

Miss Bethany said she would read to me, and Mr. Will would get me a nightlight. She said I'd never be lonely anymore. I was starting to believe her.

Once we got upstairs Miss Bethany sat on the bed next to me to explain the rules. I waited while she spoke. "The first rule is, food will never be used as a consequence or taken away from you. Ever. You must eat to stay healthy." She smiled and gave me a hug. A mom hug. It felt so good. And she smelled like flowers.

Starting to Believe

She and Mr. Will went over the other rules. No hitting. Speak nicely. No running in the house. They seemed easy enough. Then we made lots of bubbles in the sink and cleaned the dishes. They told me we would be going horseback riding next



weekend. I used to ride ponies with the other girls in the group home and I missed Evie, my favorite horse. I'm so happy! I better not mess up.

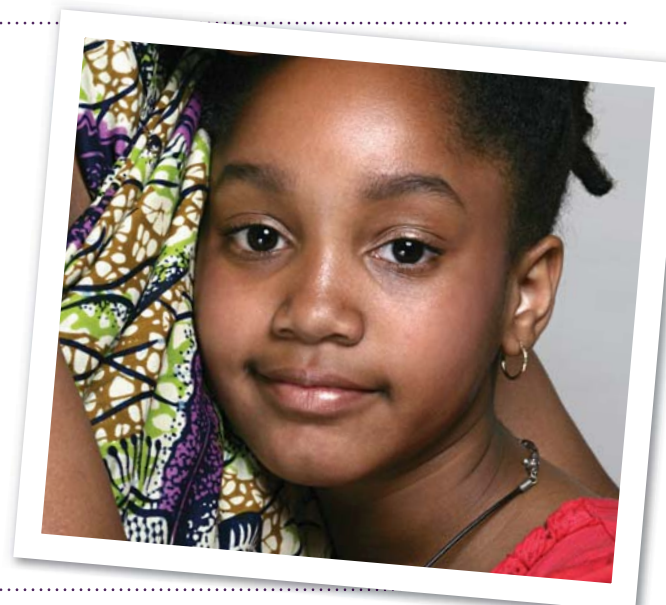
I was getting tired after eating. Then I remembered I barely slept all night because I was so nervous. Miss Bethany asked me if I wanted to go to my room for a nap. I'm 7 years old, not a baby, but I think I want to lie down with Jelly Bean. When Miss Bethany was about to leave, I got scared and yelled for her. "What's wrong, Maddie?" she asked. It took a while, but I told her I was scared to be alone. Whenever I was bad at home, my stepmother would make me stay alone in my room. Miss Bethany said she would read to me, and Mr. Will would get me a night light. She said I'd never be lonely anymore. I was starting to believe her. I'm excited we are going horseback riding next weekend. I think tomorrow will be a good day.

Children who have endured abuse and trauma need vast amounts of patience, love and structure to feel safe and start to heal. Because of your generosity, we are able to provide children such as Maddie with the tools, support and experiences they need to gain confidence in themselves and go on to live in a family. We are also able to find loving families like Bethany and Will to care for them and help them have brighter futures. You are changing the lives of the most vulnerable among us. Please make a gift today at www.cafsnj.org or in the enclosed envelope.

To read more of Maddie's story, please visit www.cafsnj.org. Thank you!



~ Maddie ~ Finding a Family



Maddie was placed in one of Children's Aid and Family Services' therapeutic foster care group homes to help her heal from abuse, neglect and trauma. During that time, she lived in a safe and loving home environment where the staff provided structure and nurturing 24/7. She participated in weekly counseling sessions where she was encouraged to talk about her concerns and challenges, as well as her new-found successes. She worked with a tutor on her math skills, and for the first time began performing at her grade level. Her participation in hands-on group activities such as therapeutic horseback riding helped Maddie reconnect with her own ability to care for others and to learn to trust again.

We are happy to announce that Maddie has been matched with Miss Bethany and Mr. Will, foster parents who have received Children's Aid and Family Services' specialized training and support for working with traumatized children. Here, in her own words, Maddie shares her journey of moving from the group home to living with a new family.

The Last Day/The First Day

It was a great day for me, everyone kept saying. I'm leaving the group home and going to live with Miss Bethany and Mr. Will. I held Jellybean, my bunny, tighter because he always listens to me. "This can't be real, Jellybean. What have I done that's so bad? Why do I have to leave my family? Why did Miss Bethany and Mr. Will pick me? Don't they know that I mess up a lot? That's what my family always said. Will they give me away, too? I'm so scared."

