



ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPHER CHERINGTON

Working with a foster mom made me a better parent — and person

Rachelle's child was placed with Heather, a foster parent, five months after birth. Both women have written columns sharing their experience with foster care. To protect their privacy, as well as the child's, only their first names are used.

Five months. That's how old my child was when they were removed from my care.

When I heard the words "foster care," nothing good came to mind. I wanted to dislike Heather because, after all, she was there for all the milestones I missed out on: crawling, walking and talking.

Watching someone else raise your child is agonizing, but I knew in my heart that we had to work together as a team, because that would be in my child's best interest. And that's just what we did.

Initially, I was angry and ashamed. "I can't ever let anyone find out about this," I thought to myself. "What will they think of me?" I thought others would see me as a bad mother who doesn't love or care for her child, and I felt I had to prove them wrong.

As reunification grew closer, I became incredibly nervous. I worried that maybe I wasn't good enough for

my child or that maybe they loved Heather more than me. But Heather's support and faith in me drove me to believe I was the mother my child deserved. She believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

While working with a foster mother was likely the most difficult experience I will ever face, I can truthfully say it made me a better person and an even better mother.

People will ask me how I'm able to remain so close to the woman that fostered my child and, truthfully, it's easy. I recognize that Heather and my child will always have a special bond, and I don't hold any resentment for that, as I know that would only hurt my child.

Heather has become my friend through this long journey, and I consider her family at this point. She still plays a very active role in my child's life. She sees them at least once a month, and we communicate frequently. I send her pictures, and I always fill her in on the silly things my kid says or does because I know she appreciates it.

As a single mom, you need as much help as you can get. I am thankful that, even though her foster duties for my child have come to

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an end, Heather still shows up for my family. It takes a special kind of person to step up and be there for a child that isn't their own, and that is why she will forever hold a special place in my child's and my hearts. That's what foster care is about.

Rachelle is a proud mom to three, two of which are dogs, and has a passion for helping people.

Being a foster parent is a beautiful cycle of heartbreak

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I was driving to work one December day when a hot tear snuck down my cheek. I tried to stop the wave of emotions by turning up the music and singing loud, but the sadness crashed down on me. I made it to the parking garage before the wracking sobbings blurred my vision. Being a foster parent and losing a child to their own family is a unique type of heartache and sometimes, the grief overwhelms you.

I know time heals all wounds, but when I feel the loss of letting these kids go, the tears always come. And it's at the most inconvenient times. Instead of sobbing while I pack up the last of their belongings, kiss them goodbye, and wish them good luck at their new old home, I cry randomly. Half an hour between meetings? Let the tears flow. Making dinner? So for a few minutes, then set the table.

Fostering is beautiful and tragic. I get to be part of putting families back together while my own heart breaks. I get to love a child and watch them grow every day ... until I don't. Sometimes they leave unexpectedly. Other times, there's a slow transition that prepares you for the pain. But eventually, you're not their person anymore. The first few free days are nice. You enjoy sleeping in, wearing clean clothes and going out without worrying about nap schedules. Then you find a pacifier under the couch or a baby sock in the laundry and you break down.

People ask me how I do it over and over again. Isn't it hard to root for the parents? Of course. But then you have a success story. For me, it was Rachelle. Her child came into my care abruptly. I got a text early in the afternoon and by 5 p.m., a caseworker was standing in my driveway, baby in tow. The next year was full of many milestones for the baby and many challenges for the mom. And while I loved that little kid from the moment we met, they

were never mine. Behind the scenes, Rachelle was working hard to get her child back. She was becoming the parent her child deserved and, finally, they were reunified.

Saying goodbye to that kiddo was the reason I barely made it to work safely on that winter day. I was so sad to see them go, but I knew it was the right decision. Rachelle never stopped loving her child, and she never gave up. I am so proud of her. And while it would be easy for her to resent me for the time I had with her baby — time she didn't get — she doesn't. That baby is now a sassy little kid. And thanks to Rachelle, I get to attend birthday parties, take them to the park and feel like part of their family. I am immensely grateful. And I am so proud of Rachelle: it's the ultimate comeback story.

