

# Lessons from a Life in *Foster*

“Hello, my name is Renee Badeau.”

This is how I start every time I am asked to speak on a panel about my experiences in foster care and adoption. It sounds pretty simple, and I always sound strong and confident when I say it, but people do not realize what a journey it has been for me to be able to say these simple words.

I was born Renee Jones and I was my parents' fourth child. Soon after me, two more children were born. The six of us grew up with love, friendship and fun, but also with fear and confusion. Scared, angry and confused — these are the feelings I experienced a lot as a child, and to this day when I get stressed it is easy for me to get back in touch with those angry, scary and confusing emotions. The difference now is that I have people around me who can help me move out of that scary place and back onto safe ground.

When I was a small child, my parents did not have much money. We did not have a lot of clothes and hardly any toys. Sometimes we did not even have enough food to eat. But we played games together — my brothers were always organizing contests to see who was fastest or strongest or could jump the highest. I was one of the younger ones, so I never won at these games, but I think it helped all of us and we went on to do well in Special Olympics and in high school

track and field competitions. My brothers set the rules and took care of us when my parents weren't around. They made sure the younger kids got food to eat. They were good brothers.

But other things happened too. My dad and my brothers did things to us that were inappropriate. I was a small child, so back then I did not know the word “inappropriate,” I just knew that I didn't like it and it was scary. Whenever I heard my dad coming toward my room at night, I got those scary, lonely and confusing feelings in my chest.

My dad's mother was mean. We did not like this grandmother, she was just mean, mean, mean. I heard stories about terrible things she did to my dad when he was young, and I think that is sort of the reason why he had a hard time as a dad and showing love and affection in the right way.

My grandmother scared me with her talk about witches and voodoo. I hated going there. When my mom learned Grandma hit us with a whip she did not want us to go there anymore. My mom thought hitting us was OK when we were bad, but whipping was going too far.

We had other relatives too, on my mom's side. We had cousins and aunts who did our hair. We laughed, played and had some good times. It wasn't all bad, but when the bad

times did come around, they were dark and scary. Then, my dad died when I was about 10 years old. He was shot, killed. This is a terrible thing in a family, even when your dad did things he should not do and touched you inappropriately, he is still your dad and you love him, and when he dies, it is hard. You cry, you are sad, and mostly you are scared because you do not know what will happen to your family.

I was angry too. I was angry at my mom even when my dad was alive because she knew about the things he was doing to me and she did not stop him. And after he died I was angry at her because she was not able to keep our family together. Social Services came along and took us away from her. This was even more scary and confusing.

At first they put us all together in one home, and that was good. I loved those foster parents, they treated us like their own children. They had five or six other kids there too, and we all got along most of the time. But they had been foster parents for a long time and soon they were ready to retire and we had to move.

This turned out to be the first of many moves for me. This time, we did not all go to the same home. I did not understand what was happening, and I do not feel like anyone really took the time to explain it to me. I did not know if I would see my mom again and now my brothers and sisters were taken away

# Care

Renee Badeau grew up in several foster homes prior to being adopted by Hector and Sue Badeau. Today, she lives with her 11-year-old son Daniel.



Your Complete Source

for Adoption Books

www.tapestrybooks.com

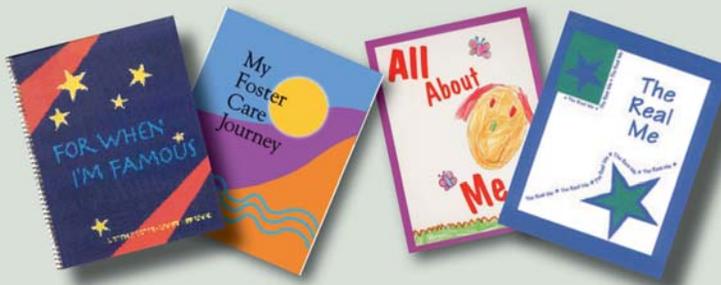
www.tapestrybooks.com

## Featured Book



**Labor of the Heart:  
A Parent's Guide ...**

Adoptive parents often experience the double trial of infertility and the adoption process itself...



One book resource for:

- Selection
- Personal service
- Unbiased recommendations
- Volume discounts and/or free freight
- Purchase Orders (for qualified agencies)

Complete listing of our books, & **get current prices**, visit us on the web.