The door opened and Miss Jean came in singing. "It's a special day for you, Maddie," she said. "Let's get you ready for your new home."

I felt weird...I couldn't stop shaking. "Are you alright, Maddie?" Miss Jean asked. I tried to talk but my throat had a lump in it. The staff told me to tell them when something was wrong. My stepmother always told me to stay in my room and be quiet. I wasn't sure what to do.

"You will make mistakes and that's okay Maddie, because everyone does," Miss Jean said. "And Miss Bethany and Mr. Will like you a lot!"

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Miss Jean asked me again if I was alright. This time I said, "What if I mess up and they don't like me?"

Miss Jean sat next to me on the bed. "You will make mistakes and that's okay Maddie, because everyone does," she said. "And Miss Bethany and Mr. Will like you a lot! You have all the tools you need to do well. Remember to think first, ask for help and tell them when something scares you. I know you really like Miss Bethany and Mr. Will. I think Jellybean does, too. Do you Jellybean?" I laughed whenever she spoke to Jellybean.

Miss Jean gave me one of her "mom" hugs. It felt so good. It was just how my mom hugged me, right before she left for the hospital. Miss Jean smelled like flowers...like my mom smelled. I started to get worried again. I hope Miss Bethany knows how to give mom hugs.

The Car Ride to My New Home

I had another lump in my throat as I waved goodbye to Miss Jean and got in the car. But I

*The walls were painted pink
and there were stuffed animals
all over — friends for
Jellybean — and a doll house!*

didn't cry. And I will be good. I will be so good that Miss Bethany and Mr. Will will never think to give me away.

Adele came on the radio, and Miss Bethany started to sing along in a funny voice. Before I knew it, we pulled up to their house. I had been there before for visits, but this was different. The lump came back in my throat and I started to shake. Then I thought about Miss Jean and remembered to take a deep breath. I can do this.

Mr. Will opened the door and there were balloons all over and a big Welcome Home Maddie sign. I thought I smelled cookies, or maybe cake? The house was full of furniture and pictures, but



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everything looked so neat and clean. I hope I don't break anything. "Come on up to your room, Maddie," said Miss Bethany. We went upstairs. She opened the door and I couldn't believe it. The walls were painted pink and there were stuffed animals all over — friends for Jellybean — and a doll house!

"We're making tacos for lunch, Maddie. We know you like them," said Miss Bethany with a smile. I was really hungry because I didn't eat much at breakfast. I smiled back and asked to use the bathroom.

Miss Bethany had pretty lotions and perfume in the bathroom. They might be the same ones that my mom wore. I took the cap off a bottle to put a little on, and it slipped out of my hand and crashed all over the floor. Oh no, I think, how can I explain this? I can't hide it. I know they will get mad and take me back.

"Maddie are you okay?" Miss Bethany asks. I don't answer. I'm afraid to open the door. She says it's okay, so finally I let her in. I run out and grab Jelly Bean. I'm leaving, I know it. "Maddie, it's okay, you had an accident," she said. "Come help me clean up. I like to sing when I clean. How about you?"

Tacos, My Favorite

I can't believe it. She's being too nice. But I help her clean up the perfume. It smells good, like my mom. And I'm so hungry. "Do you want to help me put the tacos together?" says Mr. Will. We put chicken, cheese and beans in the taco shells. There's a salad on the table. "It's really important for you to eat your salad and vegetables," he says. "You want to grow up to be strong."

He didn't have to tell me twice. I was so hungry and tacos were my favorite. They joked and called me "Chef Maddie." I laughed but then I felt sad.



They were being too nice. Would they take dinner away like my stepmother had when I was bad? She always said that children that mess up don't deserve to eat. I excused myself and went into the kitchen. I put some chicken in my skirt pocket for later, just in case. Then I went back to the table and finished my taco. It was time to clear the dishes. Miss Bethany was looking at my skirt and asked me to come over. "What's the stain on your skirt?" she asked. I froze. How do I tell her I stole the chicken? Would she hit me? Miss Jean told me to always tell the truth and it would be okay. Miss Bethany put her hand in my pocket and found the chicken. I was so embarrassed.

"Maddie, let's go upstairs and get cleaned up," she says. "We will go over some family rules."

I was so hungry and tacos were my favorite. They joked and called me "Chef Maddie." I laughed but then I felt sad. They were being too nice.