

She's Gay—And the Best Foster Mom I Know

By Arelis

My sister has the sweetest foster mother alive. Her name is Mary, and when I go to her house every Sunday to visit I feel overcome with happiness.

I always play football, basketball, and kickball in Mary's backyard with my brothers and sisters. Her house is the best of all the foster homes I've seen because Mary treats her foster children like they're her own. In other foster homes, they treat you like you're a foreigner. In some homes you have to share your room with like four other kids, but in Mary's house everyone has her own room. Some foster parents punish you by hitting, but Mary uses mediation to resolve problems.

Whenever I see Mary, she always seems happy. She's usually busy because she works out of her home, but when she sees me she always smiles and gives me lots of kisses and hugs. She'll talk to me about regular things, like how my day is going. I'll say, "Pretty OK. Thanks for asking." It's just little stuff, but it's nice to know that she cares. Part of the reason I like going to Mary's so much is the house itself. As soon as you step inside you're speechless, because it's just so mellow. Mary's house has three floors, five bathrooms, a living room on each floor, a library, and a back and front yard. Mary has five foster children living in her house, but there's a lot of space and it's really peaceful. One of my favorite places is the porch because Mary has a rocking chair there, and when I sit on it I feel like the world freezes and I feel free. Even though I've been to her house many times, every time I go I like to wander around. When I do, my mind finds peace and I can think.

Since I am in foster care and have no one to spend the holidays with, Mary always invites me. Last year I spent Christmas at her house. When I arrived, she told me that they decided to buy a small tree and told me to go see if I could find it. When I stepped into the hallway, my heart stopped as I looked at a beautiful tree covered with angels and red and blue ornaments and icicles. The tree must have stood at least nine feet high. It was the most beautiful tree I had ever seen, and on top was a star that glowed so brightly that I had to shade my eyes.

Mary was standing there smiling at me. I was truly speechless. Next I looked under the tree. It had lots and lots of presents. Many of them were for me. I told my sister that this was the best Christmas I had ever had and she agreed.

There are lots of things I love about Mary—her thoughtfulness, her cheerfulness, even the way she dresses. Mary is also a lesbian, which is fine with me.

When I first met Mary I figured she was gay because she had a necklace that had the colors of the gay flag and she had gay flags in her house. Many people look down on

people who are gay or lesbian, but Mary has made a huge difference in my life. I will always love her for it and will always be grateful.

For the most part, Mary is highly regarded in my foster care agency, but there are a few social workers who don't really like the idea of gay and lesbian foster parents in the system. They don't say it, but you can tell by the unfriendly way they treat Mary.

I think they should be more worried about foster parents who have no love to give. I was in three different foster homes growing up, and two out of the three were really crappy. The foster parents had no respect for the children they were taking care of. In those homes, no one had any love to give a child. For most of my life, what I saw in the world made me feel pretty hopeless. Mary's house is proof that there are foster parents with kind hearts and lots of love to give.

A few months ago I went with Mary to a meeting sponsored by a gay parents' group to encourage gay and lesbian people to become foster parents and to encourage agencies to recruit gay foster parents. The Administration for Children's Services says its policy is not to discriminate based on sexual orientation and they do go out of their way to recruit gay parents, hosting meetings and passing out information at gay events. I am glad to know that the system is doing what it can to make sure there are more foster parents to choose from.

Can a gay man or woman raise a straight child? Can a White man or woman raise a Black child? I think so. I think part of the problem today is that people think that kids need to be raised "by their own kind."

Well, Mary isn't only a lesbian. She's also Irish, but she has a house full of kids of different races. She has Korean, Puerto Rican, African-American, and white children, and she loves them all. She's a white, gay woman, and she's the best foster mother I've ever known.