

# Maintaining Connections with Foster Families: An International Perspective

By Barb King



Last week I opened my email and, to my delight, found a message with a familiar Spanish subject line: “Saludos.” The email was from Evelyn, foster sister to our two-year-old son, Juan Carlos, whom my husband Tim and I adopted from Guatemala in 2005.

I say Evelyn is Juan Carlos’ foster sister, but she was more like his foster mother, as it was 18-year-old Evelyn who was his primary caregiver during the first eight months of his life.

It was Evelyn who bathed him, fed him, diapered him, slept with him and brought him to our hotel in Guatemala City on both our visit and pick-up trips. And it is Evelyn with whom we exchange emails every few months, sending photos of Juan Carlos and updating her on his life as a member of our family.

Our family is fortunate to also keep in touch with the foster family of our four-year-old son, Rory, whom we adopted from Guatemala in 2003.

We first met Rory’s foster mother, Isabel, when we traveled to Guatemala in September 2003 to bring Rory home. We invited her to our hotel room, where, with the help of an interpreter, we visited for a few hours.

We questioned her at length about Rory’s schedule, his likes and dislikes. We also got to see the easy, gentle way she interacted with our son—how he smiled for her and followed her with his gaze.

Toward the end of our visit, she gave us a small photo album containing photos of Rory during the nine months he was in her care. I

remember feeling overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness, generosity and love that went into this gift.

Before meeting Isabel, Tim and I

hadn’t given much thought to keeping in touch with Rory’s foster family. It’s not that we were opposed to maintaining this connection, but as first-time parents obsessed

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with diapers, formula and car seats, it simply wasn't in the forefront of our minds.

It was Isabel who very subtly suggested keeping in touch when she mentioned during our visit that she has received hundreds of photos of her foster children over the years. She also gave us a letter, which contained her home address.

Since then, we have sent her letters, gifts and photos. Tim and I also had the great fortune of seeing her again when we traveled to Guatemala to visit Juan Carlos in September 2005.

Isabel was disappointed that Rory could not travel with us (his passport application had been lost in the New Orleans office during Hurricane Katrina), but she was happy to see the scrapbook and video we had made for her.

I especially treasured this visit with Isabel and her daughter Isadonia, who shared with us their memories of Rory and details of their family life that I will one day pass along to him.

To Tim and me, the willingness of our sons' foster families to stay in touch with us demonstrates the depth of their love for our boys. In fact, the availability of foster care was a primary factor in our decision to adopt from Guatemala when we were first considering international

adoption nearly five years ago. Little did we know then that our life as a family would be so enriched by the relationships with our foster families—relationships that transcend language, nationality and race.



To say that our sons' foster families are important to us is an enormous understatement. Tim and I know that these families were important to our sons by the way the boys grieved for them during those first few months with us.

Our sons' foster families have become extensions of our family, providing a critical link to the boys' personal histories and cultural identities.

In several years, when our boys can more deeply appreciate it, our family plans to return to Guatemala and reunite with our sons' foster families. I envision this trip to be the first of many over the years, hoping that it will re-establish for our sons the connection to these families that was so palpable to them as babies and strengthen their bond to two very special families living far away in a very special country.

*Barb King and Tim Wood are parents to Rory, 4, and Juan Carlos, 2 (at the time that this was written). They live in Milwaukee. Reprinted from the Summer of 2007 Partners newsletter.*