

Peter  
by Jane Fullam

The elderly couple knocked on the door of the little wooden house,-once, waited,- twice, waited,- three times- no response, but they could hear the baby crying.

Worried, they pushed in the door. They swooped up the two year old, soothing her with whispers. As they retraced their steps, they saw the baby's mother passed out on the couch. The girl was out cold. Shouting, even shouting directly into her ear, elicited nothing.

Outraged, they snatched baby from the house, leaving the girl where she lay. They stayed in the yard until the school bus deposited the eight year old. When Peter arrived they took him and baby to their house. They thought they might be kidnapping but they didn't care. They had to take care of those children. They contacted the sheriff's office and DFCS. On inspection from those offices, the children's removal had official sanction.

As the Court Appointed Special Advocate, my job is to gather all the information for the Judge to help him determine the best permanent placement for these two children. My court order gives me access to all information regarding the child or children as well as their parents.

I interview the mother. She is twenty-eight years old. Thin and pale, her attractive face shows more age than it should. She admitted that she'd been drinking steadily, all day long even.

"But that was a long time ago"

Lately, things were better. She just slipped up a little. There were no other problems in her life. She was glad she was back in Peter's life. She'd had to leave him when he was six months old. She just had to get her life together, you know?

"But as soon as he was five, I was there. He's been a blessing to me, my little man."

The baby's daddy was captivated by her. She was fun-loving, exciting, -contrasting his own quiet persona. He liked the boy too, thought they'd make a fine family. They got along well, Peter needed a male in his life. One thing he couldn't understand was her sickness. He'd had to bring her to the emergency room ten, maybe twenty times when she was in extreme pain.

Peter. I cannot help being drawn into Peter's eyes. They are his most prominent feature. Round and brown, they inspect my face. I explain that I will be his voice when we go to court. Right now he is in the temporary custody of his aunt who packed her bags, her two babies, moved from a neighboring state into a rented condo the minute she heard Peter needed her. She had to prove to the court that she had been in Peter's life from the time of his birth. Peter is a lucky boy. He knows it and tells me so, after he decides he will trust me. He doesn't want to live with his mother ever again. He thanks his aunt for remembering to feed him. He does not miss the baby. To him, she was nothing but trouble. When she cried, he had to take care of her, feed her things like raviolio's because his mom was sleeping. All the time, he tells me, all the time. The baby woke him up in the middle of the night.

He was with his mom when she was arrested. "I bet I'm the only kid in my school that has a DUI." He's certain of this and no matter that I tell him that there are other children who have terrible problems too, he says again, "Yeah, but I'm still the only one with a DUI." He is crestfallen with shame.

I check with area hospitals. The young woman is well known at many of them. She has been to the nearest one a total of 150 times. Doctors there have suspicions she is drug-shopping. Her symptoms are vague and though they test her each visit, they can find no cause for the pain she insists is a ten on the scale from one to ten.

My report to the Judge gives him all the information I've gathered.

Gratefully, Peter's mother chooses to waive her rights to custody of her children although she will demand visitation rights.

Peter will remain in the permanent custody of his aunt and her husband. Visits with his mother will only occur when Peter is willing. For now, he is not willing.