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In Her Own Words: A Qualitative Case Study of Foster Care, Adoption and Independent Living

Elise N. Zuber

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**In Her Own Words:
A Qualitative Case Study of Foster Care, Adoption and
Independent living**

by

Elise N. Zuber

**A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The School of Social Work,
Grand Valley State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Master of Social Work Degree
Department of Social Work**

**Grand Valley State University
Grand Rapids Michigan
April, 1999**

Master's Thesis Approval

This acknowledges that Elise Nicole Zuber has completed all requirements for his/her Master's Thesis (SW 694 & 695). It further asserts that the student successfully defended their work, in the presence of the undersigned committee members.

The undersigned faculty and committee members agree that this Thesis, entitled:

In Her Own Words:

A Qualitative Case Study of Foster Care, Adoption, and

Independent Living

is accepted by the faculty of the School of Social Work; Grand Valley State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree.

In Her Own Words:
A Qualitative Case Study of Foster Care, Adoption and
Independent Living

Elise N. Zuber

Grand Valley State University, 1999

Thesis Committee

Jerry Johnson, Ph. D - Thesis chair
LeAnne Silvey, Ph. D - Committee member
Darcy Komejan - Committee member

This is a biographical account of a young lady who was involved with the child welfare system for eleven years. "Jill" entered foster care when she was eight years old. She was adopted by her foster parents and re-abused as a young adolescent by her adoptive father. Jill re-entered foster care, experiencing several foster homes, caseworkers and counselors. This year Jill is one of 20,000 foster children who will assume independence from the child welfare system.

The author utilizes a qualitative method of case reporting. Interviews were conducted with Jill, former caseworkers, foster parents and therapists. In addition, a record analysis was conducted on her case file. The study is presented in the voice of Jill and others interviewed. Her life experiences are described in detail. Jill gives recommendations to improve the foster care system. Existing literature is utilized to compare Jill's experience with other findings.

Implications for future social work practice and research are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first want to acknowledge "Jill", who without, this project could not have happened. It is her story of tragedy and survival that is an inspiration to me. I want to thank her for her willingness to share intimate details of her life. Jill is a very courageous young lady.

I express my gratitude to Dr. Jerry Johnson, my thesis chair, who gave me the tools to do qualitative research. He believed in me from the beginning and guided me through the process. I also wish to thank my other committee members. Dr. LeAnne Silvey, who taught me to look closely at people and celebrate their uniqueness. Darcy Komejan, who has been my mentor for the past three years. Thank you all for your support and assistance on this project.

I would like to thank my husband Duane, and daughter Katherine, who have given me unconditional love and support while I completed my Masters degree and this project. It has been challenging, but we made it through.

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Chapter I

Overview and Introduction

Foster care has served society for a long time as an alternative placement for children who cannot live with their family of origin. The origin of foster care is thought to have its beginning in the mid- nineteenth century with Charles Loring Brace (Cohen, 1992). Brace established the Children's Aid Society, which placed emphasis on healthy family relationships to achieve rehabilitation (Cohen, 1992). Prior to Brace, children were placed in apprenticeships to learn job trades or were orphans. Following the Depression the use of family foster care increased (Cohen, 1992). In addition to this children's rights and specialized needs were beginning to be recognized (Cohen, 1992). Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons such as parental illness or death, to child abuse and/ or neglect. Foster care is designed to provide temporary care to these children. In some cases foster care becomes a permanent placement when returning home, or adoption is not in the child's best interests.

Children who enter out of home care encounter multiple separations and losses (Fahlberg, 1991). This is coupled with the trauma of the reasons that the children were removed from their family of origin. Children respond to entering care in a variety of ways such as feeling helpless and depressed to having no reaction at all (Fahlberg, 1991).

Unfortunately, foster care is rarely looked at through the eyes of the child (Folman, 1998; Wilson and Conroy; 1998; McAuley, 1996; Festinger, 1983). Research often looks at foster care in terms of numbers and not people's feelings. It is relatively easy to compile data on how many children have

entered care, how many children have been reunified with their birth family, or how many children have a plan for permanency in place. Compiling data on feelings and experiences within foster care is more difficult. It is more involved and requires a certain level of acknowledgement and validation of the feelings. Children want to talk about their experiences, fears, and feelings to those who will listen. The following excerpt from a poem demonstrates children's need to express their feelings.

I want to talk to you about what it feels like
 getting ready to be adopted, [or being in foster care],
 when you are a little kid who has already had about
 a hundred mothers.
 When you can barely remember what your first mother
 smelled like...
 When some of the people who took care of you
 were called
 "foster parents"
 and you didn't know what that meant
 except something about
 they weren't going to stick around.
 When, in the process of being moved all over the place,
 you lost some of your brothers
 and your sisters
 and a particular pair of shoes that felt just right
 and your absolutely most favorite cuddly...
 So I want to talk to you, Big People, about these things,
 even though I am not sure you are real interested
 (Trout, 1997, p. 3, 4).

Children in foster care have lost so much but they have not lost their voice. It is important for professionals working with children in out of home care not to take this for granted. Children need to be given the opportunity to speak and be heard.

Purpose of Research and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to hear the voice of a young lady, "Jill", who

has spent the majority of her life in out of home care. Jill is given the opportunity to speak and be heard by this researcher and the readers of the study. This study presents a detailed description of Jill, her history, and her views regarding her experiences. Jill offers suggestions based on her experiences on how to improve the foster care system.

The research addresses the following four questions:

- 1). Who is Jill and what are her experiences?
- 2). What does Jill perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the foster care system?
- 3). What are the implications from one person's experience to the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice?
- 4). Does qualitative research have any affect on the researcher?

Content Overview

This project begins with a description of the methods in which the inquiry took place. My primary source of data is interviews with Jill and persons involved with her life. I also utilize existing literature to demonstrate similarities and differences between this study and others. The existing literature also serves to emphasize concerns that Jill has brought to my attention.

I introduce the reader to Jill and her family by describing her home environment and the abuse that she suffered. The story is told primarily utilizing her voice. Throughout the biographical account of Jill's story I serve as the narrator to add further understanding and clarification of what is being said.

Following the introduction, Jill's experiences in foster care are described. She tells the reader how it felt to be in foster care and to be taken away from her mother and later separated from her siblings. Also described are the

reunification services, visitation, and the court process in which Jill and her family were involved.

The reader then hears about the joy of being adopted and the pain of having to move again.

Jill's experiences of re -entering foster care are then described. Jill talks about having to move to different foster homes and her feelings that it is too late for her to attach to any family. She describes some experiences within foster care including her feelings about foster parents and counseling.

Jill then describes independent living and her fears of being emancipated from the system with no family on which to fall back.

She then reflects on her experiences and make recommendations to change the foster care system.

To conclude the research,I present my experience in doing the research and discuss my feelings regarding Jill's life. I then provide implications for future social work practice based on the inquiry.

Chapter II

Methods of Inquiry

In order to conduct this research, official permission was obtained from the Grand Valley Human Research Review Board, Jill's caseworker, and the director of state wards for the state in which Jill resides. Releases of information were signed by Jill, her caseworker, and the director of state wards. To protect the confidentiality rights of Jill and those participating in this study, all identifying information has been changed. All records of interviews and notes taken were stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to this researcher. Upon completion of the study, all documents with identifying information will be destroyed.

Data Collection

Initially a record analysis was conducted to gather pertinent case information. This included a review of the protective services records, court documents, school documents, quarterly reviews, medical documents, psychological tests, and therapy progress notes. The record analysis was conducted at the placing agency which held the information. Notes were taken to ensure that upon interpreting the data the accounts in the documents would be accurate. Throughout compiling and interpreting the data, reference was made to these notes.

Following the record analysis Jill was interviewed in her home, a supervised independent living placement. This site was chosen so the researcher could obtain a more thorough understanding of Jill's home environment. The interview followed a structured outline (Attachment A) but

allowed room for further discussion. This interview lasted approximately three hours.

Interviews were then conducted with Jill's former foster parents, therapists, caseworkers, and the protective services worker. These interviews were both structured and unstructured, as room for discussion and further questioning was pertinent to obtain as full an understanding of Jill as possible (Attachment B). All of the aforementioned persons were contacted by telephone by this researcher. The purpose of the call was explained and appointments were made.

Two of Jill's former foster parents declined participation in this study. Jill's first foster parents, who adopted her, declined to participate. This adoption was disrupted due to abuse in the home. These foster parent felt uncomfortable in discussing anything pertaining to Jill. The second to decline was Jill's third foster care placement. This parent had transferred her foster care license to a different foster care placing agency and did not wish to participate in the research. Jill's second and fourth foster parents were both interviewed. These interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Also interviewed were the parents who supervise Jill's independent living placement. This interview lasted approximately two hours.

Five of Jill's six caseworkers were interviewed. One declined due to feeling she would not remember anything about Jill. She stated she received the case approximately eleven years ago, and it was a case she did not wish to think about. The interviews lasted between one hour and two and a half hours. Those who had spent more time with Jill had more to discuss than those who had her on their case load for a short time.

One of Jill's three therapists were interviewed. This researcher was

unable to locate two therapists, both of whom had sought employment elsewhere since providing therapy for Jill. The one interview conducted lasted approximately one hour.

Finally, the protective services worker was interviewed in a three and a half hour session.

All interviews were taped and then transcribed. The participants signed consent forms to being taped before the interview took place. All interviews were conducted in the participants place of employment or residence.

Following the transcribing of the interviews, a second interview with Jill was requested. Jill agreed to this interview but canceled a total of four future appointments. At the time of the second appointment Jill had moved out of her supervised independent living setting into her own apartment. For the fifth appointment, Jill was not at her place of residence at the scheduled time. Jill choose to meet at a restaurant rather than her place of residence when the second interview did occur. This interview lasted approximately four hours.

Negotiated Outcomes

Following transcribing the second interview Jill was given the opportunity to read the interviews which she declined stating she knew what was in them and was comfortable with whatever they said. Jill has called this researcher on several occasions requesting that certain aspects also be placed in the report, Jill stated that she remembered things that she had forgotten and wanted to be sure the information would be in the report. This information was added. Jill was offered the opportunity to negotiate outcomes of the final project but also declined this opportunity. She stated that she was comfortable with what she said and felt that the researcher would write an accurate portrayal of her story.

Trustworthiness

The outcomes in this study rely solely on the perspectives of the persons being interviewed and the case records. Existing research is also discussed to demonstrate similarities and/ or differences in the outcomes. The interviewees speak for themselves, interpretation is included in the discussion and implications sections. Verification of statements was done through corroborating information by separate interviewees and case records.

Transferability/ Applicability

This study entails a detailed description of a young lady who spent the majority of her life growing up in foster care. Working hypothesis are drawn from the data collected and presented. The transferability is dependent on the similarity between what is presented here and what it is being applied. The transferability judgment is the responsibility of the person applying the research.

Limitations

The study presented here consists of memories filtered by time and recollection. In addition the records analysis contained information that required the judgment of the person writing. There is missing information as not all persons agreed to be interviewed and Jill's biological family did not participate.

Finally, I utilized my own experience as a social worker in doing the research and in making the interpretations.

