

Scenario #1 – Shortly after Catherine graduated from college in December 2018, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy at Eastside Hospital. One week later, she decided to take the baby back to the hospital and gave him to staff under the Safe Place for Newborns law. She provided her name and the baby's name. The attending doctor contacted DFCS and examined the baby. DFCS promptly notified the court of the situation. When the DFCS worker arrived to pick up the baby, the doctor gave the worker all known information, including contact information that was in the baby's birth records, and she released the baby into DFCS custody. The baby was placed with a DFCS foster family who was willing to adopt.

Nine months went by, and the baby was thriving in the foster home. The foster family was grateful to finally have a baby placed in their home that they could adopt. They never really wanted to work with birth families, but they did so in the past because DFCS expected them to.

As the newest caseworker was filling out a TPR packet so that the foster family could adopt, he received a call from someone claiming to be the baby's grandmother. She demanded that DFCS place the baby with her. She said that she recently moved back to Georgia after caring for her sick father in North Carolina for the past year. She talked to Catherine on the phone regularly, but she had not seen Catherine since she left, and she did not know that Catherine was pregnant. Catherine never said anything to her or anyone else in the family. She found out about the baby this morning when she ran into one of Catherine's old college friends. The grandmother has a large home, financial comfort, a clear background, and a reliable support system. She had no problem passing a home evaluation. The grandmother was extremely angry that DFCS never contacted her.

When it was realized that a diligent search for kin should have been completed in December 2018, DFCS tracked down Catherine to get information about her family. Catherine was terrified. She said she intentionally did not want anyone in the family to know about her pregnancy. She told the caseworker that she had a "one-night-stand" with a guy she met at a bar and did not know anything about him. She said she has PTSD for trauma she experienced as a child and now back in counseling. She said that caring for the baby was a significant trigger. She is also embarrassed and feels guilty for giving up her baby, but she was steadfast that it was the best decision for herself and the baby. She knew that her family would want to raise the child if they found out. She said she loves her family, but it would be too painful for her to have to see her child at family gatherings and such, and she begged DFCS not to place the child with her mother. She wants her baby to be adopted.

Scenario #2 – Misty was arrested six months ago when she was caught with a pound of methamphetamine in her car's trunk. Her children were with her. This was Misty's second drug-related arrest in the last 10 years. Her first arrest was when her older child, Hannah (now age 13) was three years old. Misty had been using meth and was caught with anti-anxiety medication not prescribed to her. DFCS was never involved because Misty's mother had guardianship of Hannah through the Probate Court at the time. When Misty was released from jail, she entered drug treatment, got a job, and then an apartment. Convinced that Misty was on the right track, Misty's mother relinquished guardianship of Hannah when Hannah turned seven years old. Three years later, Misty's mother passed away suddenly. A year after that, Misty gave birth to another baby girl, Nicky (now age 2.) Misty left Nicky's father when he started becoming violent with Misty.

Misty had been working at the same company for several years and was making good money. She started missing too many days of work, though, because her children were having problems. Hannah was having trouble in school (lying, not following directions, and anger outbursts towards peers and teachers.) Nicky had frequent ear infections. Misty had no one she trusted to help her. Hannah's father was reportedly addicted to drugs and was never there for Hannah, and Nicky's father was abusive to Misty. Misty was eventually fired for "attendance issues."

Misty's bills piled up. She began to feel more anxious and extremely hopeless. On a day that she was particularly down, Misty ran into an old acquaintance who told her that she could make some quick cash if she just transported some drugs from Columbus to Rome. Desperate, Misty agreed.

Hannah and Nicky are both in foster care. DFCS could not locate any family members or fictive kin to take the children when Misty was arrested. Unfortunately, DFCS could not find a foster family that would take both girls together.

For the past eight months, a transporter has been regularly bringing Hannah to the jail to visit Misty. Nicky's foster parents live near the jail and transport Nicky occasionally. Nicky has been calling her foster parents "Mommy" and "Daddy." Hannah heard this during a sibling visit and became irate. She cussed at DFCS for allowing this to happen. Hannah is critical of the care being provided to Nicky, although DFCS and CASA have not noted any concerns.

Misty has just learned that she will have to serve three years in prison, at a minimum. The prison is over 100 miles away from the children's foster homes.

The children's fathers have been located. It turns out that Misty and Hannah's father were married.... and they never divorced. He came to the 75-Day Hearing and said he would like to work a case plan and take both children. Hannah wants to stay where she is and wait for her mother. She never really met her father before seeing him at the court hearing. Nicky's father has not shown for anything, but Nicky's paternal grandmother came to the hearing and wants Nicky placed with her. The foster parents of both children are confused and frustrated.

Scenario #3 – Jason has six biological children from his marriage to Katie. The children range in age from 3 – 11 years old. There has been significant DFCS involvement with this family in the past due to neglect, particularly regarding their 8-year-old, who has cerebral palsy, and their 5-year-old, who has a severe hearing impairment. Two years ago, Jason left Katie and the children.

The year after Jason left, Katie overdosed on drugs while her children were sleeping. Her 11-year-old, who had always assumed a parent-like role to the younger children, found his mother and called 911. When police and fire rescue arrived, they called DFCS. The home was deplorable. Katie survived.

DFCS was not able to find relatives that were willing to take any of the children, let alone all six. The children were separated into four different foster homes. The 10 and 11-year-old's were placed in one home while the 3 and 4-year-old's were placed in another. The 8-year-old and the 5-year-old were each placed in specialized homes. DFCS contacted relatives several times prior to the 75-Day hearing to place the children with family, but they had no success.

DFCS was able to locate Jason four months after the children entered foster care. He was living in a shelter. He said he left his home because drugs became more important than his family. He said he quit using “cold turkey” and has been living at the shelter for the past two months. He tested negative for drugs and agreed to participate in a substance abuse assessment. He said he wanted to do whatever he had to do to get his children.

Over the course of the next few months, Jason visited with his children each week. The children were excited to see him. They repeatedly told DFCS and CASA that they could not wait to live with him again. Jason helped the children with homework and he demonstrated a good understanding of ASL so he could communicate with his 5-year-old. He even attended (virtually) medical appointments for his 8-year-old. He was negative every time he was tested for drugs, and he completed drug treatment while living at the shelter.

DFCS discussed the family’s case and agreed that if Jason could get some reliable income and a place where he and the children could live together, they could return the children and maintain an open CPS case for the family (with a protective order.) The shelter would not allow children and DFCS could not find any other shelters that would allow Jason and his children to live there. DFCS offered to assist Jason with deposits for a rental home if he could cover monthly expenses. Jason repeatedly agreed to this, but he never followed through – there was always an excuse.

The children have now been in foster care for 15 months. Katie never followed through on any of her case plan tasks. The foster family caring for the two youngest children is the only foster family interested in adoption, but only for the children currently in their care. The two oldest children have had two placement changes since they entered care. All the children are in counseling, except for the youngest child. All of the siblings want to live together with their father.