

**FOSTER PARENTS SPEAK:
CROSSING BRIDGES AND FOSTERING CHANGE**

**Final Script
November 8, 2004**

1.	Voice over collage matches on-screen text	Music
2.		I have been a foster parent for close to ten years.
3.		We've had 80-some children through our house.
4.		We have ended up adopting two sibling sets.
5.		Foster parents and birth parents need to have a strong relationship that's as good as you can make it.
6.		When you take a child into your home, you're also taking in that family.
7.		Kid yourself not, it is a lot of work.
8.		It might be one child at a time, but you make that difference.
9.	FOSTER PARENTS SPEAK: CROSSING BRIDGES AND FOSTERING CHANGE	
10	Chapter 1 -- IT TAKES MORE THAN LOVE	
11		Beverly: You must be ready for this job, that is the first thing. It is a great challenge.
12		Chris: Being a parent I think is the toughest job in the world. And it takes everything.
13		Rose: It's the vision that I have to be able to, to supply a safe place for a child or be there for them when they need, when they have a need.

14	Tammy: Sometimes it's a long, hard road.
15	Thomasena: You've got to have a well made up mind to be willing to share your heart and your soul, your house, whatever you got, your beds, your cookies, the things that you used to say are "mine", now you have to say they're "ours".
16	Brenda: People always say to me, oh you must love children, and I kinda really hate to hear that because it takes more than love to care for children. They think love is just it. It's love, it's devotion, dedication, support, sacrifice.
17	Janet: When you decide to go into this, be wide open for whatever can happen, because there are going to be lots of experiences, good and bad. But in my experience, the good has always outweighed the negative.
18	Chapter 2 -- KEEPING KIDS CONNECTED
19	Beverly: We are fostering, helping, bridging a gap, helping to have these children go back home, that is our first job and if we can get that first then the other things will be easier.
20	Virginia: Of the seven children that we've fostered, two have gone home. So, obviously, they need not to be separated from their parents and then reunited, but they need to have a continuous, good relationship with their parents.
21	Renita: You just have to focus that foster means temporary, that their goal is to return home, to put yourself in their shoes, that no matter what happened in your life, you always want to go home. And, so you have to move yourself out of the way and do whatever it takes to make it happen.
22	Chris: That's their mom, you don't pick them, that's your dad, you don't pick him, but you want to go back with them and you love them.
23	Rose: I think a lot of it too, is involving the parent in every aspect of the child's life, you know, educationally. Umm, when it comes to their health, all the issues that the child

		would have with their parent at home, that parent should have the right to be involved with those same issues even when the child is outside of the home.
24		Brenda: Know from the beginning, that that relationship, that connection, of that child and their birth family or caregiver, wherever they are coming from, is important. And an effort should be made to make, keep that connection.
25		Ginny: And for the kids who are going on to be adopted, they also as you said, that they need to know that where they came from, was ok. That their birth parents were people who cared about them and who loved them.
26		Rose: When the child sees you working together for their best interest, it makes them more comfortable, it makes them feel more safe, and it gives them a healthier attitude about what's happening in their life.
27		Chapter 3 -- CROSSING BRIDGES
28		Tim: She was a foster kid and we just had her first birthday party, she's 40 can you believe it? She never had a birthday party her whole life, and all the kids were singing and she was crying. Chris: Foster care was different 40 years ago. A lot different.
29		Bob: In my foster parent training, and this was 1995, 1996, I don't believe there was any mention of any attempts at interaction with the biological family. We were just an entity, isolated in time, and not related to anything else in the child's life.
30		Kelly: Because I was new at fostering I wasn't really sure, you know, how to approach the relationship, and I really didn't have a lot of advice, I didn't, I wasn't encouraged to have a relationship with her. My instincts told me that it was best to have a relationship, a good one, with her.
31		Chris: We had, three foster-care children, they were siblings, and the first time I had to meet mom, dad was out of the picture I had to go to the prison which for me alone

