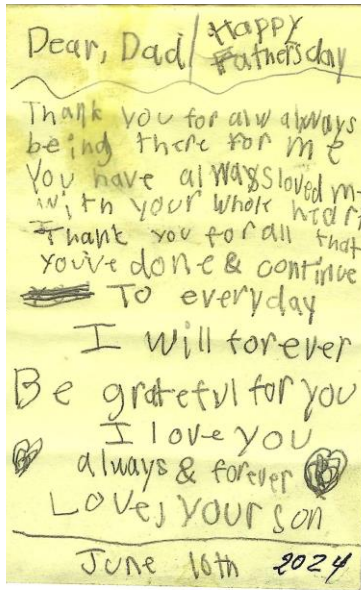


"I said I wish I could live with him sooner."



8-year-old Joshua crouched behind a dresser in his foster home and put a notch in the wood for each day he was separated from his family. He eventually stopped counting.

Joshua has experienced too much in his young life and now deserves to enjoy a childhood free from worry or trauma. He is exactly where he needs to be - home with his father - catching largemouth bass, having sleepovers and riding the Superman roller coaster at 6 Flags New England.

The road getting here was far, complicated and took years to figure out.

For almost four years, Theodore had no contact with his son. The impact of this statement is even worse when rephrased from the child's perspective to say Joshua had no contact with his father from ages 4-8 years. What was this little boy told and what did he

think about his father?

Theodore was convinced the mother was telling his son anything and everything to "brainwash" him into hating his father.

Theodore was prevented from contacting Joshua in any manner due to a bitter custody dispute which led to an ex-parte order suspending the parenting plan that included his visits, phone calls and any form of communication which went on for years. Theodore refers to this as "parental alienation" in its most harmful form.

"I tried to make a deal to make her happy, but it did not work,"

Theodore stated. He hired a lawyer, filed motions, proceedings were

interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Judge's directives were not followed.

Theodore never gave up on his son.

Theodore knew literally nothing about Joshua for almost four years, eventually first hearing concerns about his son's treatment from the father of Joshua's half-brother.

DCF eventually became involved and upon assessment, Joshua was determined to be unsafe, requiring removal from the home. At the time, Theodore was in Massachusetts, had not seen his son in years and had a long history of reports made by the mother that DCF needed to carefully sort through. Joshua was extremely scared to even meet

his father because of the stories he had been told about him.



"When Mr. Burrell found out that Joshua was in the care and custody of the Department, he immediately asked how he can get his son back. Mr. Burrell understood the importance of being actively involved in Joshua's life," stated Social Worker Marsha Hurt.

Joshua had already lost his father and was now separated from the only family he knew.

The DCF team in Milford located Theodore, engaged with him, and believed in him.

DCF carefully reviewed history, assessed Theodore's current providers and his support, including his sister who lives in a nearby town.

The Agency realized that reestablishing the relationship between Joshua and Theodore would take time. "They could see Josh would be more stable with me," Theodore stated. Careful planning took place.



Theodore trusted DCF. "Marsha was great," Theodore stated reflecting on one of several Social Workers and Supervisors he believed guided him. He will always remember Marsha Hurt from the Milford Office.

"I never had anything to hide. I'm proud of my little house and what I can offer Josh. A little bit of education and career I set up for myself, I'm proud of all that. I know I can be a good father. My father was a good father, and I conveyed that. I'm really hurt not being there for Josh for those years. Those are fun years," he added.

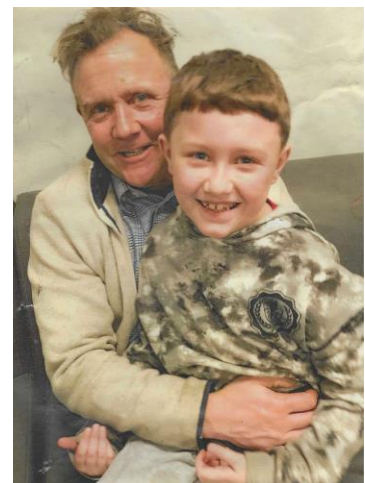
Hard work followed. It was very slow, but Joshua started agreeing to speak to his father and then visits beginning with his aunt.