Jill's story is one of tragedy and success. Jill is a survivor. I encourage the reader to utilize her story to compare it to other children in foster care and adoption. Her story may either confirm what a child in foster care is feeling, dis-

confirm it, or add understanding to the child's situation. It is my hope that the reader is inspired through this account.

Chapter III Introduction to Jill

"I'm turning 19 this month and I'm worried. I'm worried about my car, my rent, my food, my insurance. I mean, I'm glad I'll, you know, finally be on my own, but it's scary. I mean, what if I can't make it? What if I can't pay my bills? I really don't have anywhere to go if I'm in trouble..."

This year Jill will be one of the 20,000 foster children who will "age out", or emancipate, from the child welfare system (Sieg, 1998). The same system that Jill has been dependent on for her survival for the past eleven years. This is her story.

Jill was born in a small town in the southern part of the United States. She is the youngest in a sibship of three girls. There is speculation of an additional brother who died as an infant due to SIDS.

"I had a brother before I was born, but he supposedly died from crib death. When I was young I used to believe this. I don't anymore. I feel my mom killed him, but I can't say that for sure."

Her life has been full of extreme abuse and neglect. The majority of the first eight years of her life were spent moving from place to place. She has lived in multiple towns in four states. According to the protective services worker, the family would disappear when a complaint of abuse or neglect was made. When interviewed by an investigator, the older girls would lie or change their stories. Reports could never be substantiated, or the family would move.

Jill never knew her father. She often wonders if the man named on her birth certificate is even her real father. Her parents were never married and she never met her father. Jill is curious about who her father is, this is a piece of her life that is incomplete. "I think my dad left when I was six months old and

I'm not sure why. Perhaps my mom kicked him out or maybe he left because of the way she was."

Jill's mother, "Betty", is a bisexual woman who was involved in a relationship with Jill's aunt, "Karen" (Betty's half sister). The two of them lived together with their children. Jill believes they have always lived together as she cannot recall a time her mother was not with Karen. "Most everything that happened to us is Karen's fault... My mom was afraid of her because she was really small, and if she didn't do what Karen told her to do, Karen would beat her."

It was not until late in the 1980's when the family moved to a small isolated town in the Midwest that authorities were able to intervene. Jill remembers her life in this town most vividly, "We lived in a small home hidden back from the street." There were six children in all, five girls and one boy, all were in school with Jill being the youngest. They lived in a small home with a cellar basement. Jill remembers the house as having three bedrooms. Her mother and Karen shared one room that was off from the kitchen. The two other bedrooms were used by the children, Jill shared one with her sisters and Karen's children shared the other.

The abuse

"They [Betty and Karen] would yell at us or throw stuff at us if we ever tried to come out of our room." Jill really isn't sure why they had to stay in their room, but at least in the room she felt more secure. Outside of the room was where the abuse occurred.

"Sometimes they would ask [us] to stand in the door way of their room and ask us to add numbers like two plus three and if we got

them wrong, they would throw stuff at us. They threw whatever was close to them. They were too lazy to get out of bed.”

At times the children would be locked in the basement and forced to eat dog food.

“I can remember being so hungry I would do anything for food. I even ate out of the trash. One time when we complained about being so hungry to our mom, she and Karen made this huge pot of beans, like a crock pot, you know. Well, they made us eat them until they were gone. Then Karen said, ‘There, see if you’re hungry after that’. I sat up all night and puked. I can remember eating toothpaste because that was all there was. One time I stole the peanut butter and ran out to the woods in the back and ate it all... One time I was locked out of the house. It was cold, but I didn’t care. I got to play in the yard and pick berries in the woods. I had to sleep under the porch, but it didn’t matter to me because I had fun that day.”

The schools were aware of the children stealing food as they would catch them digging through garbage cans. The children were all described by school officials as “emaciated and under socialized”.

The children looked as if they were wasting away. One of Karen’s girls, “Kristi” was developmentally delayed. She was forced to cook for the entire household. When Kristi was allowed to make a meal for the children, it typically consisted of rice and cookies. She really did not have the ability to provide meals for the family, but Karen and Betty were often sleeping in their bedroom or too busy to cook.

Jill was not taught common social skills, such as how to act at the table, what common everyday appliances were, or how to interact with people. The children isolated themselves or would act out aggressively.

“I don’t really remember having any friends, I mean, they [Betty and Karen] wouldn’t even let us go outside and play. It was like when we were young we grew up and didn’t have any money, so you don’t have food and you don’t have hardly any clothes, and you don’t have any friends because of the way your mom acts, you

know. But I loved school, my teacher was really nice to me.”

According to reports, school officials and the protective services worker had multiple meetings to discuss the concern over the children. The children would often have peculiar bruises on them to which the children would give bizarre explanations. They would miss school for periods of time and come back with new bruises. The biggest frustration for the protective services worker was not being able to substantiate the injuries as being a result of abuse. The girls would constantly stick to the same story. The children appeared to be loyal to their family. It was not until later that the children explained that Karen and Betty made them promise not to tell. Karen and Betty would create explanations for the injuries for the children if they were questioned. The protective services worker felt concerned the children were not telling the truth regarding their injuries, yet she could not substantiate abuse based only on her hunches.

According to the protective services worker, in the 80's resources to help prevent child abuse were limited in her county. This was despite the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 which allocates money for prevention and re-unification services for families at risk of child abuse and neglect (P.L. 96-272). The intent of passing P.L. 96-272 was for states to develop and implement pre-foster care placement preventative services and post-placement reunification services. Each state was to ensure “reasonable efforts” were being made to eliminate the need to remove children from their homes (P.L. 96-272).

The protective services worker referred Jill's family for available assistance she felt would benefit the children. She was able to help Betty receive Aid for Dependent Children (ADC) which is money for children who are

deprived, and Medicaid which is public assistance for health care. Betty also was given food stamps to help purchase food, and the children were given free school lunch meals. Additionally, the school provided assistance to the family whenever they could. The schools would help them find free or inexpensive clothing and attempted to reach out to Betty by offering emotional support. The children were given social work and psychological support from the school. Yet, Betty was described as being very hostile and resistant to any intervention. She would not cooperate with the school, and often would not send one of the children to school if a note pertaining to assistance had been sent home.

The protective services worker described the home the children lived in as "filthy". "There was clutter everywhere, the children had to do all of the cleaning. The kids had to wash the cloths in the bath tub." Jill recalls,

"I don't really remember if it was dirty or not. I just remember we were never allowed out of our room so it must have been clean, but there were a lot of cockroaches. I do remember that it was so cold. My sisters and I would all huddle together with a blanket by the register to keep warm... I also remember that all of the windows were nailed shut. We could never go outside or even open the windows. We would either sit on the bed all day or play a game together... We would have to stomp them [the clothes] out in the tub all day, I would get so tired but they would beat us if we would stop. After a while you couldn't feel it anymore. If they didn't beat us, they would put our head under the water and make us hold our breath. I just remember the water being so cold."

"When there were scary movies on television they would make us watch them. I remember thinking it was really scary and they would make us stay up and watch them. If we fell asleep they would throw water on us or hit us to keep us up to watch the movies...When I was about seven years old I was playing on a rusty barb wire fence. I fell and had a huge open cut that was as long as my leg. My mom decided she was going to pour hydrogen peroxide all over my open wound. I screamed the whole time, but she didn't care. All I remember was her calling me a big baby. She made it very clear that she didn't want us, she told me she didn't care if I died. For her entertainment she used to make us

stand on one foot in the corner, and if we fell she would throw something at us. One time we were beat up so bad by my mom and Karen that it sort of made them feel bad. They put meat on our faces to take the swelling down, but they laughed about it later. I lost my tooth brush once, and I prayed to God that he would help me find it because I would get beat up if I did not. I never found it, and I wondered why God didn't help me."

It was not until Betty's oldest daughter, "Lisa" came to school with two black eyes after missing school for a week, the protective services worker was able to substantiate abuse. The girls could not keep their stories straight. The protective services worker took Lisa to the hospital for a full medical exam. The medical reports indicated in addition to the two black eyes, Lisa had bruises in different stages of healing on her chin, forehead, elbow, buttocks, neck, and left hip. There was hemorrhaging in Lisa's eardrum that the doctor believed came from "one heck of a whack". In addition to the bruises, there was evidence of repeated sexual abuse, indicated by the tearing and scarring in the vagina and anus and a vaginal infection. Also, Lisa was severely malnourished. Lisa's injuries were so extensive she was hospitalized overnight for monitoring. The following day the protective services worker did an emergency removal of the children, taking the children out of the care of their mothers and placing them in foster care. The protective services worker recalls having to hand write the petition to the Juvenile Court Referee requesting immediate removal of the children. Both Karen's and Betty's children were taken from school to a foster home following the referee's acceptance of the petition. "I came and took the children from school, and I wished I had taken them the night before because Jill's [middle] sister "Amy" got the crap beat out of her for Lisa being in the hospital"

"I think the social worker came and pulled me out of class, I didn't really know what was going on. I just remember taking a really long car ride and

ending up at someone else house." All of the children had injuries similar to Lisa's, in particular being malnourished, having several bruises, and having indications of sexual abuse. Jill did not appear to have been sexually abused as often as the older children, although there was physical evidence that sexual abuse had occurred. The protective services worker believes Jill, being the youngest of the children, was not sexually perpetrated on as often. Although Jill was not always the physical victim of the abuse, she would witness it on a daily basis. The abuse caused great physical and emotional damage to all the children.

Unfortunately child abuse and neglect is common. In 1996, complaints were filed on 44 of every 1000 children in the United States (American Humane Association, 1999). Yet even with this heavily researched statistic it is impossible to compile an accurate number because child abuse is grossly under reported, (Cohen, 1992).

Child abuse and neglect is not a new problem. Throughout history children have been injured, killed, beaten, and sexually exploited. Children were once considered a "chattel" or a piece of property of their parents (Kandushin, 1980). Parents had the view they could do as they pleased with their children. This view is still prevalent in society today.

Most parents have the desire to be decent parents, and they have good intentions from the beginning. However, parents at times lose control.

"Factors which contribute to child abuse include the immaturity of the parents, lack of parenting skills, unrealistic expectations about children's behavior and capabilities, a parent's own negative childhood experiences, social isolation, frequent family crisis, and drug or alcohol problems" (American Humane Association, 1999, pg.5).

No matter what abuse children suffer, there is harm to the child's physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development (Delaney, 1998; Brooks and Siegel, 1996; Gil, 1996; Gil 1991; James, 1989).

In addition to the harm in the child's development, often abused children are relocated into an out of home placement which creates yet another traumatic event in their lives. Although there are many efforts to avert out of home placements, it still is a necessary means to protect children (Delaney, 1998). This is especially necessary in situations similar to Jill's where the abuse is so severe and is a daily occurrence.

Chapter IV

Initial Foster Care Placement

Jill was really confused about being placed in foster care. She was not sure why she was there because she really didn't know that anything was wrong.

"I thought the social work lady was a neat lady, but I was really nervous. I didn't know where I was going and I didn't know what was going on. I mean I can remember wishing that my mom was nicer but I didn't think she was bad. I thought everything was normal... The hardest part was not knowing what the people would be like, I didn't know if they would be nice or mean or what to expect.. I had to switch schools, which I guess I didn't mind because I was young, but I never said goodbye to anybody."