		was an experience (laughs) and I bring the kids in to meet the mom and immediately I could tell the mom just didn't like me. So I was like, well, this is the first chance to work with foster care, it was our first kids so, well this isn't what they taught us in the classes, we gotta build a bond here.
32		Thomasena: I have to convince this lady that I'm not her enemy, I'm here to help her with her child.
33		Maggie: You've got to find a common ground and of course, this is a complete stranger, what is the common ground you have? It's the child.
34		Virginia: I can remember this mom was really angry, her kid had been taken, she was furious, she was suing everyone in the state. And she met me and she was ready to kill me. The first thing I said to her was..."What time does she usually go to bed?" And she looked at me as if I was crazy and then she started talking to me as a mom.
35		Thomasena: You have to talk with that person and let them know that I'm not here to come between you two, but I'm here to bridge this child back to you. I will put as many boards as I have to put on this bridge to make you understand that I'm not here to take your child.
36		Tammy: We had a birth parent that was doing absolutely excellent for 10 months who was just absolutely amazing and the child was going to be returned within a month, but then mom and dad regressed and had an incident and now the sibling came into care and I decided I'm going to take a negative situation and make it positive by calling up the mom and saying, you know, "I realize you guys have fallen, what can I do to help?"
37		Chris: Every week we sat the kids down on Saturday night and made them write a letter to their mom and they'd write letters and all of the sudden we started getting letters from mom, "thank you, you're in our prayers, you're doing wonderful," and she got out and did everything the county wanted her to do and she did very well, she got a beautiful apartment and everything, she got reunified the day before Thanksgiving with the kids. And two months after that we got an invitation to go to their birthday party.
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		Chapter 4 -- UNDERSTANDING BIRTH PARENTS
39		Virginia: When you think about birth parents, you think about the loss of control, I mean, suddenly someone has come into your house and taken away your child, or your children. And you are helpless, you can do nothing. And you, you can feel how angry and, and hopeless people feel.
40		Bob: At my one meeting with the parents they made it quite clear that, they considered me part of the evil empire, the DSS and myself, who had taken away their children and they were very hostile towards me.
41		Renita: It can be frightening starting a relationship with the birth parent, because of the abuse that have been inflicted on the children or the neglect or just their lifestyle of violence and disrespect, so it's very frightening.
42		Janet: I think you have to be prepared in this particular job to take chances, to give folks a chance to prove to you that I am not going to take advantage of you.
43		Kelly: You know, when you have a child, the one who has a zillion therapies, and the doctors say, well you know, he had a fractured skull twice before the age of two. It makes you angry and every time he's having a hard time or he can't talk and his friends are making fun of him and his little heart is broken, how can I not be angry? And it makes it difficult to take that phone call, you know, when he's crying, your heart's broken for him and then mom calls and says, "Oh, how are the kids". You know and then, I do, you know I don't, I, I don't say always what I want to say, but there are times when, honestly, I want to say, "Not good".
44		Chris: As hard as it is, you gotta give mom and dad that second chance. You gotta, everybody has a second chance.
45		Maggie: The child would come into the house, you'd hear the story of this horrific situation, this child's life, and the parent is the bad guy. And not necessarily is the parent the bad guy, the parent sometimes is just as needy as that child is.
46		Virginia: I had one mom who was out of control all the time with her kid. Screaming at her kid and screaming at

		everybody, and then she said to me, I hear myself talk and I don't want to say those things. I don't want to sound like that, but I can't help it.
47		Brenda: A lot of times the birth families don't have a lot of supports, so when that husband loses the job and now they have lost their apartment, it's just a trickle effect of things, a domino effect is happening. Everyone has a breaking point I say, and I truly believe that. Its just a matter of how much is put on and at what time and what supports you have, just how far you can bend before you break. And I think having that frame of mind is really good, this way I am not judging the parents.
48		Beverly: A lot of foster parents have a mindset about the birth parents, they dislike the birth parents because you did this to this child. You are bad people. And we have to start before, not judging them.
49		Virginia: When you meet the birth parents, if you can let go of these preconceived notions and you just see them as parents who do care about their kids and I've never met a birth parent who didn't care about their kids.
50		Thomasena: We must remember mothers and fathers love their children, regardless to whether they are cocaine dependent or chemical dependant, mental health issues or whatever the cause for them to break up in life. Whether they couldn't hold their families together, they love their children.
51		Chapter 5 -- VISITS ARE HARD
52		Virginia: Visits are hard for the kids and they're really hard for the parents. And the kid senses it. At goodbye time it's so hard, sometimes you have to peel the kid off of the parent's neck and drag them away physically.
53		Maggie: I have one child. And I adore this child. But after a visit, he would be so distraught that it would take me an hour and a half to get home. He would be flipping himself over the seat, pounding his head against the wall, trying to rip the steering wheel away from me.
54		Virginia: The last little girl we had would cry for about forty

		minutes after a visit. Just sitting and crying, not raging and not angry, just sadness, just tears. And I couldn't, she didn't want me to hold her, she didn't want anything, she wanted to be alone, and she'd just cry.
55		Tammy: We started doing visitation in our home for our child's sake, you say you love these children; you have to show them that, you know, you're willing to do something that might make you uncomfortable.
56		Chris: We've done visitations at the county building supervised and we've supervised in our home, and what I find is the kids are more relaxed if they're at the home environment, plus they also see that if my mom and dad are coming to the home obviously they've got to be comfortable with the people they're working with. So it shows that we are, that we're working together.
57		Brenda: In some cases it is not going to work, because that person may be violent, they be hostile, they may be very angry, and you have to wait, you know, to kind of, gradually go into it. It is not just something you can jump right into and say, "Hi, I am that foster parent, come on over". But always have that in your mind that it needs to be done.
58		Renita: Well, we're much more comfortable now, you know, that we've done it, but in the beginning my husband is thinking "whoa, this mother is an addict, and are they gonna come back and steal, are they casing the joint while they're here?"
59		Beverly: It is touchy but you have to be open and do this slowly, it takes time. So by meeting outside first, then gradually, you know, calling on the phone, I would say, in a gradual thing, to build that trust, and then you bring them into the home.
60		Chris: When we used to take them to McDonalds or the county or something like that, the kids are anxious all the way up, they're worried about if I do this or say this how are my- when mom just shows up at the house it's they're just normal. They're doing their thing, their playing, and mom seems more relaxed with us and it doesn't feel like, if it's supervised, it doesn't feel supervised if they're in our home.
61		Renita: I just open the door, I welcome them, and then I

