

“The kids give us life.”



For nearly four decades, Jim and Terry shared a bond that transcended friendship, seamlessly transitioning from dance floor partners to life partners. Leading and performing Victorian and Ragtime dance for many years while each pursued other relationships.

Their journey took an unexpected turn when divorce separated them from their spouses. Undeterred, they embraced a new chapter as a married couple and licensed foster parents.

With a blended family of four grown children and grandchildren, Jim and Terry stepped back into parenthood. With open hearts and a shared resolve to make a difference in the lives of children in need, they have provided respite care and foster care to children from birth to three years old for the past three years. They have provided care for more than twenty children, some for as short as two days and others for up to five months.

Now both retired, Jim recalls years of long work hours and regrets missing many of his daughters' milestones. Terry, who spent many years as a nanny, explained that caring for children gives her life a greater purpose, adding, “I think I would die if I didn't have children to care for.”



Licensed during COVID-19, Jim and Terry started to care for foster children because they wanted to do good and give back. They wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. The couple spends their days together at playgrounds and beaches, participating in story time at the local library and taking long walks while raising foster children in a safe and loving environment. “This journey has never been easy, but very few things in our lives that have made our lives better have been easy.” Jim stated.

Jim and Terry believe advocating for children is crucial to their roles. They exchange a knowing glance as they recall their experiences as outspoken advocates for a child in their care. They had been fostering a child on the autism spectrum and drawing from their experience with a grandchild who also has autism. They researched effective parenting practices and activities for non-verbal children. Their efforts significantly improved the child's verbal and social communication skills, and the foster child and their grandson became close friends.



They were truly making a positive impact. However, they faced disappointment and frustration when the department proposed moving the child with professional therapists experienced in autism care. Concerned that this change might hinder the child's progress, Jim and Terry objected. Their advocacy efforts paid off, and they were allowed to keep the child in their care until he could be reunited with a relative.

“They are fierce advocates for the children they care for,” explained Samantha Heltke, Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAP) Liaison, adding, “They are active in support groups, DCF and CAFAP events and, are part of the Quality Parenting Initiative Steering Committee in Region 2. They truly exemplify what partnership looks like and if I could replicate them for our children and families, I would!”

Visibly emotional, Terry expressed feeling selfish sometimes when the children leave, yet fostering at 79 years old is undeniably selfless. While many retired couples are traveling and focusing on self-care, Jim and Terry are members of the Quality Parenting Initiative Team, understanding the importance of birth-family engagement and establishing relationships with them.



Jim eagerly searched for a “life book” that he made for one of their foster children. It was a small keepsake book with pictures that captured many beautiful memories. Jim planned to share it with the boy's father.

With an emphasis on the couple's commitment to providing detailed, consistent, and thoughtful care for the foster children, they are enhancing the support system surrounding each child they care for. “The most important thing about the family is their attention to detail. For every child they have fostered, they have written updates about the child's progress and sent pictures to the Ongoing Social Workers to capture special moments,” explained Kim Sperry, Foster Care Division Support Worker.

Jim and Terry are also foster parent recruiters, eagerly sharing literature with community members interested in learning more about what fostering entails. This couple had such love in their eyes as they gazed at their foster baby, who sat quietly on Jim's lap for most of the visit. “This is a life value; we are giving back,” Jim said, while Terry tenderly remarked, “It's going to

be hard to let him go. We just love him so much, but his grandmother will be reunifying with him soon." she said.

The couple also have maintained relationships that benefited other children's stability and emotional security. They forged a good connection with a child's legal risk foster parents and helped with a smooth transition to his new home. "To this day, they continue to maintain contact with one of their foster children and his legal risk foster parents," explained Julie Dixon, CPS Social Worker.



"The kids give us life," Terry said with a laugh. "I remember once, at the diner on our way to church, a young man who had seen us come in with different kids over the years came over to chat. He couldn't fathom how we managed everything and grumbled about his aches and pains. As he walked away, I whispered to Jim, 'I hope I never act that old.'" They both laughed, their eyes shining with the affection and joy their foster kids bring into their lives.

Jim and Terry's retirement years are filled with giving and receiving love. Supported by their blended family and church congregation, they are on a mission to ensure that every child placed in their home gets the best possible start in life. Their days are a beautiful blend of laughter, care, and heartfelt moments dedicated to making a lasting difference in the lives of the children they foster.

"At this point in our lives, we cannot commit to raising a child long-term," Jim explained, "but we can make a difference in these kids' lives. We just want to help!" he added.

Jim and Terry redefine what it means to be senior citizens, showing that fostering children, shared love, patience, and a good sense of humor are vital ingredients in aging gracefully.