

A STORY OF HOPE

By: Judge Randy T. Rogers

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"Someone's missing," the judge observed, looking in the direction of the parents-to-be. "Where's the little girl?"

What began as a normal day, wading through a docket of routine cases, was about to become one of those special moments that occur in courtrooms from time to time. Even though judges regularly hear evidence of the effects that immorality and crime have had upon this nation's families, there are moments in courtrooms when the evidence takes a surprising turn out of the muddied waters of disagreement and despair, toward a place of harmony and hope. It happened that day.

The County's Children Services Board had placed a little girl for adoption. When the adoption hearing began every seat in the courtroom was filled. The crowd was so large that the judge had to abandon his small hearing room where adoptions normally took place, and move to his big courtroom where trials took place, a room distinguished by its specially carved woodwork, high ceilings and massive oak bench.

Looking over the bench, the judge spotted the adoptive mom and dad sitting at the counsel table on the right. A lawyer and a Children Services worker were sitting at the counsel table on the left. The judge noted the dozens of people sitting in the jury box and on the courtroom benches, but he did not see the little girl.

Looking at the adoptive parents, he said "Someone's missing here. Where's the little girl?" It was then that the judge saw near the back of the room a little head bobbing up and down. It was the little girl. She was running all around the courtroom, saying "Hi" to each person who came to share her special day.

The judge would later discover that the fact that the little girl was running around the room was a story in and of itself. When this little girl was placed with this couple she was nearly two years old and at that time did not walk. She could stand up, but for the most part, because of developmental delay issues, would only crawl. For those who knew the truth, it was heart-warming to see this little girl running around the courtroom, in that only eight months before she hardly walked.

After the witnesses were sworn, the judge began to listen to testimony and heard the rest of the story. The couple testified that for a number of years they had tried to have children, but were unsuccessful. The dad testified that he was then diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer, a type of cancer in which the tumor grew around the heart. "The doctors gave me no hope" he told the judge, "but they offered to give me an experimental treatment, even though they gave me no hope." The man took the treatment, and survived the cancer.

Because of the cancer treatment, the man testified it was no longer possible for him and his wife to have children naturally. Still wanting children, when they heard about the Foster-to-Adopt Program sponsored by the Children Services Board, they signed up and took classes. After they were certified, they waited for a placement. A year went by, but no child was placed with them. Another year went by and still no placement. Children Services was probably concerned about placing a child with a man whom the doctors had given "no hope."

"My wife and I were getting discouraged and thought about dropping out of the Program, but in the third year, we received a call." The Children Services worker on the other end of the phone line said, "We think we have a little girl for you. Why don't you come down and meet her?" With much anticipation and some fear, he and his wife drove down to the Children Services office. "We went into a fairly large room filled with a lot of chairs lined up against the walls," testified this man whom the doctors had given "no hope." The man and his wife sat down in two of the chairs backed up against one of the walls and waited.

After a long wait, a Children Services worker opened the door cross the room and walked in carrying the little girl. The worker walked across the room and set the little girl down in front of the man whom the doctors had given "no hope." The man testified that the little girl crawled up into his lap. "I fell in love with her instantly, and the bond between us was sealed. I just knew that we would be allowed to take her home, adopt her, and that she would be ours."

And the name of the little girl who the judge first saw running around his courtroom saying "Hi" to everyone, the name of the little girl who crawled up into the lap of the man whom the doctors had given "no hope," the name she had been given at birth, her name was --- Hope!

It was a courtroom encounter the judge would always remember. There were no "muddy waters" that day, only that which was peaceful and pure. It was a story that was true. It was a story of hope.