"I remember the first day that I was there [in foster care] we ate pizza. I asked when the next time we would be eating was. Then I wrapped up the crust and saved it for later because that was all I thought I would be eating for the day. I was really surprised that we got to eat so much."

Jill had very little to eat when she lived with her mother. She did not expect anything to be different at her foster home. Children who have experienced mal- nourishment or neglect often are prone to have preoccupation with food (Delaney, 1998). Jill was worried that she would have to continue to go hungry. She felt that she needed to use the skills that she had developed while living with her mother in order to survive.

Jill was brought immediately from her school to her foster home. She was never again able to go to her mother's house.

"I felt kind of sad when my stuff came. I never got to go back to my house again, and they brought my stuff over and all I had was one brown bag of stuff. I really didn't have too much... I also remember that I got to ride a bike for the first time. I had to use training wheels. I was embarrassed but happy. I learned how to ride pretty fast. I remember having animals, I was so happy and

all of the toys. I got a new backpack and you got a bedroom and you got to take showers, like every night, I only took showers like once a month before that... I told my foster mom that I never wanted to leave. I was happy, and I think it is because I felt safe, I mean I would often wonder why I wasn't always being yelled at. I was happy about that, but I still worried about my mom. I wondered if she was okay and if I would see her again."

Separation from parents is a traumatic event for the majority of children even for children who attach to parents/ families as infants (James, 1994). They are dependent on their parents for their very survival. Early attachment serve as foundations to their future interpersonal relationships (Fahlberg, 1991). Even in situations where the attachment is not healthy or is impaired a disruption in the attachment can be detrimental (James, 1989).

Entering foster care often occurs without notice or preparation. The child's feelings are typically ignored or discouraged (Fahlberg, 1991). Folman (1998), found children who were unexpectedly taken from their home felt as if they were being apprehended. This leads to a lot of fear in the children causing them to withhold questions. Children feel abandoned because they are unable to say goodbye. Caseworkers have a sense they have rescued the children, they fail to consider what the child may think about the situation. Many children are confused or unsure of why they are entering care (Johnson, Yoken, and Voss, 1995). They arrive not knowing anything about their surroundings, the new family, and what expectations will be placed on them (Kulp, 1993). This was very similar to how Jill was feeling.

Sibling Separation

Initially, all of the children were placed together but then were separated. The children were physically violent to each other and would sexually act out on each other. Jill remained in this foster home with her sister Amy who was the

middle child.

“They didn’t really tell us why we were separated. I think it was because where I was living didn’t have enough room, I don’t think it was a good thing especially taking Lisa. Amy left shortly after that. I guess because she was a bad kid. We fought a lot. She lied a lot and had temper tantrums. One day she threw a shoe through the window. So then she left. I wish they would have tried to keep us together. I really don’t care about Karen’s children, but I wanted to be with my sisters, you know what I mean. I was always worried that I would be the next to go, I felt bad because I felt like my sisters were that way because they had learned to be that way. I was pretty scared.”

Losing parents and home environment is difficult. Losing siblings can be equally traumatic. Siblings serve as a source of comfort and a connection to the past. Having siblings together in foster care compensates for the loss of ones parents and helps to give the child a sense of identity, (McAuley, 1996). The mere presence of a sibling serves as a source of support and eases the adjustment from traumatic events (Hegar, 1988; Tizard, 1986; Festiger, 1983). Separating siblings not only inhibits this support but also impairs it for the future. “In general, sibling attachments are even closer than usual when there has been inadequate parental care and attention” (Fahlberg, 1991). Historically, placing agencies have not recognized the value of placing siblings together although trends are changing (Fahlberg, 1991). The reality is it is difficult to find homes with the capacity to accept a sibling group (Smith, 1996).

Placing siblings together also has negative aspects. There is the possibility the learned dysfunctional behaviors from the abusive environment will carry over to the foster care placement (McNamara and McNamara, 1990). This was the situation in Jill’s case. The protective services worker struggled with separating the children, but felt it was in their best interests at the time.

"Amy would always go after Jill. They fought to the point where it endangered their safety. Also when it was found that the children were forced to have sex together, it was deemed most appropriate to keep them apart. It is sad that they were separated, but there was little focus on keeping siblings together at that time".

Disclosures

After the children had been in care for approximately one month they began to feel more comfortable in their surroundings. They would talk more freely about the abusive experiences through which they had gone to caseworkers and foster parents. The protective services case remained open for approximately one year following placement due to the adjudication hearing date being adjourned on several occasions. The protective services worker would interview each of the children separately when there was a new disclosure in order to see if there was corroborating evidence.

While in care, the children disclosed abuse that the protective services worker found to be horrific. The children described what their parents called doing their "light work". When they were asked to do "light work", this meant that one of the children would be placed in the middle of the others, and they would take turns beating the child in the middle. This would consist of hitting, kicking, and whatever else the parents instructed. The children discussed being hit with objects, like flashlights baseball bats, belts, switches, telephones, etc., until they would bleed.

The children were forced to participate in sexual acts with each other. They also had to watch Betty and Karen being sexually active. In addition to this the older children all have described being forced to have sex with strange men whom they did not know.

Jill's siblings talked at length about having a baby brother who died as a

young infant. They described having watched their mother deliver this child in their home. The baby then died at a young age, and their mother told them it was from crib death. The girls believe the child had been buried in the woods. The truth of this could never be substantiated as there are no records of this baby's birth.

The protective services worker recalls

"All of the children were interviewed separately regarding these events. I remember them being very fearful and anxious when they talked to me. They were afraid of what Karen would do to them because they told. Karen was definitely the most domineering person in the relationship. Betty was very dependent on her. She did what she was instructed to do. In addition to my interviewing the children, all of the foster parents kept journals that described behaviors and any statements that the children made."

Jill remembers her foster parent journaling and her caseworker taking notes. She really did not like the fact that her foster parent was writing everything down.

"I remember her notebook, it felt like she was condoning [encouraging] what I said and trying to make me hate my mom. She used to sit with her notebook, she must have like twenty five. She wrote tons. She used to write about me all of the time, I would say something and she would write it down. The more she wrote, the happier she was so I guess I felt happier. I don't think people should do that. They should at least wait until the kid is out of the room or something. It feels so wrong to have them write down every word you say."

There has been little research regarding disclosures following foster care placements. It has been speculated that upon entering care a child senses her environment to be less threatening, and therefore is more apt to disclose abuse (Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant, and Loughlin, 1999; Snow, 1991; Sgroi, 1982). A child is likely to disclose due to a breakdown in his/her defenses, and the majority of the disclosures are accidental (Snow, 1991; Sgroi, 1982). Children

are apt to feel threatened or pressured by family members not to talk or to recant, therefore children will often be in a state of denial regarding the abuse. When a disclosure happens, and a process starts, the entire event is often revealed over time (Snow, 1991). Due to this timely process, it is often necessary for the worker or foster parents to take notes regarding a disclosure in order to utilize it in protecting the child. Festinger, (1983) found that the majority of foster children in her study found it very bothersome to have caseworkers and foster parents taking notes and writing things down especially when they did not know what was written. For Jill, note taking also appears to have been very intrusive. She felt as if it were a reward for her talking.

Reunification Services

According to the Protective Services worker and the various quarterly reports, there were numerous efforts to assist Betty in reunification, as this was the original goal. Betty received individual counseling twice a week, plus group counseling once a week. This counseling focused on mental health, depression, self esteem, sexual abuse, physical abuse, parenting skills, and reunification issues. In counseling Betty placed most of the blame on Karen's oldest daughter, stating that she was the reason the children had been abused. Initially she denied any responsibility for the abuse. Betty would often say that counseling was a waste of time and money because she stated she did not have anything on which to work. It was not until later in the counseling process that Betty acknowledged physically abusing her children. She also recognized that her children had been sexually abused although she denied being the perpetrator of the abuse.

A psychological report described her as being void of affect and having

a dependent/ schizoid personality with aggressive and hostile behaviors. Betty openly stated she felt it was wrong to express her feelings. She eventually learned to express some of them and was remorseful regarding what had happened to her children. Betty also attended a parenting class to improve her skills. Reports indicate her parenting skills did improve in this class. The court required Betty to separate from Karen and live at least fifteen miles from Karen's residence. Money was allotted to pay for the deposit and first month's rent. Betty was extremely hesitant to move out away from Karen but did move into a small efficiency apartment.

Betty received a lot of help to reunify with her children, yet Jill did not know any of this. Jill remains confused about why nothing was done to help her family.

"I feel like they did not do enough to keep our family together, but I hardly knew anything that was happening. I was very confused and still am. Kids usually can tell what's going on, and I think that adults should just tell them. I still don't understand why they just didn't make my mom move away from Karen and then help her buy a house. We could have gone home if they would have helped us a little."

It is very important for children to understand the efforts being made to help their parents. Most children are too overwhelmed or terrified to ask questions (Folman, 1998). It is important for foster parents and caseworkers to be sensitive to this fear and to be open to discuss the child's perceptions in feelings in regards to the case. Wilson and Conroy in their study of out of home care found children felt they had not been able to give enough input into their case. Children need to have this information to have their sense of security and safety. Fahlberg (1991) believes caseworkers should talk honestly with children, yet being careful not to place blame on anyone. She

believes children deserve to have information regarding their case. Without this information the child goes on worrying and fantasizing about what is occurring. Unfortunately Jill did not receive this and believes that little has been done to help her family.

Visitation

Betty visited her children one time a week for an hour at the placing agency's office with a case aide present. These visits were often tense because the children did not want to go to the visits. Betty was often angry with the worker and the children felt that she was mad at them. Jill was the most adamant about not wanting to visit. Her foster parents would bring her to the office, and Jill would refuse to visit.

"I didn't like to visit because there were always people watching plus I didn't like to look at my mom's face. It was hard because I still loved my mom, but I wanted to stay where I was."

This was also the time when the siblings would visit each other. Following their separation in foster care, they did not visit each other regularly. "I hardly remember seeing my sisters. After it was all over I only got to see them about once a year, if that." Betty was provided with transportation to these visits, but occasionally would miss her rides. At times the children would confront their mother during the visitation regarding what she had done to them to which Betty would have no response. It was not until a visit following a court hearing that Betty apologized to her children. She stated she was wrong for what she had done, she should not have been with Karen, and she would do what she needed to get her children back. "When she apologized to us, I felt really bad for her. I mean, I felt like she had learned."

Visitation between children and their biological parents is a necessary part of foster care. Visitation can serve to preserve and strengthen the parent/child attachment. It can decrease negative behaviors, helps facilitate transitions, allows workers to observe interactions between parents and children, helps children avoid worries and fantasies about their biological parents, and can increase the likelihood of reunification (Cantos, Gries, and Slies, 1997; Erera, 1997; Fahlberg, 1991; Fanshel, 1982; Fanshel and Shinn, 1978; Grigsby, 1994). Many children want visitation but are too afraid to request it because they do not want to hurt the feelings of their foster parents. Jill recalls her struggle with visitation, "I wanted to visit more, but I liked where I was too, and I didn't want them to be mad at me."