		ask them, well of course I find out in advance if it's supervised or unsupervised, can the children be alone with the parent. If they say that the child can be alone, I tell them, you know, you're welcome here, I'm gonna step into the kitchen and start cooking, or I have some ironing, or just something to let 'em know that I'm right over here, you know, I can hear, but I'm not right in, you know, your business.
62		Chapter 6 -- FINDING SUPPORT
63		Beverly: People ask me, "How can you do this, how?" I say "I couldn't do it by myself."
64		Thomasena: You develop a good relationship with your caseworker. It's very important. We both supposed to be about the child's life, we're not supposed to be about our personal lives, we supposed to be about the children. So therefore you must develop a relationship so you can talk to that person about that child, and they talk to you.
65		Kelly: And I remember calling a caseworker, I was like, this kid, I mean, he was four. And he punched holes in the sheet rock. And he was out of control. I didn't know what to do. It was like, I need some help.
66		Chris: One of the caseworkers came to the house and explained to me about the foster care association and she said "get involved", she said you get involved with the foster care association and when you need help, they'll be there to help and they will educate you too, and we made the phone call...and we've been going strong... Tim: And we've been involved and now it's reached another plateau, you're helping all kinds of people, not only are you learning things...
67		Rose: And I echo, you know, getting involved with a foster parent association group, there's a lot of support there a lot of encouragement and a lot of education, somebody to come along side of you, somebody to give you advice.
68		Chris: So now we feel we got the support behind us and we make a decision, we don't feel like it's just us and the caseworker, we're being informed.

69		Beverly: It's a lot to carry being a foster parent, you have a lot of issues to deal with and you need a break. So at times we, there's respite, we need to call up on our resources to have this support in order for us to be effective.
70		Chapter 7 -- GOING HOME
71		Renita: When my foster children are about to return home I give them a letter, and the letter talks about how they blessed my life while they were with us. And also, we talk about all the changes that they've made, and how we're so excited to see how their mother's life is going to be better because they're more mature, more responsible, reliable, dependable. It's a letter, it's written I in a way that they can show it to their parents, so that they feel proud.
72		Rose: Our first baby that was brought into our home. We had him for almost two years and we had two of his other siblings. And when it was time for them to go home the mom knew that I loved, had grown to love the other brother and sister but this baby had been in a way with me from birth 'til almost two years old so he was part of my husbands and my life in a real deep way, it was so hard to give this baby up.
73		Beverly: When children leave our homes we go through such losses and we have to mourn and to grieve that. And a lot of times as foster parents it is very difficult because every time a child comes and goes we have to go through that loss, that cycle. And even for the child that left the home. For me, my child, when I had my kids for six or seven years and they went back home, it was a great loss for them, for me and for my daughter who grew up with them.
74		Janet: The child that has gone home, I have remained available to be a babysitter, to take the child over weekends, because I feel that the relationship that this child and I established back when she was in my home is still important today. It didn't end when she left my home.
75		Bob : And I am extremely grateful to his adoptive family that they have not only permitted but they have encouraged his staying in contact with me.

76		Ginny: Every time we had a new foster child I'd say to my husband, "Now be nice to the birth parents because we want the kid to visit after they go home". And we have had, all our foster kids still come to visit.
77		Chapter 8 -- ONE LIFE AT A TIME
78		Janet: I've got grandkids I never thought I'd have. I have children I never thought I'd have, and for me its been a wonderful experience, and I appreciate the fact that I've had the privilege of being a mom to a lot of kids.
79		Rose: When she came home I said if it were just for you, you know, these 18 years we've been in care and the things we've seen and the things we've had to go through, it's not always been enjoyable and there were many nights we stayed awake and there were many times when we were in fear you know, for your lives, but if it were just to see this little four year old grow into this beautiful bride, it was well worth it.
80		Tammy: It was worth every heartache that we had gone through to know she's actually going home and I really feel it's going to be successful and that, you know, there's a good chance she won't come back into the system because people are trying to do what's best and they were putting her feelings first.
81		Brenda: You know what, I often wondered, would I do it again? Yeah I would do it again. If this was the outcome I would do it again. I would go through the suffering I would go through the late nights, I would go through the aggravation, I would do it again.
82		Thomasena: If you hang in there with the kids, you will get your joy, because there are times in their life you'll just see them and you'll be so, you just, its like a healing that you never had before when you see the kids.
83		Chris: I don't think I'd be sitting here today if it wasn't for people like this, that made a difference in my life to bring me here today. So I know what we're doing works.
84		Beverly: We can't change the world, but we do our best

		one life at a time.
85		Cast Photos
86		Production Credits
87		For More Information Screen