Rachelle and her child are just one of my many positive experiences. I've been a foster parent for years, and while it's the hardest thing I've ever done, it's also the most rewarding.

You got to meet a scared little person who doesn't understand where they are or why, and teach them you're a safe person and your home is their forever home. And when they blossom. And if you're lucky, you get to see their family, too.

It's a beautiful thing, seeing a parent turn their life around to become worthy of their child. You become their cheerleader, knowing their success will lead to your heartache. But it's not about you. All the swirling emotions and court dates and case-worker visits, it's all for the kids. You know you'll be sad when they leave, but it doesn't stop you from loving them and supporting their family — and taking the next call, where you're invited to love and lose another kiddo.

Heather grew up in Portland, Oregon. She's a middle child, so you know she's both well-adjusted and hilarious. After bouncing around from Fiji to New York, she landed in Salt Lake City when she was a house, a dog and two many plants. She loves riding her bike, taking her pup on hikes, playing pickleball and attending concerts.

At UMOCA, we welcome change. It shouldn't come at the expense of SLC's arts and culture scene.

LAURA ALLRED HURTADO

RICHARD WALJE

As readers likely know, exciting changes are coming to downtown Salt Lake City with the development of a new entertainment district. As executive director and board president for the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, we know that while change can bring uncertainty, it also comes with opportunity. But it shouldn't come at the expense of arts and culture.

As we move forward, we must build on our history and our proven ability to continue serving as a critical part of a vibrant downtown experience.

In 1974, the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (UMOCA) and the Salt Symphony were selected to be part of a proposed Bicentennial Arts

Complex Project to be built downtown and funded by Salt Lake County and the Utah State Legislature. We now know these buildings as Abravanel Hall and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art.

Legislators' decision to center arts and culture in downtown Salt Lake was visionary and transformative for our city, leading to decades of musicians, artists, writers, thinkers, composers and so many students experiencing the cultural richness of our state.

Fifty years later, we have another historic, once-in-a-generation opportunity before us. As part of the revitalization of downtown Salt Lake City, there are questions about the future of the Bicentennial Arts Complex and the organizations who make it their home.

Like Abravanel Hall, UMOCA is also two years into our master

planning and renovation discussions and, through these studies and close conversations with the county, we have realized the high cost of renovating a 50-year-old building. Given this, a new home in the downtown sports, entertainment, cultural and convention district presents a real opportunity.

As leaders of UMOCA, we've been asked a lot of questions from our patrons, artists, students, residents and community members. We want them to know three things as the plans for downtown progress.

We will continue our long legacy of working with our symphony neighbors and Salt Lake County on our shared vision of advancing arts and culture in Utah. We are deeply passionate about the generational impact of our organizations and will work to serve future generations of Utahns. We are optimistic about this

opportunity to reimagine the downtown experience and are inspired by the initial vision set by Salt Lake County Mayor Jeremy Wilson, Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall and Jazz and NHL teams owner Ryan Smith. We are encouraged by Mike Maughan's statement that "beloved institutions like Abravanel Hall and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art remain on site with better connection points."

We look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with the Utah State Legislature, Salt Lake County, Salt Lake City and Smith Entertainment Group to explore possibilities for renovation or relocating within the new district.

We're clear that our future is

based on two basic tenets: Arts belong in the core of our downtown, and investment in the arts is a shared responsibility of all partners. We cannot lose sight of the fact that the reimagining and shaping of a city for the next generation needs clearly allocated resources and investment for the future of the arts.

UMOCA is built from a community of innovative, forward-thinking artists with creativity and problem-solving in our blood and we are excited to bring new solutions and perspectives to the table as, together, we shape the city of the future.

Laura Allred Hurtado is the executive director of the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art. Richard Walje is the president of the board of trustees for the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art.

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