With patience, conversations, and therapy, Joshua became more comfortable.

Joshua and his father interacted over ZOOM for a few months to continue working on their relationship. "I could tell there was this huge wall up," Theodore remembers. "Josh was hating me" as Theodore's belief was his son was "conditioned" to think in a particular way while they were separated.

"Mr. Burrell was committed to learning more about Joshua and participated in therapy with Joshua to better understand his needs. Mr. Burrell knew that this transition would not be easy for Joshua and went at a pace that Joshua felt comfortable with. Mr. Burrell was never the primary caretaker for Joshua and did not want Joshua to feel pressured between choosing him or his mother," Marsha stated.

Eventually, father and son began face-to-face visits. Theodore would drive almost two hours from his house in Massachusetts to Connecticut. He was never late and never missed their time together. "I cherished each visit. It was a chance to bond with your kid," Theodore stated.



The relationship grew and eventually led to extended time together and overnights. Reunification was becoming a reality.

"Mr. Burrell worked hard at making Joshua feel safe, secure, comfortable, and more importantly "Loved". He would take Joshua fishing during the visits and have meaningful conversation with him," Marsha stated.

Joshua was not legally placed home for Father's Day in 2024, but this father/son team spent the day together. Joshua gave his Father a poem he wrote. "Thank you for being there for me," is one phrase and "I will forever be grateful for you," is another.

During the middle of June 2024, the plan was confirmed for Joshua to reunify the following month. "At the end of one of our visits, I said I wish I could live with him sooner," Joshua said he told DCF staff. Two days later, Joshua went home!

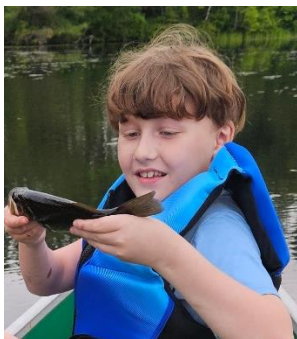
Theodore put Joshua on the phone to take part in the interview and tell parts of his story. He is now a delightful, polite and articulate boy.

"I was crying and happy when told I was going home," Joshua stated.



Father and son are now together. They decorated Joshua's room; he has a cat named Simon and established a group of friends while fitting in "nicely" at school. Theodore has arranged for one sleepover with Joshua's friends at his house while invites have come in for Joshua to spend the night at other families' homes.

Joshua is now 11 years old and will attend the 6<sup>th</sup> grade next year. At the end of the recent school year, Theodore hosted a pool party at his sister's house for Joshua's entire class and almost 25 children participated!



What is their favorite thing to do? "Hitting baseballs and developing his swing," Theodore stated. "Connecting with the ball and trying to see how far Joshua can hit it. He is developing a nice swing."

The Red Sox are Joshua's favorite baseball team followed by the Patriots in Football. The pair attended a Hartford Yardgoats game last year.

In one very special moment, Joshua and Theodore traveled to Maine to visit Theodore's 85-year-old Father. They all fished together.

Theodore has also worked to have Joshua maintain contact with his older brother, Aidan, who lives with his grandmother in a nearby town. They often visit the Aidan and have dinner at the grandmother's house at least once a month. Aidan also comes over to Theodore's house a couple nights a week during the summer and is excited to help with some work around the house.

Joshua is a very smart young boy who knows the President's by their number in history. He wants to be a pro football player.

What would Theodore tell other parents involved with DCF?

"See the process through. There is no other way," he responded.

"You are in it for the best interests of the kids."

"Stay focused. It is a pain in the butt but at least you are communicating with your child."

Joshua has a message for other children in a similar situation to him, wanting to remind them to "stay strong" and remember that "things will get better."

Things did get better and a couple of weeks ago, Joshua and his father shared an entire Father's Day together as a family that was completely reunified.

Congratulations Theodore and Joshua!