877-266-5406  
www.tapestrybooks.com

from me too. Separating siblings is terrible. You have already lost your parents, when you lose your siblings it is like your whole world is crashing around you. But in another way, it was a little relief for me, because I knew I would be safe now. No one would do those creepy, scary things to me anymore. I trusted the people around me to keep me safe and take care of me.

But that did not turn out to be true. Even in my foster homes, bad things continued to happen to me. So, soon I began to feel like I couldn't trust anyone. This made me angry inside, and I started to show this by acting angry on the outside. Foster parents felt like they couldn't control me and I got moved many times.

During these years, I often felt like a nobody and like I would never have any hope for a good life. I don't remember even thinking I would grow up, never mind dreaming about what I could be when I grew up. When I lost the ability to trust the people around me, I lost my dreams and hope.

It got so hard for me that I started to talk about crazy ideas, even ideas of killing myself. I don't think I ever meant to do it, but I don't know what would have happened if no one stepped in. I was put in a hospital for children with emotional problems, and once again, I was scared, confused and angry. My life unraveled like a sweater, and my feelings got tangled and knotted like a big messy ball of yarn. I hardly ever saw my siblings and sometimes I did not even know where they were. We did not even go to the same schools.

Finally, I got placed in a foster home where I could relax a little and start to feel comfortable. This new foster mother was someone who cared. I started to feel a little bit like I could trust her. And she and my social worker started talking now and then about adoption. I wasn't sure about that, but I knew I wanted to feel safe. And I wanted parents and to be with my siblings.

One day, we were invited to a party at the school for the deaf where my youngest brother was a student. A family was coming from far away to adopt him and they wanted to meet us too.

I did not know that they had already said they wanted to adopt me, no one told me that. I did not know that they had sent a birthday present for me a few weeks before. No one told me that either.

When I met them, I was a little unsure what to think about them, but my brothers were there and I felt safe. My brothers seemed to like them and asked them all kinds of questions. Soon, I felt comfortable, and when they took my sister and me for a ride and asked us how we would feel about joining their family, I was ready to give it a try.

They said they lived in Vermont, which was pretty far away from New Mexico, but it sounded like it could be fun. They had a lot of kids already, younger ones and I thought that would be nice to have some younger sisters. More brothers I wasn't too sure about, but I thought it might be OK.

I moved to Vermont and started at a new school. Once again, I had to think hard before I was ready to trust these people, and there were times when I tested them hard. Sometimes I was rude and disrespectful. Sometimes I was angry and mean. Sometimes I didn't come home from school and they were worried about me. But little by little, I started to feel less scared, confused and angry. I started to see that I could relax and begin to dream again, begin to hope again about my goals and future.

I started to run on the track team and play soccer. I sang in the school choir and made friends. Most of all, I was happy that after all these years my brothers, sisters and I were all together in one place. And I loved having grandparents, aunts and uncles who were kind, loved me and took me shopping for my

birthday or let me come over to their house to get dressed for the prom. I have so many good memories from those years that it can bring tears into my eyes to think about how I almost did not get this chance.

I was 16 when I got adopted. I had special needs. I was in special education, and had learning disabilities. I had been labeled with mental health problems because of my time in that hospital when I was thinking of killing myself. Plus, I had five brothers and sisters. Some people think that teens like me cannot be adopted. I am glad my social worker and parents did not give up on me or my siblings.

Being adopted and having a permanent family has made all the difference in my life. I don't know where I would be today if I had not been given a chance to have a family. I still have struggles and problems in life. My special needs did not go away because I got adopted. But now, I have parents who know me, care about me and understand how to talk to me and how to listen to me when I get into my scared, angry or confused moods. They stick by me, and I stick by them. We are a family and we always will be.

I have a son. I have a job. I pay my rent, buy my own clothes and save money for summer vacations with my son. I celebrate holidays and birthdays, good days and bad days. I know that I still have a lot to learn, but I also have a lot of hope and dreams for my future and my son's future. Every child deserves the chance I had to be part of a family that will be theirs forever. 🌸

---

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Renee Badeau grew up in New Mexico and Vermont. She attended Leslie College Threshold Program and works at Lasalle College High School. She is active in church and as a "sports mom" to 11-year-old Daniel. She loves sharing her story and speaking at conferences. She and her family live in Philadelphia.