

## News

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# On the Record

## A story I didn't see coming

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Adoption Day is one of my favorite events to cover.

I had predicted ahead of time what I would see there: "the essence of hope, the highest of humanity prevailing over the basest of destruction, of love saving the day."

That's exactly it. That's my story. That was the story present Tuesday.

But I was wrong about one thing. Judge Thomas Shumaker has said repeatedly that some of these kids are "broken," that not even the greatest fount of love is enough to salve some of those wounds.

You won't see those kids today, I said.

Wrong. If this one child, now 22, wasn't ever considered broken, the concept is meaningless.

She ended up in the ER at age 3 after being sexually molested. She had hot peppers forced down her throat and was forced to eat her own feces when she had a potty-training accident. Was held under the Christmas tree as two men covered her nose and mouth until she passed out.

When she was 6, she decided she'd had enough, and was going to run away. She climbed out the window in the bedroom of her trailer, but once she was outside, she realized it was dark, it was cold, and she had no place to go. She tried to climb back in, but the window was too high. She couldn't.

She knocked on the locked front door to be let back in. Her biological mother and the boyfriend demanded to know details, and she admitted she was going to run away but had changed her mind. The mother told her, essentially, if she wasn't grateful, she should just leave ...#8221; get out.

The girl pleaded to at least be allowed to take her younger brother and sister with her, and the mother exploded.

"How dare you take my baby from me!" and then pounded the 6-year-old's head on the floor repeatedly until she passed out.

As this 22-year-old began to tell her story Tuesday, I tried to tune out such details. Those are

the details that when I hear on TV or start to read in print, I try to get away from because they are too horrifying.

So it was hard to sit there, captive in the courtroom, and hear her story. No one thought to have tissues in the courtroom ...#8221; and every person there was sniffing or wiping their eyes while this young woman spoke. I gave up and just let the tears fall.

I stopped taking notes.

But I couldn't stop listening. What came next was why this day is important ...#8221; the "essence of hope" stuff that I had expected.

Her horror finally stopped and healing began when she was 6 1/2, when she was placed in foster care.

She was adopted at age 9, along with her two younger siblings, by Terry and Lanette Conklin (superintendent of Burr Oak schools, and his wife, a guidance counselor), and she has grown up to be the sweetest, articulate, and personable young woman.

I left the courtroom, as I did last year's Adoption Day proceedings, wishing and wanting to be the type of woman who would and could foster parent. Of wanting to be able to make a difference in so many lives like the Conklins have, like Barb Kinney and Anita Schlabach are.

I'm making a difference in raising my three to be good people, I'm making a difference, I hope, in writing about those on the front lines of stepping in to rescue and save the next generation. I wish I could do more.

There's so much more to be done.

Audora Burg is a Journal correspondent.