Court/ Termination

Jill and her sisters entered care in the late 1980's. They remained temporary court wards for approximately one and a half years following the date they entered care. According to the protective services worker the children were temporary wards longer than usual due to the criminal hearing for Betty. The defense attorney would request adjournments at several of the juvenile court hearings. Jill doesn't remember too much about going to court although it sticks out in her mind as being difficult. "I didn't want to have to say everything in front of my mother. I was scared and afraid of what she would think of me or say to me. I didn't want her to be mad."

It is very difficult for children to testify against their parents particularly when there is a bond. However, the U.S. Constitution guarantees the person charged with a crime to have face to face confrontations with the witness even when the witness is a child (Myers, 1994; Walton, 1994; Melton, 1984). It is the

belief that witnesses, particularly children will be more compelled to tell the truth under the watchful eye of the defendant (Higgins, 1988). Testifying in sexual abuse cases can pose psychological stress to a child, but it also can empower the child (Myers, 1994; Berliner and Barbieri, 1984). Jill's role in testifying was critical to the hearing.

The jury found Betty guilty. Her parental rights were fully terminated and she was sentenced to twenty years in jail. It was the feeling of the protective services worker in this case that her sentence was harsher because she was a female. According to the protective services worker,

"A male who sexually molests his children will either have his rights terminated or go to jail for one to five years. This was a case of reverse discrimination. It is hard for people to fathom women being so cruel and sick to children. When the girls testified, it greatly impacted the jury and the judge, and Betty received a very harsh sentence. It really is a shame because Betty clearly has a mental illness and was very dependent on Karen. Karen had Betty do things that Betty probably would not have done if Karen had not been involved. Betty really did care for her children, she just did not know how to show it properly. The original goal was reunification, but that changed as the allegations became more severe and it was clear that Betty was not making enough progress. She failed to protect the children, and we wanted the girls to have permanency."

It is difficult to determine whether or not Jill's mother truly was discriminated against without reading the records from the trial or observing the jurors deliberating. Regardless of this, the guilty need to have a consequence for their crime (Walton, 1994). It is difficult for children not to feel some sort of responsibility for this consequence (Berliner and Barbieri, 1984).

"I remember when my mom went to jail, we were sad. We wanted to help our mom... She sent us a present from jail. It was nice. I know she still loves me, but I worry about her, and I worry that she will hate me for what I did to her. I worry that I might go to hell

because of everything that happened . She should not have gone to jail, she learned her lesson. I do want to see my mom again though.”

Children are affected by parents being incarcerated. There are both emotional and physical consequences to the incarceration (Seymour, 1998). Jill had difficulties with her mother going to jail and this was compounded with learning she would never return to her mother’s care and custody. Jill felt the punishment of not being able to have her children back was lesson enough to her mother.

Chapter V

Adoption and Disruption

Adoption

Jill was almost ten years old when her mother's parental rights were terminated. She had been living in the same foster home for the past year and a half and did not want to leave. She felt attached to this family, got along well with her foster siblings, and felt safe. It was approximately two years following her placement into foster care that Jill was adopted. "I felt like I was a part of their family so that was really neat. I liked it ." Jill enjoyed helping out around the house. She would help with the cleaning and cooking and she especially enjoyed helping with the younger children in the home. To Jill this house seemed like Heaven.

When a child who is in foster care becomes legally free for adoption, it seems natural for the foster parents to pursue adoption. Children are typically attached to the foster parents and having another loss is detrimental. Adoption by foster parents serves to provide the child with a greater sense of security and add continuity. Adoption provides the child a permanent "safe" home (Barth and Berry, 1988). However there is concern that foster parents who adopt have less of a commitment to the child's best interest (Barth and Berry, 1988). This concern stems from the notion that foster care is a temporary arrangement and children do not see the placement as permanent. Furthermore, if foster parents discuss adoption with the child prior to the termination of parental rights, this may serve as an inhibitor to reunification (Barth and Berry, 1988). In Jill's situation, she often struggled with loyalty between her mother and her foster mother. She did not want to displease either

parent, yet enjoyed the attention she was receiving in her foster home.

Jill had lived in this home for several years and things seemed to be "okay". She felt like these people were taking good care of her. She missed her biological family immensely, but she had moved on and become a member of a new family. Jill would not have wanted anyone else to adopt her. "I liked it there, and I would have stayed if I could have".

Re-abuse and Disruption

Jill wanted to remain with this family forever. She was very attached to her adoptive mother and the child born to her adoptive parents. Jill was devastated the day her adoptive father asked her to undress for him. This went on for nearly a year and a half. He would ask her to undress and take nude photos. Additionally, he would play strip poker, spin the bottle, and drink beer with her and her friends. Jill was crushed. The people that she trusted to keep her safe had now become those of whom she was most afraid. Jill would talk to her friends about what was happening, and would devise plans on how to get him to stop. She would sleep in her clothes so that she would not have to undress at all in the morning and risk her adoptive father requesting to be present. The hardest part came when Jill disclosed this to someone who could actually help.

"I told the principal at my school, because I was going to use one of those, [pointing to interviewer's dictaphone] but my friend kept on forgetting to bring it to school. The principal helped me... My adoptive mom, she said it wasn't true. She just didn't want to believe me because she had been with him for like fifteen years. He always asked to have sex with me, and I don't know how she could not believe me. She used to always call me 'daddy's girl', that would bug me. He would buy me stuff if I did what he wanted, like I got a new jacket, a C D player, and expensive stuff. It was really hard because I miss my little sister [adoptive parent's

biological daughter]. She didn't want me to go. She cried and I never got to see her after that because my mom [adoptive] didn't believe me. I guess it is my fault because I had to leave. I couldn't stay there like that anymore. I should have just told him to stop, but he probably wouldn't have."

After Jill disclosed the abuse, her adoptive father moved out per the request of the authorities investigating the complaint. Jill's adoptive mother believed her temporarily but later believed that the accusation was false. Her adoptive mother elected to have her husband move back home, and Jill went back to foster care. Jill's adoptive parents disrupted the adoption and the charges against the adoptive father were never pursued.

It is very difficult to adopt an older, abused child. There are limited resources for the adoptive parents, and the issues are very complex (Delaney, 1998; Wethues and Cohen, 1990; Barth and Berry, 1988; Churchill, Carlson, and Nybell, 1979). Older children who are placed for adoption often have been abused and/or neglected. They have strong attachments to their birth family. It is common for these children to have a variety of behavior problems, including eating disorders, enuresis and encopresis, sexual acting out, amongst others (Delaney, 1998). Disruption of adoption with older children is not uncommon due to behavior problems and stress on the family. Jill did not have many behavior problems, and she appeared to be a well behaved child. Several of Jill's caseworkers reported Jill to be a very sexualized child.

"Jill had the tendency to re - enact her abuse, I think she did this a lot by being flirtatious with men. I think that her adoptive father didn't know how to handle this, and he did not have the training or support. Further Jill did not have the proper therapy to deal with her past. There was not a lot of focus on trauma work then, and Jill is definitely a child who has undergone a lot of trauma."

"Jill was a very flirtatious and sexualized child from the beginning, although it was as if she did not know what she was doing. I think

the foster father just took this too far and did not know how to set his boundaries. This is still no excuse for what happened.”

When adoptions disrupt due to the child being re- abused, it is tragic. The child was placed in the home for protection and to prevent further abuse. This home had originally been her safe haven turned into the horror from what she had gotten away. It is hard to know what was more difficult for Jill. She had already experienced so many losses that she contemplated whether or not she should have disclosed the abuse.

“I was safe at that house. They were the nicest people I could ever ask to live with until I became a teenager. Then he changed. I wanted to stay but I just couldn't take it anymore. He was so gross. I still feel bad about it though, I mean I really hurt my mom [adoptive mom]. I worry too, about my little sister, [adoptive parent's biological daughter] she is a teenager now, and I worry if she will be safe. I have no way of knowing. I still wish I would have confronted him and told him to stop. I should have given him a chance to change. Then maybe I would still be there.”

Jill continues to struggle with what happened to her in her adoptive home. She is not sure what hurt her worse; the abuse by her biological mother or the abuse by her adoptive father.

Children who have been sexually abused are never intentionally seductive. They are conditioned to display these behaviors in order to maintain normalcy (Gill and Johnson, 1993). Delaney (1998) describes re - enactment as a common occurrence with children in foster care. Re-enactment is recreating old relationships with new people (Delaney, 1998). Foster parents report this re-enactment to be very stressful and creates a lot of difficult reactions and feelings (Delaney, 1998). Foster parents have trouble knowing how to handle themselves and become drawn to abusive impulses (Delaney and Kunstal, 1997). In Jill's situation it is difficult to determine what the adoptive father experienced without being able to interview him. Even without this

interview, he is clearly responsible for the abuse that occurred to Jill as he was the adult who was there to protect Jill. When he felt abusive impulses, he should have sought help immediately.

Chapter VI

Second Foster Care Placement

For the second time in Jill's short life, she went back into foster care. She had been with her adoptive family for approximately six years. Jill left her adoptive home from school. She never went back because she was too afraid.

"It was very hard to leave, probably just as hard as when I had to leave my real mom, I lived with them just about the same amount of time. I remember my little sister crying, saying 'I miss you. When are you coming home?' My mom [adoptive mom] said she wished I could stay and said I could if I said it was a lie. But it wasn't and I couldn't stay."

Her caseworker, "Mary" remembers Jill sobbing uncontrollably. "This was the only time I have ever seen Jill display genuine emotion. Typically Jill's affect had been very flat and monotone. This disruption hurt her terribly". Originally there were plans for her adoptive family to work on reunification, but they elected to disrupt the adoption instead.

"I never said goodbye to anybody. I was too embarrassed, I just left. My mom [adoptive mom] packed my bags for me and that was that. I remember the first night at my new foster home. My worker dropped me off, and I just took a shower and went to bed. I really didn't want to talk to anybody".

Jill moved approximately one hour away to a town that was much larger than from where she was coming. She was afraid of running into her adoptive father and anyone who knew him.

"I really did not want to leave my school and my friends, but I really did not want to see him. I guess I really didn't have a choice... My new foster parents were nice enough at first, I especially liked my foster dad, "Mike", He seemed like a good guy. My foster mom "Linda" was okay, but she always lies."

Jill had to restart her life for the second time. She was only visiting her biological siblings one time per year, she had no contact with her biological mother, and now her adoptive family wanted nothing to do with her. In addition to the loss of family, Jill had to let go of friends. She did not say goodbye the first time she came into foster care, and she didn't this time either. Her new school was a lot larger, and she was unfamiliar with the community.

"I felt so out of place, I wanted to go back to my old school, but I couldn't. I remember I was nervous about going to a new school, but it was okay. I was the new girl, and all of the people there wanted to befriend me."

Jill's caseworker, "Roger" describes Jill,

"She was a beautiful girl. She was shy but got into sports. She had instant popularity at her new school and fit in very well. She seemed to like it at the new foster home. I was always impressed with how well Jill did. She is a bright girl with a lot of potential. It was really a shame what happened to her."

