

Love, an Adoption Success Story

When people think of family, their mind may go to what most may describe as the "typical family" a mother, a father and children who belong to the parents biologically. The truth is there is no one correct definition of what a family is or what a family looks like. Family is made up of individuals who love one another unconditionally and will always be there for one another - a "forever family". How Lori McConnell's family came to be is anything but typical.

More than five years ago Lori made a decision that would change a young girl's life forever – she chose Ellena McConnell to be her daughter. "I was single and although I had not found Mr. Right I did not want to go through life without children," said Lori "I have always felt I would adopt someday. The more research I did, the more I realized how many kids needed a loving home right here in my local area."

After much research, Lori decided to [adopt through foster care](#). She realized that there were kids out there who just needed someone to call mom, someone that would not give up on them and would love them unconditionally.

Lori recalls that it was Anne Holton's *For Keeps Initiative* in 2007 that helped her realize that she wanted to adopt an older child. "On the day of my last foster/adoption parenting class at [Children's Home Society \(CHS\)](#) I started attending Anne Holton's *For Keeps* initiative meetings in Chesterfield," explained Lori. "I heard older kids speak about their experiences, all different experiences, but the one thing these children all had in common was the desire for a family. I was in my early 40's and I still called my mom all the time. Just because a child is not an infant or toddler it doesn't mean they do not need a family or a mom to love them."

Shortly after attending the meetings, CHS called Lori to let her know that they had a child for her and it wasn't a toddler, but a 10-year-old little girl."That call was about my beautiful daughter Ellena," said Lori "I thought back to the stories I'd heard at those meeting and I knew, without a doubt, my answer was yes and the rest is history."

Ellena was placed in Lori's home through foster care in August of 2007. Less than one year later, Ellena's adoption was finalized - Lori was officially her mother

Lori has since adopted two more children. In 2010, 8-year-old twins were placed with Lori and their adoption was finalized in December of 2011. Lori and her three daughters are very proud of their story and share it every opportunity they get in hopes to increase awareness about children waiting for loving homes.

"It has never been a secret that my kids are adopted. We talk to whoever will listen about foster care and adoptions," explained Lori. "Each year we celebrate the girl's adoption finalization day as their "Gotcha day" they take cupcakes to school as if it were their birthday, and then we have another celebration at home. We are not ashamed of it, it's something to celebrate. We hope our story will raise awareness about adoption and result in more kids being adopted."

Lori and Ellena are involved in helping to make a difference for other children still in care. They both volunteer to help train prospective foster and adoptive parents at [Children's Home Society \(CHS\)](#). Lori also frequently spoke with Anne Holton's *For Keeps Initiative* group about adding paid adoption leave to state employee benefits. She wanted it to be called the P.A.T.R.I.C.I.A Bill (**P**aied **A**doption **T**ime **R**esulting **I**n **C**hildren's **I**nvaluab**L**e **A**ttach**M**ent). Due to budget restrictions, this bill did not materialize.

"I am a huge advocate of adopting older children. I speak at the CHS parenting classes about my experience, the adoption process, what to expect and how I felt during the process. I offer a real life experience from someone that has been through it all and I offer my support to parents if they want to call or meet with me before, during and after their placements," said Lori.

According to the [North American Council on Adoptable Children](#), once waiting children in foster care are nine or older, they are much less likely to be adopted. About 43 percent of waiting children are nine or older, 72 percent of those who are adopted are under age nine. Statistics show that adoptive parents shy away from older kids because these children often have psychological wounds that need healing. Ellena is grateful for Lori's willingness to take a leap of faith and adopt an older child, had she not; Ellena's life would be very different ([Read her story](#)).

"Having a *forever family* to me means that no matter what, at the end of the day you have a safety blanket, a place that is surrounded by people that love you and will always be there for you regardless of what happens. No matter what age a child is we all need love and a place to call home," said Ellena "To individuals considering adoption, please don't ever give up. It gets hard at times, but know that you will change their life just as much as they change yours. Like I said before we all need a loving place to call home."

This unique love story is about two people who longed for a family and found it in each other. "Even though I did not give birth to Ellena, the bond that we have formed in just 5 years is so strong that anyone would think that I have had her since birth. Adoption has truly changed my life," said Ellena.

There are 5,271 children in the Virginia's foster care system and as of October 1, 2012, 1,335 of these children have the goal of adoption. If you are interested in becoming a foster parent or adoption, visit VDSS [website](#) or use "[Meet the Virginia Kids](#)," a user-friendly database of hundreds of waiting children. The comprehensive database can be searched by age, region, gender and other demographics.