

Reunification: Growing Together

We often share stories

of COBYS families and adoptions. Adoption stories are heartwarming and natural milestones on the journey of foster (and former foster) children. Adoptions are a time to celebrate new beginnings and to reflect on the journey so far.

This isn't an adoption story. It is instead, a story that often occurs, but is rarely able to be told, for so many reasons. It is a story of reunification. Having children reunify with their biological parent or parents is almost always the primary goal of foster care. But for reunification to happen, vital changes must be made by the biological parents. This is a time of change, adjustment and hard work.

One important factor to a successful reunification is the relationship between the biological family and the foster family. The most successful outcomes generally occur when both families engage in the relationship.

This is a story of such a relationship. For privacy sake we have changed the names of the biological family members to mother Brianna and twin boys Logan and Luis. We are grateful to both the biological and foster families for being so open in sharing their experience, and present this story in their own words.



This story begins with Amy and Justin Martin, a new-to-foster care couple with no biological children. They shared what led them to foster care and COBYS.

A&J: There are several reasons and they all come back to Jesus and His love for children and their families. We really hoped and prayed specifically that we could form a good relationship with the parents of any children in our home. We couldn't have even imagined how awesome that relationship would become.

We chose COBYS to get licensed through because we love the extra support we get through them. We have been foster parents for three years.

Their immersion in to foster care came quickly with a placement request.

A&J: Logan and Luis were an easy "yes," and it was our first phone call! They were in our home for two years, so that gave plenty of time for about a million wild rollercoaster rides and

unexpected turns. It was over the beginning of the pandemic so we all made adjustments to zoom visits.

The relationship between biological and foster parents can understandably be fraught with tension, resentment and animosity. But trust and faith can soothe those emotions and lay the groundwork for progress. Both families weigh in on their relationship.

A&J: Relationships are hard but so worth it, especially for the children. We can't begin to imagine the extra stress the children feel when there is tension between the families. On one of the first visits the boys' mom said to me, "I'm relieved now that I met you. Everyone told me how bad foster parents are. I was so worried for my boys." It made me really stop and think about how awful that had to feel, we were determined to continue to show her that her babies were safe.

Brianna: I was afraid at first where my kids would be or who they were with. I heard nothing but horrible stories of

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things happening to children in foster care. Throughout this process, the Martins have been nothing but kind, dear and supportive. We consider them as family. Establishing a foundation and relationship with the resource parents helped me in this journey because they loved my children and myself no matter our background and who we were. My kids love them as much as they love us.

A&J: I will never forget the first Mother's Day we had Logan and Luis. My emotions were all over the place. We had a zoom call with the boys' mom and I could tell she was struggling too and before we ended the call she said, "Happy Mother's Day, Amy." I don't think I managed to say much then but I cried as soon as the call was over. It meant the world to me and changed how I felt about myself as a foster mother. We personally never had safety concerns for the boys, so building that relationship was considerably easier because of that. Often it is recommended to put boundaries and safeguards in place with the bio family, we never did this and it has never been a problem. We liked to come to visits early or stay after to talk with them. We sent emails and texts with updates. Now being the people who are missing the boys, always wondering how they are doing, we are thrilled when we get a update or picture! This relationship has blessed us so much, the boys and their family really are family to us.

There is a dire need for resource families who are open to foster siblings. What do you think is unique about fostering twin children and why it is so important to keep siblings together?

A&J: It was wonderful that they had each other through all the changes. Even if bio mom and dad or foster mom and dad weren't there, their brother always was.

What characteristics do you think are important and help you to be successful as foster parents?

A&J: The things that helped us were **Fostering Hope**



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– Amy Martin, foster mom

reminding each other reunification is the goal.

Communicate directly with bio parents as much as possible. This helped us a lot, hearing from them where they were on the case plan. Often I would get updates from the caseworker and bio mom around the same time. Foster parents need to treat bio parents how they would want to be treated if they were in that situation.

Brianna: The foster care process is tough in itself. There's a lot of requirements that need to be fulfilled before you're reunited. Have patience.

The foster care process can be difficult for all parties, but can you comment on misconceptions about the families in the foster care system?

A&J: A misconception is that they are so different from us, but they're not. One difference was the healthy support we are very accustomed to, they did not have this.

What was a good support system like for you, for the twins?

A&J: We have an incredible support system. One that we have been able to share with the boys' family even after reunification. Our friends have been able to babysit the boys when we were not able to. The thing that was the best support was seeing people truly love the children along side us, no questions asked and no expectations on the child. I often had people go along to take them for visits and appointments. The added support and extra hands helped things go better. It was not uncommon for clothes and food to show up on our porch. All the support we had made it easier for us to support bio family.

This is a reunification story, can you describe what that transition home felt like for you?

A&J: I'm not sure there are words to describe this feeling. Our emotions contradicted themselves. We were heartbroken as we packed up all their things and yet we were rejoicing because a family was reuniting. We knew how hard the parents worked to get the boys into their home. It helped so much that the parents continued to remind us that we can still be in the boys lives, we really held onto that.

We have been able to babysit the boys since reunification. Transitioning from foster parent to babysitter was easier than we thought it may be. We asked the mom how she wants us to handle them calling us mommy and daddy. She told us to allow the boys to call us whatever they want. She added it would be confusing to the boys to suddenly not allow them to call us mom and dad.

Now that you also have a biological son, what hopes do you have for the future of your family and the boys?

A&J: We hope to always be in their lives. We hope Logan and Luis always love to come over and know they will

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always hold a very special place in our hearts. We hope they will always know their toys and beds will be here, and their pictures on our fridge. We hope to continue to support bio family as they parent and have all of our boys grow up together!

Brianna: My goals and wishes for my children and family is that we continue to be this village that we built to raise our families together and always love one another because you never know what someone may be going through in their situation.

A&J: We do realize that while we did work for a good relationship with bio family, so did they! We would never have this type of relationship if they wouldn't have worked equally as hard for it. Trusting us had to feel like a huge risk. Some of the things we did to help build connection was anytime we were making parenting decisions we asked for their input and made a plan together, such as when to take the pacifier, when to introduce solid foods, how to correct behaviors. It was so good for the boys to have consistency between the two families. And it was incredibly helpful to us and helped us feel confident in parenting, as we had never done it before. We also put together a photo book every month and were sure to have milestones written in there. And when we met, even though the twins were young we think it was really good for them to see us talking and laughing together.

COBYS wishes both families all the best as they continue to grow together.