



Love Backstory

Who comes to mind when you think of a humanitarian - Mother Teresa - Oprah Winfrey? There are many - not all with worldwide acclaim. Some are every day people performing extraordinary acts of love and kindness. Like Carol Donald, foster parent to 100 children with medical needs in Northern California since 1965. Simply stated, Carol Donald was born with a passion for babies and raising children. It's her life long calling.

One of five daughters born in Northern California, Carol received her 2-year Home Economics certificate in 1942. That same year she married her husband Richard. They had a son, Edward, and six years later a daughter Kathy. The doors to Carol's dream opened in 1965 when she attended her daughter's confirmation class and saw two pregnant 14 year old girls. She wondered, "What happens to those babies?" That night she prayed and the next morning saw a newspaper ad for Foster Parent Training. With her husband retired from the Air Force and her children in high school, the timing was perfect. Carol - ready to accept her mission - answered the ad and forever changed the face of foster parenting.

The challenges of foster parenting in the 1960s were daunting and being unwed and pregnant was socially unacceptable. The transition from foster to adoptive parents was as Carol describes, "A death." They would take the child from the foster home and send them to the adoptive parents without notice. Seeing the child's trauma, she became an integral part in developing a "partnership" - arranging meetings between foster and adoptive parents. She made sure the children never called her Mommy, but always Grandma and eased their transition by telling the child, "You're going to your new Mommy and Daddy."

Carol affectionately recalls one child in particular, she would say, "Your Mommy and Daddy are coming to take you to your new home." The day the adoptive parents were to arrive, the young child, perched at the window saw their car approach and squealed, "Look Grandma here's my new Mommy and Daddy!"

Many of the infants suffered from fetal alcoholism or were methadone-addicted. She feels it's important that the community know the damages of fetal alcoholism. And Carol, through loving arms comforted her babies. It's been written that God's love comes through a Grandmother's heart. When the babies' seizures were so bad, Carol would rock them on her chest - sometimes for 24 hours - until the seizures subsided. She says babies sense your love and, "You cannot take good care of a child unless you love the child, you must be part of their life." Carol opened her home to 100 children and her heart broke every time they went to adoptive parents.

The passing of her husband in 1985 five days before his 65th birthday didn't alter Carol's love for raising children or her determination to give them a fighting chance. She continued to volunteer as a foster parent without her husband at her side for the next 23 years.

Carol at age 85 recently retired due to a fall where she broke her femur - her concern - the children. If she fell and hurt the baby, she could never live with herself. Living in a Northern California community in the home where she was raised Carol reflects upon her life as a foster parent for the past 43 years. The Jefferson, The Juvenile Justice and the Concord Human Relations Commission - Life Time Achievement Awards are merely a few of the plaques that decorate her wall. "It's a wonderful life I live and if I had to live my life over I wouldn't do it one bit differently." Her foster children stay in touch and she feels blessed.

Who knows what ripple effect Carol's unconditional love for children has had? As she has shown there is no sense of time when you love what you do - you're inexhaustible. Even in retirement, Carol remains visible in the community and occasionally mentors foster parents.

To capture the magnitude of Carol's 43 years of service and outstanding contributions in a few short words is no easy task. Yet Carol's devotion to so many children and her love that lights their lives will be felt for generations. She shows us it's possible - from where we stand - to make a difference in the world. Carol Donald - an everyday hero - is an inspiration to all.

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