Jill stayed in this foster home for three years,

"Living with Linda and Mike was weird. I mean they were nice and all, and they took me on vacations and stuff, but Linda and I didn't see eye to eye. I mean she lies too much. I thought she was really cool when I first moved there, but she must have been in the honeymoon stage. She tried to act her best. She told me I would have lots of freedom, and I didn't have any. She told me she loves to go out and do stuff, and then all she did was sit at home. She had to make sure everybody was in school. Like when I lived with her, she used to have people check on me at school and make sure I was eating lunch. Plus she had her favorites, I mean like kids. She would take them out and buy them new clothes and anything they wanted. Then the ones that she didn't like she would get their clothes at Goodwill or Sam's Club. Plus she did not give me any space. She would always go through my stuff looking for drugs or reading my notes from my friends. She couldn't keep her sticky fingers off of it. I started to hate her."

Jill had a total of four different caseworkers while she was at Linda and Mike's.

"Caseworker's weren't really that bad. They did take you out to lunch and get you out of class, but I always hated how they wrote everything down that I said. It would have been nice if they could've waited until I left or something. It just felt weird. Another thing was sometimes it was embarrassing if they came to school and told everybody in the office that they were my caseworker. Then all the kids in the office would know I was in foster care. Plus they would never say anything in front of Linda, and then she would turn around and say that they said something. I never knew what was true. My last caseworker I had at Linda's, "Nicolette" was the only one who would confront her with me there. I really liked that because then I would know the truth."

Nicolette recalls,

"When I first received the case, it was tough. Linda informed me that Jill did not want to see me because she was sick of having caseworkers. It took me approximately three weeks to get an appointment with Jill. When I finally saw Jill, she had asked what took me so long. I informed her about the situation of Linda, and she was pretty mad. In fact she explained to me that Linda always lies to look good. Jill stated that Linda was probably too busy and didn't want me around herself. On my first visit with Jill she showed me pictures of her sisters and asked if she could call them. She explained that Linda would not let her because her middle sister was gay. I talked with Linda that same day about it with Jill present. I felt it was only fair to do it this way. From that day on any time that Jill had a complaint or needed something, I would have a discussion with both of them together. Mike always stayed in the background. He had a full time job and really let Linda run the house. I didn't see him that often. Things between Linda and Jill became increasingly intense. Jill did not trust Linda at all and had caught her on numerous occasions rummaging through her belongings. Linda explained to me that she feared that Jill was sexually involved with boys which wasn't true at all. Jill had asked me if she could move for the entire first eight months that I had her on my caseload. I would always tell her no. Finally my supervisor and I agreed that Jill was not going to last, and we sought out a new home."

Nicolette was not the first caseworker that Jill had complained to about living with Mike and Linda. One of Jill's former caseworker "Mary" recalls,

"I had known Jill back form when she was at her adoptive home,

because I had other children placed there. She [Jill] was a sweet girl and very down to earth. I never knew her to lie. After Roger had the case for a short time, I took over. Jill and I got along quite well, and she always complained about Linda for as long as I can remember. Part of the problem was that Jill had not come from an overly nurturing home. Linda and Mike were very tight knit and nurturing. They were family oriented and Jill, being so independent and not accustomed to affection, did not do well in this situation."

A decision by Nicolette and her supervisor was made to move Jill. This was talked over with Linda and Mike. They did agree that it was probably in their best interest. They were afraid that Jill would falsely accuse Mike of molesting her. They stated that they felt that Jill had not told the truth about her adoptive father, and they believed that moving Jill was pertinent. Nicolette recalls,

"I hated to move Jill. She had been at Linda and Mike's for three years. I wanted to keep her in the same school district, but it was hard. I couldn't find any homes that were available. Plus I knew after what Linda and Mike were saying about false accusations that they were no longer appropriate even if I could reach a compromise. I finally talked with a single woman who lived about a half an hour away. She was very excited to foster Jill. Jill was really nervous to move so far away, and she was unable to meet this woman before the move. She had to rely on my word only. She agreed because she felt it was her only choice. It was either this home, or she would run away."

Moving was not as easy as Jill had expected it to be. Although she was relieved to be leaving, she still cried when she embraced Linda with a hug.

"Jody' my new foster mom was okay. I was scared to go. I guess the hardest part about moving is you don't know what to expect and you don't know what your boundaries are. You just go and find out when you are there all moved in. It would be nice if you could spend time with foster families before you move in so that you can get to know them and they won't do stuff to try and impress you. Then you can make up your mind about moving, but it usually doesn't work out that way. Jody took care of me, she bought me

soap, and clothes, and stuff, but she was kind of moody. I think she was moody because she needed a man or something. I don't know. But then she accused me of stealing her car and running away. She called Nicolette and told her that I was taking her car to Detroit. She let me borrow it so I could drive to work."

Nicolette's job description involved her being on-call for emergencies twenty-four hours a day. Nicolette could not remember ever getting an emergency call pertaining to Jill, until Jody called her in a panic.

"Jody called me at about 1:30 in the morning, saying that Jill had run away to Detroit with her car. I asked her if she was sure Jill wasn't at her friends or at work, she said no. I told her to call work and any friends that she could think of and to call me back in an hour. Jody called the police instead, and Jill came home twenty minutes later with the police waiting for her. I was really upset with Jody, and Jill was livid. She had been at work and had to close that evening. She was determined that she could no longer live at Jody's".

Jill stayed with a friend for a couple of days while Nicolette did everything she could to try and work things out with Jody. An alternative placement was found in the same town with a young single woman, and Jill was moved again. Jill was not thrilled about moving again. She felt it was too late for her to be a part of a family.

"Emily' [the new foster mother] was too young and I was getting too old. She was so bossy and thought she had all this authority over me, I guess I just didn't respect her, plus I didn't try. She treated me bad and didn't trust me just because I was a foster kid. Her whole family would stare at me. Nicolette started working hard at helping me get my own place. I had to take these classes to learn skills which were stupid because I already had a job, knew how to write checks, and stuff like that but I did it because I was so sick of foster care. I was sick of having my stuff gone through, I was sick of people trying to tell me what to do, I just wanted to get away from all my stupid foster parents and their damn families. They would force me to do stuff with their stupid families, and their families were not mine, I didn't want to and shouldn't have been forced to. I was old enough to make my own decisions. I really didn't trust any of them. Why should I? It was hard to trust

anybody. I don't even really trust my boyfriend. They all thought I was psycho and made me do stuff like be in counseling. I'm not crazy. I just want to be left alone".

Many foster children report they have had little privacy in foster care (Festinger, 1983). In addition to this, Festinger (1983), found foster children feel as though being in foster care gives the child a stigma of being bad. The children reported just wanting to be treated like other children. Further, 96% of the children in Festinger study reported that they had some concerns with the foster care system although overall they were satisfied (1983). Moving from home to home is very difficult. It creates a lot of instability in the youth and contributes to attachment problems (Fahlberg, 1991; Delaney, 1998) Moving should only be done if it is entirely necessary, but all precautions should be considered to ease the transition of the move (Delaney and Kustal, 1997, Fahlberg, 1991, Festinger, 1983, Churchill, Carlson, and Nybell, 1979). In each of the foster care moves, Jill participated in the decision to move. This appeared to be difficult for the majority of the caseworkers as they were concerned about attachment problems that Jill was having. However, it was clear that little effort was made to ensure that Jill was matched with the appropriate family. Often the moves were made quickly, and Jill did not have an opportunity to meet the family.

"I think that it should be different, than just moving. Kids don't know what to expect. They need to get past the honeymoon stage and so do the foster parents. So they need to get to know each other before they move. Although I know that it is not always easy to do, I am not really sure why I moved so much. I really don't like to think about it, but I know I couldn't stay in most of the places that I stayed in any longer than I did."

Counseling

Jill had been in counseling when she originally became involved in the

system. She was seen by a woman who did a lot of play therapy with Jill. Jill felt this woman had helped her resolve a lot of issues she had about her past abuse. She did not feel she should have been in counseling again. Many of Jill's caseworker's and foster parents believe Jill has never really processed the abuse.

"Her adoptive parents were not very invested into counseling. They had other children besides Jill, and it was difficult for them to bring them all to the many appointments that they had. Jill lived in a town where there were not many resources, and her abuse never really was dealt with. Jill so desperately wants to be normal that she denies that the abuse and the moves had any impact on her."

"When Jill was on my caseload, she revealed to me that she worried a lot. She said that she worried about everything, from school, her foster home, her future. Oh, really it was just about anything. She had headaches and stomach aches which her medical doctor determined to be an ulcer due to her excessive worrying. I think it was just hard for her to attach because she would be too vulnerable then."

Jill's counselor "Sara" describes her as having a flat affect, and very resistant to treatment. She gave Jill a diagnosis of Adjustment Reaction Disorder.

"Jill was referred to me after the disruption of her adoption. She never really worked in therapy with me. She has had a history of refusing to address the sexual abuse and all of the loss and abandonment issues that she has had. I attempted therapy, but Jill was very guarded and stuck only to surface issues, like boyfriends and problems related to the foster home. I attempted some outreach sessions but these also did not prove to be successful as Jill would refuse any emotional work. I attempted to engage Jill unsuccessfully. I gave Jill a poor prognosis only because she has so many issues and a lot of traumatic things have happened to her. I only hope that she will engage herself in therapy as an adult in order for her to establish healthy relationships, and so she will attach to someone. Jill is so independent and will not let anyone into her world. I even talked about having her transfer to another

counselor, but Jill would have nothing to do with it. So Jill continued to come in and talk about surface issues until Jill moved into independent living. Then she stopped. I really fear for her if she doesn't get the help that she needs."

"Children in [foster] care have mental health needs that are qualitatively and quantitatively different from the general population of children and require specialized mental health services" (Schneiderman, Connors, Fribourg, Gries, and Gonzales, 1998,38-39). Conventional psychotherapy may not be the best fit for the child who is in foster care. Something less threatening and nontraditional may be a better approach (Delaney, 1998). Further, each individual child has her unique experience, and they all react differently to the experience (Gil, 1991). Children who are abused "find creative and inspired means of communicating their pains, their joys, their worries, and their distress" (Gil,1996,80). It is the therapist job to find a way to understand what the child is communicating and talking typically does not work especially with a resistant child. Many therapists have been successful at implementing play and other expressive techniques into their therapies and this has been a successful way of reaching the child (Gil, 1991; Gil 1996; James, 1986; Brooks and Siegal, 1996).

Jill states,

"I really don't think that counseling does a lot of kids any good especially if they are forced to go like I was. They won't talk about what they need to talk about. They'll talk about other things. Kids should only be forced to go to counseling if they have done something really wrong. People act like it is the kids who did something wrong. This was not even my fault. I did not do all of those things to myself. No one should have the right to tell a kid they have to go to counseling. Counseling should be offered but never forced."

Chapter VII

Independent Living

Jill resided at Emily's for about six months until she moved into independent living. Unfortunately, the Family Independence Agency (FIA) decided to transfer the case to a new worker, "Gretchen". Nicolette took this hard as she did not want to stop working with Jill.

