

I THREW AWAY MY CUP

By: Judge Randy T. Rogers

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"Raise your right hands" instructed the Court's bailiff. With their hands now raised, the bailiff then asked the prospective parents, "Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to give before this Court today shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"Yes," the couple replied, realizing that the day for which they had long waited had finally come.

Peering over the edge of his elevated bench, the judge directed the anxious father-to-be, "Tell me in your own words why it is that you want to adopt this little boy?" Wiping away unexpected tears, the former Navy man replied, "We love him ... we wanted another child ...and we went through the Foster Care To Adopt Program ... and the Lord blessed us with this little boy."

"How long has he been in your home?" asked the judge. "He's been in our home since he was eight weeks old, and he's over two years old now," the man replied. "It's been a joy --- and a handful," as the two-year-old chose that moment to play quarterback, tossing his brightly colored "Sippy Cup" across the counsel table, nearly reaching the judge's bench. Laughter erupted within the courtroom as the playful toddler seized control of the proceedings, transforming the once serious judge into just another courtroom spectator. Coming to the judge's rescue, the bailiff quickly retrieved the irreverent "Sippy Cup" and returned it to the safer hands of the beaming mother-to-be.

Back in control, at least for the moment, the judge continued, now directing his questions to the smiling mom. "Tell me in your own words why you want to adopt this little fella."

"From Day 1, when Children Services dropped him off on my front doorstep I was in shock that something so beautiful could come into our home ... Day 2, I felt like he was ours, and ever since he has been part of our family," she continued, as the two-year-old tried to wrestle the orange "Sippy Cup" from her grasp to send it soaring once again.

"One more question," the judge continued. "This is a lot of responsibility, and you have some responsibility already [with your other child]. Why are you doing this?" The mother

paused and then replied, "Why wouldn't we do it? He's a child. This is something we have always wanted. We've wanted a larger family. We love him with all of our hearts. He is our son."

Every year thousands of abused and neglected children are placed in the temporary or permanent custody of public children services agencies which are a necessary part of every community in this nation. In America, more than 500,000 children are in foster care. Circumstances differ in every case, but more often than not, illegal drugs and alcohol and the effect these substances have on the lives of biological parents, are the principle reason for the needed intervention of a local agency in the lives of innocent children.

The "Sippy Cup" thrower in court that day came from one of those harmful environments poisoned by illegal drugs and alcohol. He was taken by Children Services from that polluted environment and placed in a home in which his foster mom was initially "in shock that something so beautiful could come into [their] home." This was one of the local agency's many foster care success stories.

Nearly fifty times the year before, this same judge had presided over similar such adoptions, each time hearing adoptive parents and their family members and friends testify about how well their placement worked. This year was no different. The work of a local public children services agency never ends. The photo album in the judge's chambers chronicles the many times the "system" has worked well, thankful parents having regularly sent the judge pictures of their smiling new families, poignant reminders of the success stories who had graced his courtroom.

An ancient philosopher once said, "I threw away my cup when I saw a child drinking from his hands at the trough." Far too many children in this relatively prosperous society end up "drinking from [their] hands at the trough." In many cases, foster care is the only way to give the children a chance to enjoy the opportunities others sometimes take for granted. Foster parents like the ones who adopted the "Sippy Cup" thrower do make a difference, but many more are needed. Someday maybe society will have what it needs, and fewer children will have to drink from their hands at the "trough."

"Judge, can we take a picture with you in front of the bench?" asked the new mom after the adoption hearing concluded. "Sure," said the judge, "but I want to hold the "Sippy Cup."