving, she puts up with me on my bad days and has a big heart. My mum always fights for me when she needs to and makes me feel wanted and safe.

Nathan

My name is Carol. My husband, Derek, and I have been fostering for 15 years. We have three other long term placements, two 13 year old boys and a 20 year old who stayed on after foster care through Shared Lives.

For nine years we have also been foster parents to Nathan – I always remember the first time we met, he came to tea as part of a planned introduction, unfortunately he had a few placement changes beforehand – so he was surprisingly charming, smiling a lot and chatting away as if he had known us for years.

As we were to find out later, he was just good at masking what was really going on for him because underneath he was scared, hypervigilant, ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) – which we suspected but didn't get diagnosed until a lot later, and believing that eventually all adults in his life would

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fail him, as they always did in the past – birth parents, social workers, family members, foster carers...all eventually abandoned him.

We knew we needed to be a calm presence to a very frightened and angry child, be patient and therapeutic in our work with him, work alongside other agencies to provide a good wrap around service for him, the support from our fostering social worker Dawn was invaluable over those years.

It also meant putting aside our need to be liked or to have our love reciprocated. It meant days, weeks or months of being the only one to meet his needs so he could learn we were the adults he could trust, trust is a learned skill and it was a long process to establish trust, just after a year into the placement, we began to develop this fragile kind of trust with him, we allowed him not to have to worry about where he was going to bed that night, he didn't have to worry about if he was going to eat. He could just play and grow and thrive and we would keep him safe.

It may not have come simply or naturally or easily, but when it does come, it is overwhelmingly beautiful because by loving and attaching to him, we gave him the ability to love and attach to us.

Much of the public perception of foster children is based on stereotypes and misconceptions. Over many years we have learned that they can love unconditionally, that despite things that happen to

them that they are resilient, that they can move on from situations that are horrific sometimes and go on to be well-adjusted, successful adults, they just need someone who will champion and believe in them, just like our Nathan who is almost 18 now and will be staying on with us through his next stage of his journey in life.

As Mother's day is approaching we are mindful that this is a difficult time for some of our other children in placement however with Nathan it's very different because he claimed us a long time ago as his Mum and Dad.

Our adult birth children have been incredible with Nathan, they are so supportive of him and really accept him as their brother. Nathan always buys such thoughtful and lovely cards he completely feels part of our family and our wider family and we are so pleased that we invested in him with our pledge to each other, which was to stick with him no matter how difficult it became and take permanency on him.

In 2016 Nathan nominated us without our knowledge for the FosterTalk Carer Permanency award which made the whole 15 years of fostering very humbling. Would we do it all over again? We are!

Carol

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