"I really didn't want to stop being Jill's caseworker but the FIA would not let the agency that I was from supervise her once the independent living started. In order for private agencies to supervise Independent Living cases, they need to have a contract with the state and my agency didn't have this contract. I did everything I could think of to prepare Jill for being on her own. I felt so bad. It was really tough because we had the hardest time finding her an apartment. No one wanted to rent to her because she had no credit and no renting history. She was only 17 at the time that she started looking. We finally found a family that agreed to rent a room to her. Then I had to close Jill's case. It was really hard for me because I had been with Jill for quite awhile. I had Jill on my caseload for approximately two and a half years. I was very concerned about her."

Jill felt as though she had finally achieved a goal she had been trying to achieve since she requested to be moved from Linda and Mike's house. She was relieved, but independent living was not as easy as she had expected.

"I was really glad to be out of foster homes and into an independent living situation. It is really too late for me to be with a family. I just don't trust anyone. I don't even trust my friends. It is too hard because people really let you down. But I really like independent living. I guess I am just scared that after I move out of this place that I won't have enough money. They only charge me a little, and I can't believe all of the bills that I have. I'm turning 19 this month, I'm worried. I'm worried about my car, my rent, my food, my insurance. I mean, I'm glad I'll, you know, finally be on my own, but it's scary. I mean, what if I can't make it? What if I can't pay my bills? I really don't have anywhere to go if I'm in trouble? I won't have a caseworker anymore, and I dropped out of

school. It was stupid, but this was like my fourth school, and I just couldn't do it. I had to work to pay all of my bills. The check from the state wasn't enough. I really want to go back to school, but I don't know how. I don't want my GED because I want a diploma. I just don't think that it is possible to pay my bills and be in school. I guess if I stayed in school, I could get money from the state until I was twenty or something, but I just can't afford everything on that check. I have my car payment, insurance, phone, clothes, gas, credit card, groceries, and the utility bill. I hate to have to pay all of this. I hate that I dropped out of school. I really want to go to college."

Jill was always an A student in school. She had set very high goals for herself and presented herself as a very mature young lady. She was in sports and had a lot of friends. It seemed before she entered independent living she was motivated enough to do well on her own. Jill's new caseworker "Gretchen" was instantly fond of her,

"I really like Jill. She is probably one of my favorites on my caseload. She's neat girl and has overcome much even with all that was against her. She was approved for Independent Living because she had done so well in school despite her many moves. She is very bright and motivated and actually she is quite well adjusted for all that she has been through. I was really disappointed when Jill dropped out of school. It was as if when she first moved in with "Phil" and "Becky" that she went through a depression and this just brought her down in school. She was able to call into school for herself and was responsible for doing everything on her own. Phil and Becky supported her whenever they could but Jill had a hard time letting them into her life."

Phil and Becky were hesitant at first about having Jill move in with them. They wanted to help but were not sure what their role should be. Becky recalls,

"Jill is a really neat young lady. She is very intelligent and has gone through so much. We told her when she moved in that she could choose to be a part of our family if she wanted, but there certainly was no pressure to be involved. Initially she would eat dinner with us, but then she started to get more and more involved with work. We became very concerned about her because she

stopped going to school, and she seemed so down. We tried to help but whenever Jill would talk with us, she would push away. It was as if she were doing a dance with us. We move forward, and she would move back. Then we would move back, and she would move forward. It was very difficult to know what to do for her. I sometimes wonder if the freedom to make her own decisions was too much. She is a very independent person and presents herself as mature, but what 17/ 18 year old doesn't love the freedom of no curfew and being able to call in sick to school. It also seemed like she was struggling with her past issues and what that meant in her life. The pain was evident, but it was as if she admitted to having it, she would be admitting that she was weak or needed help. That seemed to be too difficult for her."

At times Jill will reflect back and wish things had turned out differently for her.

"I don't know. Sometimes I wish I could just start over and be back where I was before this all started. I wish I could start with a new family to adopt me. I wish I could start back to when I moved to Phil and Becky's, and I could stay in school, and I could be going to college by now. It is tough you know. I have so many bills. I guess I never really expected any of this."

Trudy Festinger (1983) found the majority of youths in foster care worry about their future. Many of them had concerns about money and had felt they were not prepared for the outside world. Most of the out of home care systems do not prepare youths for self sufficiency. They assume the youths have had the advantage of growing up in a stable home where they learn the important life skills (Mallon, 1998; Scannapieco, Schagrin ad Scannapieco, 1995; Brickman, Dey, and CuthBert, 1991; Timberlake, Pasztor, Sheagran, Clarren and Lanmert, 1987; Beyer, 1986; Festiger, 1983). For youth in foster care, it is important not to assume anything. These youth are likely experiencing a developmental crisis when they enter independent living as this is likely to bring up a lot of feeling regarding their past and their earlier losses (Timberlake, et.al., 1987). For these youth, independent living presents obstacles due to the

youths not coming to terms with their past, having a low self esteem, lacking strong relationships, having identity problems, and not having mastery over their feelings (Beyer, 1986). They have to face challenges that children who have grown up in a permanent setting do not face (Scannapieco, et. al., 1995) Many of the youth suffer from depression and feel very discouraged (Beyer, 1986). It is important for youths to have connections before they leave care because even with this and with other services, youths find the transition to be very harsh (McMillen, Fideout Fisher, and Tucker, 1997).

Jill experienced a large setback when she entered independent living. She experienced feelings of depression and dropped out of school before completing her junior year. Jill still looks back and struggles with many things that have happened in her past. She is confused and continues to have fantasies about how it could have been different. Yet Jill refuses to seek out treatment to help her work through some of the issues that she faces. It is probable that she will continue to struggle until she does come to terms with her past. Becky, whom Jill had rented a room from, remarks,

"Jill chose to move out after residing with us for ten months. She felt she was ready to be on her own. She has been gone for approximately three months but maintains contact with us every week. She still has to move the majority of her belongings out. Her caseworker feels that perhaps I am Jill's base, or connection, something for her to come back to when she needs it. We try to do what we can to help her out."

Chapter VIII

Reflections and Recommendations

Looking Back

“Sometimes, I think back and I don’t believe everything that happened. I mean, my mom did some really bad stuff, but I think I lied to get attention. Plus they just took us away and didn’t do anything to try and help my mom. My mom did not deserve to get all of the jail time that she got. She learned from her mistakes. They should have tried harder to keep us together. They should have bought my mom a house, made Karen move out, and put her in counseling. They should have done more to keep us together. I think they should have done more to keep me with my sisters too. I only see them about once a year now. I am still confused about what happened, and I think I should have been told. I hated foster care. There was nothing good about it at all. All they [foster parents] did was take care of you. They never met any of your emotional needs, just your physical. They are different than your parents. They really don’t want anything to do with you. I think I should have been able to go back to my house and get my stuff, and I think I should have been able to see my mom and sisters more. I don’t think they should have forced me to do things I didn’t want to do like counseling. That only made me not want to go. I don’t know. I should not have been treated any differently than anyone else just because I was a foster kid. That was so stupid and made me mad. I just wish things had been different, but I was never really happy because I choose not to be.”

Recommendations for the foster care system from Jill

“I know a lot from being in foster care, and I would say to kids who are in it now, ‘Good luck’. I mean it is tough and I don’t wish it on anyone. I guess I would change a lot of things because I think it needs to be changed.”

Jill created the following list of recommendations for improving the foster care system:

-“Try to keep families together first. Make the parents go to counseling. Do what ever you have to do to keep families together.”

- "If kids go into foster care, keep the children [siblings] together no matter what."
- "If families are not together make sure they visit a lot."
- "Make sure you know the foster parents really well before you put a kid there so you know all of these problems and stuff and you can know if it is a good place or not. Plus make sure they [foster parents] have dealt with their problems like anger and stuff."
- "Give parents a chance to change, give them counseling, and other stuff that will help them."
- "Never assume a kid is bad because he is a foster kid. Get to know them first and treat them like everybody else."
- "Kids need to know what is going on in their lives so tell them about their case."
- "Don't take notes in front of the kids. It is rude, and it bothers them."
- "Foster parents need to have clear and fair rules and make sure the kids know what they are right away."
- "Caseworkers and foster parents should only talk if the kid is there too so that the kid knows what is going on and then the foster parent can't lie about what the caseworker said."
- "Counseling should be offered to kids and not forced. The kids aren't the ones who did anything bad."
- "Foster parents should not show favorites, and if they have their own children maybe they should wait to do foster care because foster parents treat their own children differently and that is bad."
- "There should be groups for kids in foster care to meet other kids in foster care like a support group or something for them."
- "Foster parents should have to go to get a lot of training, and they should have to go to support groups so they can know how to work better with foster kids and so they can understand more what is going on with them."

- "Most importantly, just because you are in a foster home, it does not make you any different than anybody else. It doesn't make you better or worse. It just make you the same."

Chapter IX

Discussion - My Voice

I have been a foster care and adoption caseworker for the past three years with a private non-profit agency. This has been my first social work job following an experience working with the school system as a case aide. In addition to working in foster care I have had a brief interlude in working in a prevention program that matched mentors with families who are at risk for child abuse and/or neglect. I am a twenty five year old female. For as long as I can remember it has been my passion to work with children. In particular I am drawn to working with children who have been abused or neglected. I would much prefer that children no longer be abused so there would be no social work jobs in child welfare. However children are being abused and have been abused throughout history.

When I first began working in foster care, I was astounded by the length of time children were spending in care and the number of moves they were experiencing. It was my feeling that these children who had experienced trauma within their birth family were now experiencing it within the system. These children were floating from home to home and school to school without establishing any healthy attachments. They could not take the time to trust their foster parents because if they did something bad would happen or they would move away. I became particularly concerned with the older children who have nowhere to go following being emancipated from the system. These children could not go back to their birth family and had no healthy attachments with foster parents.

It was soon after I started in foster care that I learned about Jill from a

colleague of mine. I found her story to be intriguing. Here was a young lady who had experienced unimaginable abuse in her birth home and then in her adoptive home. She then experienced multiple moves within the foster care system. Despite all of this, I was told that Jill presented herself as a typical adolescent. She was boy crazy, tested her independence, was involved in sports, and had set goals for herself. I was interested in hearing her story in her words as I felt that Jill would have a lot to offer to social workers and other working with abused and neglected children. It was not my expectation to be so impacted by Jill's story.

As I began to get further into this project through interviews and reviewing case records, I learned about the horror that Jill experienced. I began to feel overwhelmed and disgusted with human beings. I don't understand how people can be so cruel to their children. It just doesn't make sense to me. We as human beings are the most advanced creatures on the earth, yet we treat our children worse than we treat our dogs. I am aware I do not know a quarter of what Jill has experienced. She likely withheld a lot of emotion and other very personal thoughts and experiences from me. It is fair for me to guess she may not have trusted me either, thus did not paint the whole picture. It is because of this that I am so disgusted. As I think about the horror of her abuse and then re-abuse that I am aware of I cannot hold back my tears. It is even harder when I hear her say she wishes she could start over with a new adoptive family. What kind of cruel joke was this? Why do children have to suffer at the hands of adults? I feel so much heaviness, and almost a sense of powerlessness from hearing Jill's story. This has made it very difficult for me to complete this project. This vicarious experience that I have had with Jill and the others that I have interviewed is likely to have impacted how I perceive Jill and the discussion that

will follow. Lincoln and Guba (1985), state that "inquiry cannot be value-free" (p.174). So my personal values, even in the reporting of the data have had an impact on this project.

