

The Children's Angel: The Story of a Gifted Foster Mother



B.J. Johnson

confirmed my belief. BJ Johnson has opened her heart to more than 100 children throughout the past three decades of being a foster mother and she shows no sign of slowing down.

BJ was born in Westport, South Dakota as the youngest of six children. After she graduated from high school in Barnyard, SD she moved to Onaka, SD and lived there until she moved to Yankton about 35 years ago. She has one biological daughter, Susan, who lives in Redfield, SD. BJ and her husband, Ken, also have two adopted daughters who came to them initially as foster children. Summer came to them at the age of five and was twelve years old when the adoption process was finally complete; Regina came to them around the age of nine and was adopted at the age of ten. BJ and Ken have been blessed with eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Their home always full of activity, BJ and Ken continue to take in foster children while raising their grandson, Ean, an adorable eight-year old boy with dark hair and a vibrant smile.

BJ started caring for foster children 36 years ago, around the age of 41. She and Ken had no children at home at the time, as Regina was already grown and out of the house. A lady she knew had asked her if she and Ken were interested in becoming foster parents and

I've always believed there are angels who walk among us, but my recent encounter with a wonderful lady

they agreed, both of them enthusiastic about it and willing to give it a try. BJ, now seventy-seven, never dreamed that she would have fostered well over 100 children over so many years. Looking at her, she doesn't even appear to be of retirement age; it's apparent that the children have kept her young.

She has developed many memories and relationships with her foster children over the years. BJ and Ken recently went to visit their second foster child, now in his forties, at his home in Utah. During their stay, he reminded BJ that she taught him how to cook during his three-year stay at her home. One of BJ and Ken's fondest memories is of a darling two-year old girl and her siblings. Her almond-shaped eyes and dark cocoa hair gave her the look of a baby doll. She had a sweet and charming personality that BJ and Ken fell in love with. They still talk about her to this day. I asked BJ if they become attached to the children, if it's difficult for them when the children leave. She said sometimes they can get attached, but it is all part of the process and the satisfaction of having helped a child makes it truly worthwhile.

The best memories she has are those where the children are truly astonished and thankful for receiving something we may take for granted. She said the look on a child's face when they sit down to a hot meal, have clean clothes to wear or a warm bed to sleep in is instant gratification to a foster parent. She still remembers times where she would take in a foster child over the Thanksgiving or Christmas holiday seasons. The children would marvel at the traditions of putting up holiday decorations or gathering together to celebrate over a large meal. Often BJ would serve their holiday meal with punch to drink, doled out in little punch cups. This was a pure delight for several children in having a new treat some of them have never experienced before.

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