

# STRONGER TOGETHER



## A community of care helps a young girl live “her best life ever”

By Arnold Eby

Have you ever had days that begin poorly, when you feel the weight of the whole world on your shoulders — the kind of day when everything seems that much harder? And then, when you least expect it, something happens that makes you realize the old adage — there’s a light at the end of the tunnel — is not simply wishful thinking. Even the darkest clouds have a silver lining, you just need a little hope to find it.

Well, that’s what happened to me one day. I want to share my story from the beginning so you too can experience awe and wonder the same way it hit me. So, bear with me and let’s journey back to the day.

### Tired Out

It was a warm and humid September day, nothing unusual. Yet, a feeling of deep tiredness was upon me. I was exhausted and tired out by a long day

of meetings, appointments, juggling schedules and deadlines. My 10-year-old daughter and I had just wrapped up the last of the doctor and therapist Zoom calls for the day when she suddenly said, “Daddy, can we go to Devin’s (her brother) soccer game?”

To my mind, it seemed like another event, another interaction with people I’d hoped to avoid. Although going to a game wasn’t what I wanted to do, out the door we went.

When we arrived at the fields, I parked at the very end of the lot. I just wanted to stay in the car and watch the game from afar.

But my daughter was all eagerness, and sauntered off jauntily after I gave her money for the admission fee. Before going off, she negotiated my agreement the balance could be spent on snacks.

### “I Am Living My Best Life Ever.”

As I reclined in the car, catching my breath and watching the game, she emerged from the field with a school friend in tow. They were chatting as they approached my car, looking for the two stadium chairs in the trunk.

The pair proceeded to set up the chairs and share a bag of popcorn purchased with the remaining change.

I sat there watching them, half-listening to their chatter. Suddenly my daughter said something that jolted me into complete wakefulness.

“I am living my best life ever.”

The words kept ringing in my ears, spreading a blanket of wondrous joy and warmth into my soul.

Seriously? Did she just say out loud those words — “best life?”

Gone was my exhaustion, gone was that tired-to-the-bone feeling with just a few words, uttered placidly by a little girl to her friend. And, oh, the joy it gave her father!

### Tough Tasks Made Easier

Let me share why it impacted me so profoundly. My daughter came into our lives when my wife and I welcomed her eight and a half years ago. She’d recently transferred to a new school. That meant a new curriculum structure, new teachers and new classmates/friends.

The day in question had been a tough one. After school, she’d attended all those appointments and answered all her therapist’s questions, sharing her thoughts and other details. Were those not hard tasks for a girl who is just 10 years old? Did the conversation with the therapist not drain her emotionally? Was it not hard negotiating the challenges of going to a new school, finding new friends and then coming home to attend all those meetings with her care team?

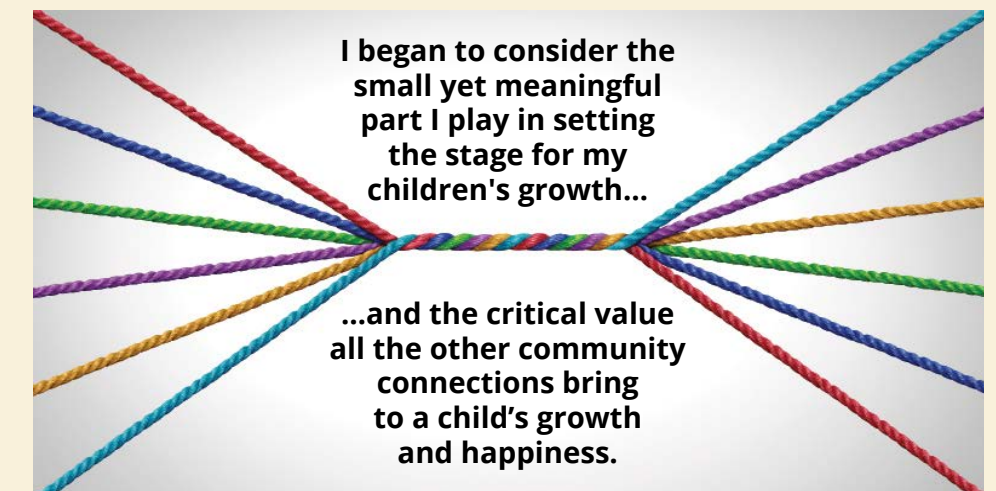
No — I am happy to know I was wrong. As the adult, I may have been exhausted by the pace of the day, the complexity of juggling all the tasks being a foster parent entails. But as her sweet words reverberated across my brain, a deep sense of contentment settled into my soul. I realized all the effort I put into the day was so well worth it. Gone was my boredom and complacency, replaced by the happiness of my daughter.

I also became aware of how critical those conversations with her care team are, how much it helps her when she is able to share her thoughts with her therapists, and how meaning is found in doctors’ appointment as well.

### Joining Forces

I began to consider the small yet meaningful part I play in setting the stage for my children’s growth. And the critical value all the other community connections bring to a child’s growth and happiness.

As a foster and adoptive parent, the support and partnerships needed to create the environment for growth and change do not happen in isolation. We each play an important part



in their lives. The school, the therapist, the psychiatrist, the friend — they all form the community in which resource parents raise their children.

Without each of these critical members joining forces to bring out the best in the child in our care, would my daughter still have felt she is living her best life?

So, there I sat in my car, with all these thoughts floating in my head. I watched the soccer game, saw her share what was left of the popcorn with her brother when he came off the field, and I realized how easily I could have missed that moment. That moment when she said, “I am living my best life ever.”

I had to share the moment with you because those are the words resource parents aspire to hear from children who come to us at various ages and stages of their young lives.

I cannot do it alone — I believe in the community connections we create, in the resources each of these connections bring to the table, and in the ways we all work in tandem to change lives. That is what gives hope and brings healing and meaning!

In turn, our souls are healed, our lives find meaning and perhaps helps us say too, “I am living my best life ever!”

I hope you will join the larger community of the National Foster Parent Association. We are here for you and invite you to explore our resources and get to know us at our upcoming conference “Making Connections” June 23-25, 2023, at the Hyatt Regency Reston, Virginia.

You can find all the conference information at [www.nfpaeducation.com](http://www.nfpaeducation.com). We hope to connect with you there. •

*Arnold Eby is the executive director of the National Foster Parent Association.*