The worst part of this vicarious experience for me is that Jill's story is not unique. Not only did the five other children who once lived with Jill experience this, but there are countless children who are being abused and neglected as I write these words. Every year approximately three million reports are referred to child protective services. Of these, one million become confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect (American Humane Association, 1999). Two thirds of the reports go unsubstantiated. Yet, an unsubstantiated report does not mean there was no abuse. It only means there was insufficient evidence to prove abuse or neglect occurred. These children remain in the home with no intervention. Occasionally the protective services agencies will open a prevention case and formal services are implemented such as outreach counseling, parent aide services, and/or other related intervention. Yet many other children remain unprotected and without services.

Jill's family had several complaints filed in a variety of states. The children remained loyal to their parents by sticking to the explanations of "accidental injuries" that their parents had given them. It seems peculiar with the number of complaints filed and moves made that the children had not been removed earlier. It was not until the girls were interviewed separately that explanations were different. Perhaps it should not be the norm that sibling groups be interviewed together. It surprises me it took so long for the girls to be interviewed without each other present. It is logical to assume that when family members are present in the room, family loyalty would be much higher. There would be pressure to conform to the dysfunction that was placed on the family

due to negative consequences that would follow the disloyalty. Disclosing personal information that jeopardizes the family would create blame and guilt for the person disclosing. In addition to this pressure and the guilt, the family members are likely to recant the information disclosed in order to maintain the family loyalty. Jill and her siblings were very loyal to the family. There was a lot of pressure not to tell what had happened and even more pressure to recant. I cannot fathom what this must be like for a child to carry. This must be very confusing and frightening. In addition to this, once a disclosure is made, a social worker comes and pulls them from their familiar environment to an unknown place. Jill did not know things were not right in her family. She didn't think she needed to be "rescued" from her abusive mother because in her eyes, her mother was fine. I can only imagine the children had to feel both a responsibility for their removal and a tremendous amount of guilt. I wonder if they thought to themselves, "mommy was right, I shouldn't have told because they do bad things to us". Jill did not see being removed as a positive thing. She wanted her family to be preserved with whatever means they had such as buying her mother a house.

Following their removal Jill was placed in a foster home that was inappropriate. To become a foster parent, a foster home licenser must do a home study of the home. This consists of having three references, having a clear protective services record, having no criminal record, being in good physical condition, meeting the guidelines for bedroom size and water, having an interview with the licenser, and filling out paper work. In addition to this, foster parents are required to have several hours in training every year to be a foster parent. In my experience it tends to be the foster mother who does the majority of paper work and does the training hours which can consists of

reading books, watching movies, and attending seminars. The training must have some relevance to parenting and children in order to qualify. The foster father is often in the background as he generally works outside of the home. It is the foster mother who is the primary care provider. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be a sufficient means to screen and train foster parents, especially with the lack of participation of the foster father.

Although abuse cannot be predicted, perhaps there are more ways to prevent it. Jill's foster parents never went through psychological evaluations nor did they receive training in working with sexualized children. It can only be hypothesized that with this, the placement may not have occurred. At least it may have given workers more of an indication of how Jill's foster/ adoptive parents could handle stressful situations. This however will never be known.

In addition to the inappropriate placement, Jill was separated from her siblings who were her last connection to her past. Jill recalls fearing that she would be the next to go. It is clear why Jill was separated from her sisters as there was physical aggression and sexual acting out between them. However, their lack of contact following separation is troubling. Joint counseling and regular visits with the siblings were not considered and utilized in order to reassess the possibility of them being placed together in the future. Jill has obviously been troubled by this. Although she maintains she is close to her sisters, she only spends time with them once a year. Further she feels they should not have been separated. Her understanding is they were bad, thus had to be removed. Placement with siblings is now given priority when selecting foster homes for children. Documentation must be provided as to why siblings are separated and a plan to continue the relationship must be in place. It has been my experience that even with this priority it is relatively easy to justify

separating siblings. Additionally minimal contact occurs to maintain the relationship, particularly with younger children.

Jill is still confused about her past and what has happened to her family. She never was told about the services her mother received. The removal of her siblings is unclear to her, and she still feels a tremendous amount of guilt regarding her situation.

It is my feeling social workers try to protect children from information pertaining to their case. It is often felt these children have made too many adult-like decisions in their lives and they deserve to be children. As a result, children are sheltered from what the social worker determines to be adult-like information. Children need to know what is occurring, not only for their own security but also so they understand the decisions made by the court. Social workers must protect children from information that could be potentially damaging to them. Yet it is clear information that is withheld can also be damaging. A social worker must be honest with children, while protecting them at the same time. Jill needs to have this information in order to come to terms with her reunification fantasies. Jill would likely continue to defend her mother but would also see efforts were made to assist her. It is difficult for me to know whether Jill is in denial about what she knew or if she truly has no knowledge. I struggle with having the detailed information about her case and the services offered to her mother. I don't know if it would hurt her or help her to have this information so long after it occurred. I was told by one of Jill's caseworkers that upon her discharge from foster care, Jill can write to an office in the state capital and request to review her file. Perhaps doing this would provide the answers to her questions. Although obtaining this information could also harm her emotionally.

Another concern to me is the multiple moves Jill experienced following the disruption of her adoption. It appears Jill was mismatched with foster parents on several occasions. It is difficult to know what children will do best in a particular home especially because there are often several factors to be considered in placing a child. These factors are often not considered because removals are often done in emergency or short time lapses between the request to remove and the actual removal. Foster parents agree to having a foster child in their home only from a verbal conversation with the caseworker. Moving children adds to the child's view that life is temporary. They are left with no permanent attachments and have a fear of attaching in the future.

Another factor that contributes to this fear of attaching is the high turn over rate from casework positions. Jill has had six different case workers and three different therapists. The multiple moves and caseworkers in Jill's life have contributed to her way of relating to people. She finds it difficult to trust any one, and she is described as pulling away from people who get close to her. As a caseworker, I feel occasionally I am the only "stable" person in the child's life. I feel guilty when I have to move a child, as if I am in some way contributing to the abuse they have endured. I want to do what I can to support the placement and to prevent problems. I feel helpless when the child has to move. It is impossible to prevent all moves, but I do feel more should be done to alleviate many of them. I also feel guilty when a case is transferred off of my caseload. I worry I added to their fear of getting close to people. I wonder if they will be able to trust the next person. Transferring cases cannot always be alleviated nor can caseworkers moving to new employment. Yet this is a standard occurrence in foster care. This should be further explored.

Further, I found it particularly interesting that Jill perceived counseling as

a punishment. She felt if she had done something wrong, it would be okay for her to be in counseling. Yet because she had not done anything wrong she should not have been "forced" into it. This notion seemed foreign to me as I typically assume most children would want to talk about what had happened to them and their feelings surrounding it. Yet, clearly this is not always the case. Jill's mother was describes as being void of affect. Jill was likely brought up to mask her feelings. Thus traditional counseling would not be an effective way to help her as traditional counseling utilizes question and answering. Counseling was a punishment to Jill; a punishment for disclosing, a punishment for feeling, and a punishment for being an abused child. It is hard to say without having witnessed the sessions if it was the techniques and styles used that were faulty or if Jill is still not at a point in her life where she is ready to integrate her history into her life. Yet it is an important factor to consider further as it has implications for future practice.

Jill also struggles with being a foster child. Jill obviously felt stigmatized both by society and by her foster parents. Jill recalls being treated differently by others because of whom she was. It is almost as if Jill feels she is less than human because of being in foster care. Although Jill often had other foster siblings, it is as if she has the notion she was the only one with her circumstances. Her experience was definitely perceived as very negative as she cannot recall anything good about it. Jill wants to be like her other peers, she wants to be "normal", and foster care did not help her feel this way. Jill will likely struggle with this for a long time, as she is reminded daily she does not have a permanent family to which she can go home.

Finally, Jill presented herself as a very mature, independent young lady, but she struggled with being on her own. She found her check to be insufficient

to meet her financial needs and felt she had to work to pay the difference. The responsibility and freedom of being on her own seemed to be too much as she was allowed to call into school to excuse herself. This led to her dropping out of school which she now regrets.

Jill worries about her future a lot. She is unsure of where she is headed and if she will make it. Jill has no base or permanent attachment. She has no family to go home for Christmas or to help her with her own children. She has no family to help her when money gets tight. She is dependent on herself for her existence, and she has been left to survive on her own. I do not know too many 19 year olds that have an easy time being in that position. On my caseload I have several teenagers that believe, like Jill did, that independent living will be so great, and they are eager to move into it. It clearly is not easy and presents many difficult life obstacles.

Jill is having a difficult time adjusting. This is evident in her wishful thinking that she would like to go back and have things be different. However, she still refuses to seek help for this. I talked to Jill about going to counseling. We discussed how difficult it is for her to trust and how she is still confused about everything that has happened to her. Yet she shrugs this off by maintaining counseling is for "psychos and people who have done something wrong". It is a shame that Jill has been discharged now because clearly she was not ready and still needs the support the system can offer her.

When Jill entered foster care the services were very limited, there were few programs in place to help prevent placement and assist in reunification. Today there are many programs in place. There are intensive parent aide programs which consists of a social worker spending a portion of the week in the home of the at risk person, teaching them parenting skills, and home

management. There are multiple counseling services that are offered at free or reduced charges for families at risk. Permanent plans for children need to be considered as soon as possible and a permanency planning hearing is to occur no later than one year of entering foster care. Legislation to improve the independent living services is being introduced to congress. Stricter standards for training foster parents are being proposed. There are more opportunities to receive specialized training in working with special needs children for both foster parents and caseworkers. There are more programs that provide emergency and planned respite care to foster and adoptive parents. Additionally many states are implementing specialized programs, such as C.A.S.A. (Court Appointed Special Advocates), or Wrap Around, programs to work in helping families receive the resources they need. Although the majority of states have taken great strides at improving the child welfare system, change is still needed. It is hypothesized that even with the aforementioned improvements Jill experiences would still have been similar.

Chapter X

Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Practice

Based on the findings presented in this research there are several implications to draw for future social work practice at all levels of intervention. The implications are organized here in a way that facilitates the various levels of program and policy change: First, micro level change, or service delivery to the individual child; second, mezzo level change, or service delivery to foster children and foster parents as a group; third, macro level change, or policy implications; and fourth future research.

Micro level change:

Foster children deserve to be treated decently and fairly by all who work with them. This includes being sensitive to their needs and understanding the complex issues that each child faces. Caseworkers and foster parents should never assume that because a child is not asking questions or talking about their biological family that it is because they do not need to know. Children are often afraid to ask questions and struggle with loyalty between their foster families and adoptive families. They have reunification fantasies that stick with them well after their parent's rights have been terminated. Knowing information on how their parents are being helped will serve to help the child be involved in the process and give them a better understanding of why decisions are made. Social workers should have to provide justification as to why they would withhold information from a child.

Further, workers need to be aware of the impact that moving has on children. Jill did not say good bye to any of her friends or teachers. These

people were important to her. Children need to have closure and an opportunity to mourn losses. In removing a child, either from the biological home or a foster home, his/her feelings need to be taken into account. Caseworkers and foster parents must be aware of the importance that family has to the foster child. Connections are extremely important even if they are not perceived as healthy. Honoring the connection and attachment will only serve to show the foster child that they are important. This will also serve as a vehicle to demonstrate and model healthy relationships. Separating siblings should be avoided whenever possible. If it is necessary, steps should be put in place to maintain the relationships and possibly reunify them.

Caseworkers and foster parents should also consider how a child feels in regards to the professionals that are helping them. Although some may see it as an inconvenience, perhaps notes should not be taken in front of the child. Many children report note taking as being intrusive. This should be thoughtfully considered. An alternative would be to discuss the note taking with the child and involve them in the process. Particularly with older children in foster care, discussions should involve them as an active participant to help reduce misunderstandings between the foster parents and child.

Caseworkers and foster parents need to do everything they can to treat foster children with dignity like everybody else in their family. Foster children already face the stigma from the larger society. They do not need to feel it from their individual families and workers. Social worker need to work to alleviate this stigma.

Finally, therapist should seek out alternative ways of working with children who are in foster care so counseling can be seen as beneficial and positive. Implementing support groups for children in foster care, utilizing play

or expressive therapy, and other motivational rapport building techniques are all suggested.

Mezzo level change:

Placing agencies should re - evaluate their matching process.

Thoughtful consideration should be made for each placement whenever possible. Children, particularly teens, should be involved in the decision to move. Whenever possible, children should have the opportunity to visit with perspective families prior to the decision to move there. Foster families in general should go over expectations and requirements with a child prior to the child moving into their home. This will help to alleviate conflict in the future.

Placing agencies must monitor more closely the training needs of their foster parents. They should provide adequate materials and education surrounding the individual circumstances of the child. There should be ongoing education and support groups where the foster parents can support and learn from each other. Both parents in the foster family should be required to participate in the training and the application process. Careful consideration should be given to the ethical problems of placing a special needs child into an undertrained or mismatched family.

Finally, placing agencies should also consider the effects that caseworker turnover and transfer has on children. Caseworkers should have lower caseloads and adequate supervision. This would ease the burnout rates and allow caseworkers to spend more time with their children. Lower caseloads will also provide more support to the foster family thus decreasing the possibility of removal. Further, placing agencies should use caution when transferring cases to other caseworkers. Transfers should only occur when

absolutely necessary. Many of Jill's caseworkers are still employed as foster care caseworkers. It is interesting to think of the relationship she could have had with just one caseworker over the number of years if she had not been shuffled around so much.

Macro level change:

Stricter standards for screening foster parents should be put into place, including having psychological evaluations done for each foster parent. A standard training curriculum should be implemented requiring all foster parents in the home to attend and participate in prior to becoming a licensed foster home. Topics included should be: the dynamics of abuse and neglect, the importance of the biological family, reunification process; communication, stress and anger management, positive discipline, managing problem behaviors, community resources, attachment theory, interfacing with child welfare workers, working with the court system, child development, childhood trauma, and other relevant topics. Legislations should be put into place that would provide the standard and the funding for screening and training foster parents thoroughly.

Foster parents should be reimbursed at a higher rate. This will allow for agencies to be more selective in their screening as foster parenting will become more of a professional job.

Child protective services needs to be closely evaluated. A registry should be created for the nation so protective services workers can have access to complaints from all states. This registry should contain information on all parents and children who have had complaints filed against them. Thus it will be easier to track families who relocate when complaints are filed. Federal legislation should be created to make this possible and to allocate funding for

states to have this system. Checking a families protective services history should be similar to checking an individuals criminal history.

More money should be implemented to provide programs with more intensive prevention services. These services should be based on the home based services that are already in place, such as the parent aide and counseling services. The prevention services that currently exist should be expanded and available to more families. It should be policy that all families that have a suspicious complaint filed against them should be eligible for these services.

A child who has a goal of long term foster care, there should be a comprehensive training program that assists them in their emancipation/ discharge. This program should begin before the child turns 16 and should focus on skills needed to live independently. Legislation should be in place to provide financial incentives to youth for staying in foster care longer, for continuing in school, and for saving money. The amount of money given to youth in independent living should be comparable to the basic costs of living. Youth who continue their education should be eligible for a higher amount of money, in order to compensate them for staying in school. Further, there must be a third transition following independent living. Youth should not be cut off from their check in one sum. Rather it should gradually be lowered to ensure a smooth transition. Throughout their time in independent living, youth should receive ongoing support from a caseworker and/ or counselor to help them with the transition. Legislation must be implemented to reflect this.

Finally, in order for the aforementioned implications of the three levels to occur, change must begin with policy. Change will not occur unless there is a change in the way society thinks and operates. New legislation will serve to

reshape our Child Welfare system and improve the quality of services provided to families.

Future Research:

Further research should occur in the aforementioned areas to support the recommended changes. More individual cases of children who have spent considerable amount of time in foster care should be looked at in a similar manner and then compared.

Finally, research should occur exploring the influence a vicarious experience has on the researcher. It is highly unlikely that a researcher will not be impacted by a story such as Jill's, and this is likely to have an influence on how data is interpreted and even presented.

Conclusion

Although child welfare programs are certainly not perfect, they have come a long ways from where they had been in the early 1900's. Improvements are being made yearly. Policy makers are becoming more aware of the issues that children face. The implications and recommendations in this research are based on the experience of a young lady who lived within the child welfare system for eleven years. It is impossible to generalize her experience to the entire population, but one can transfer it to other cases and situations.

Finally, despite what some may think, Jill's story is a success story. Yes, there was a lot of unimaginable tragedy and heartache involved, but Jill is alive today. Jill is here to tell her story and give us knowledge to improve things for children who are going through similar circumstances. Jill is a very thoughtful human being who cares deeply about children to whom she has shared a

similar path. Jill has finally told her story and has felt empowered to help make a difference in the lives of others in foster care. It is our turn to listen.

So have I told you anything that you wanted to know?
Have I helped you understand
how we feel - all of us kids who fell into the world of
foster care and adoption?
I know it is a burden for you to think so
carefully about me,
and I know you might get a little nervous to realize
that I am watching,
and affected by all that you do.
But you won't be sorry if you take me seriously.
Someday, see, I will be a Big People.
Give that a thought (Trout, 1997, p. 12).

Attachment A
Interview Guide - Jill

Attachment A

Interview Guide - Jill

Describe to me who you are. What made you the way you are today?

What do you think was the best thing about being fostered?

What do you think was the worst thing about being fostered?

What is your understanding of why you entered foster care?

How did you feel when you were first told you would be entering foster care? Describe what happened during this time. Where you told? Where did your siblings go? Did you have to switch school? etc.

Do you feel that you should have entered foster care or should something else been done?

What is your first memory of entering foster care?

How many homes have you lived in? Describe the positive and negative aspects of each.

How did it feel when you first entered a home? What was the easiest/ hardest part of the moves?

How did you get along with other people in the home? What about other foster children?

What is the most difficult part of living in someone's home?

Did you have to switch schools ever? How was that transition for you? How do you feel about school? Where do you stand with your education now?

What about friends and dating? Have you been able to maintain friend ships over the years? What has dating been like?

Is it relatively easy for you to trust people or do you have a difficult time with trust?

What is it like to be a parent to you?

Do you maintain contact with any of your foster families?

Have you maintained contact with your biological family? What does that consist of?

What do you remember about your biological family?

How many caseworkers have you had? What was the best/worst thing about them?

What do you wish your caseworker had done for you?

Is there anything you wish your caseworkers would not have done?

How many counselors have you had? What was the best/worst thing about them?

Did you find counseling beneficial?

What worked best for you in counseling?

How could your counselor have best worked with you?

What advice would you give your foster parents? case workers? counselors? other foster children?

How is it going in independent living?

Do you feel like you are getting the support that you need?

Do you feel like anything should be handled differently?

If you were the one to make all of the decisions in your case what would they be?

Do you feel like you've be prepared to be out on your own?

what are your plans for the future?

What would you change about the foster care system? What would you keep the same?

What do you want other's reading this research to know about you? How could they best understand you?

What should be done about child abuse? Do you think we are too harsh or too lenient on families who abuse their children?

Attachment B
Interview Guide - Foster parents, Caseworkers, therapists

Attachment B**Interview Guide - foster parents, caseworker, therapists****All**

What was your involvement in Jill's life?

What was your first impression of Jill when you met her?

How would you describe Jill? Her personality? her affect? work/school habits? dating habits?

what were the positive/ negative aspects of Jill?

Did you agree with the case plan?

What do you feel are Jill's strengths/ weaknesses?

Describe your relationship with Jill?

What are some concerns you have about Jill?

What was your prognosis for Jill?

Do you think that Jill has the ability to be successful in independent living?

Why do you think Jill had so many moves?

What is your wish for Jill?

Foster parents

How many children have you had in your home? How many years have you been providing foster care services?

Do you think that foster parents receive enough support? What recommendations do you have?

How long did Jill reside in your home?

What was it like to live with Jill?

Did you feel that Jill was a good match with your family?

Was Jill more similar to children you've had in your home or dissimilar? In what

way?

Do you feel that you were supportive of Jill? In what way?

What was it like to parent Jill? Was she a difficult child to parent or easy?

How responsive was Jill to you?

Did Jill integrate into your family?

How did she get along with other children in the home?

What is your understanding of why Jill left your home?

Did you feel supported by the caseworker, and the plan that was carried out?

What do you wish you had done differently?

Caseworker

How long was Jill on your caseload?

How often did you see her?

What was a typical home visit like?

How did you feel about the foster families Jill was placed with? Were they supportive of Jill? What did they do to make it easier for Jill to fit in?

What did you do to prevent Jill from having to move?

What was your case plan for Jill?

Did the court system consistently follow your recommendations or did they implement different decisions?

Did you work with her biological family? Describe them to me. Did they make any efforts towards reunification?

What did you do to help the family with reunification?

Why was Jill separated from her siblings?

Did you provide case management for them?

Where are her siblings today? Do you know how they are functioning?

Would you have done anything differently with the case plan?

Therapist

How long did you work with Jill? How often did you see her?

What were your treatment goals with her?

What treatment modality did you take? do you think that worked well for Jill?

What type of activities did you do with Jill?

Describe a typical session with Jill.

How did Jill do in therapy? Do you think she bonded well with you? Was she able to process issues that she was dealing with?

Did you ever give Jill a formal diagnosis? Did you ever have concerns in regards to Jill having a disorder?

Do you feel that you were successful with treatment and Jill?

How receptive was Jill to treatment?

What issues was Jill working on with you?

Would you do anything differently if you saw Jill again today?

What do you feel about Jill in independent living?

Did you agree with the case plan? What were your feelings about it?

Did you ever have any contact with her biological family? What were your impressions of that?

How did you feel about Jill's foster families? Were they good matches for her? Why do you think she moved so many times? Were her foster parents supportive of her?

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