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BOY & MIND

Fostering family life

Longtime foster parents form extended family

By Lynn Taylor Risk
Journal Staff Writer

He does not have that last name, but as far as Twyla and Gary Miller are concerned, Rusty is their son.

"And he calls us Ma and Pa," says Twyla of her 16-year-old foster son.

Rusty comes home for holidays, calls frequently and depends on his parents when it comes to everything from job searches to car repairs.

"When I get into a foster care, I know what I had hoped for, which is exactly what I've gotten," says Rusty, who works as a sys-

tem administrator at Norwest Bank in Minneapolis. "The support — all along the way has been incredible."

The Millers began taking foster children through Casey Family Program in 1980. Already the parents of two biological children, they wanted a larger family.

They decided long-term foster care was where they could do the most good.

"I think we wanted to make a difference," says Twyla. "We just truly wanted to see a better place for everyone to live in."

Their first foster child eventually needed more care than they could provide. But their second child was Rusty. He lived with them through high school.

Since then, 12 more children have lived with them, mostly through high school graduation.

Today their eldest biological daughter, Alicia, 19, has moved out on her own. Their 11-year-old biological son, Joshua, is still at home.

And three other children, ages 7, 9 and 14, live with them.

The Millers have decided that after their four remaining children graduate from high school, they will retire from the foster care business. But they don't plan to close up

their home. That's the time, says Twyla, when they can sit back and enjoy the benefits of a big family.

"We have no kids who will come back to us with their families," she says.

Who are foster parents?

They hear it all the time. "Oh, I could never do that," or "I'm not really special people."

The Millers along of the comments, telling people that it's the foster kids who are special. As for the other comment, "You don't have to be special," they say.

Twyla says, "Let's be real. We will find out if we can do it through... So many kids need a good home."

Gary says that although he was closer to embrace the idea of foster children than his wife, the decision has come to mean a lot to him.

"We've been really fortunate," he says. "We can give some love."

Still, foster parents have been saying the children are a foster care share for a good reason. Often they've been abused or neglected.

Gary says they've heard it all in their 19 years, and alcohol or drugs has played a part in nearly every one of the Miller's foster kids lives.

With the help of the Casey Family Program, the Millers have learned when to ask questions and when to say nothing. They know that some of the children who come to them have virtually nothing about the simple basics of life. Still others know too much.

And sometimes, it's just little things they need.

Twyla calls it the time when one little boy joined their family. They thought he would struggle, only to discover his shoes were three sizes too small. He also needed glasses.

"We used common sense in a lot of it... and humor," says Twyla. "It's gotten us a long way."

Not all of their foster experiences have been what would be called ideal. Several of the children who came lived with them don't maintain contact now that they're adults. That's difficult, the Millers admit. But it's also one of the realities of life. No one can live a life for another person. "If they don't want that family, you can't force them," says Twyla.



Twyla and Gary Miller have opened their home and hearts to 12 to 15 long-term foster children in the last 15 years. They took only a two-year break during their foster work with Casey Family Program.

Volunteers needed for many roles

May is Foster Parent Appreciation and Awareness Month in South Dakota.

According to the Department of Social Services, South Dakota has 762 licensed foster families.

There are numerous agencies and programs that provide foster care. They include DSS, Bohannon Christian Services, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, Capital Area Counseling Services, Catholic Family Services, Catholic Social Services, The Casey Family Program, Children's Home Society, Lutheran Social Services, New Horizons Adoption Agency and Northeastern Mental Health Center.

For more information on foster care, call DSS in Rapid City at 384-2434 or in Pierre at (605) 773-3227.

Priscilla Harland of the Casey Family Program says many people want to help children but cannot commit to the long-term responsibilities of foster care. There are other ways to make a difference, she says.

At Casey, many people are needed for a mentoring program and even for babysitting for foster parents. "If they want to make a difference in a child's life, we have other ways that they can help," says Harland.

To contact the Casey Family Program, call 548-0699.

Finding family

It wasn't until Rusty left for college that he really understood just how much he meant to the Millers.

Away from home for the first time, exploring Minneapolis restaurants, he came down with food poisoning. In the hospital, he called home to tell Twyla and Gary about his situation.

He expected phone calls and words.

Instead, "Mom literally got into a rental car and drove all the way up here to check on me," he says. "It was definitely not something I expected."

In response to that and all of his experiences with his family, Rusty wrote a long letter for Christmas. In it, he wrote, "You are more than a foster family to me, you are my mom and dad, sister and brother, but most of all you are my family."

And that is just the way the Millers want it.

When an athlete is injured, a number of factors must be considered for complete rehabilitation. It is common for injured athletes to lose their rehab efforts on their injury and forget the rest of their body and mind.

Discontinuing care can set up rapidly with any injury to the leg, knee or foot. Many sports athletes feel that if they can't put weight on their injured leg they can't exercise and it's almost as if they're not there.

A study done many years ago looked at the speed at which deconditioning occurs. In this study healthy college students had a number of strength tests performed and then were put on a schedule of rest for one week. These students were then tested again at various intervals during the week and at the end of one week. The results were surprising. These otherwise healthy students lost strength at a rate of 2.5 percent per day. At the end of their rest period, they were instructed to exercise daily. The authors of the study found it took an average of three months of regular exercise for the students to regain their pre-bed rest level of the test.

This study demonstrated not only how rapidly we lose strength with bed rest but also how long it takes to regain our strength. It highlights the importance of remaining active when injured and not giving in to the end of the couch.

Is what to do if you are injured? Find a way to stay active.

If you break your arm playing softball, take up rowing, walking or hiking.

Walking/running is an option, but you will have to adjust. Obviously you will not be able to use your broken arm to lift weights, but many of the Club or Handicap machines can still be used. Intensely your aerobic conditioning as that when the arm does heal, you will be in even better shape than before the injury.

Injure to the leg, that of course requires the athlete to take a more significant approach to maintaining a See Lander on page C2.

The mold count is 1,000, which is high. The pollen count is 20, which is low. Most offenders are pine and elm.

Resist call of couch during rehab time

The advertiser's slogan says, "Life is a game, play hard."

This has become the motto of many injured body builders around the Black Hills. Just this week, most of the women in my office were holding around, and the mood of the day filled the air. These weekend athletes had been such a natural season and, like most of us, did not know what to do.

There was a heavy mood, a few pulled out the old tape of the last time they were in the gym.

They were lucky so far. We had to have a staff member facing injury on proper warm-up for injury prevention.

Some were not so lucky and suffer a significant injury in their first game or practice at the season and are left on the sidelines. While a serious injury or broken bone might mean missing a game or two, it does not mean conditioning and exercise should end.

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Olive oils vary only in color, flavor, aroma

Q: Are there nutritional differences between the many different types of olive oil?

A: No. Olive oils vary in intensity of color, flavor and aroma based on growing conditions of the olives and on the stage of pressing of the olives. Extra virgin olive oil is a distinct olive oil flavor and medium color. Refined olive oil has been refined to remove color and flavor so it can be used like other vegetable oils. "Light" does not mean it's any lower in fat or calories. "Pure" olive oil usually is by color and flavor between those of extra virgin and extra light. All are nutritionally the same because the monounsaturated fat does not raise blood cholesterol, and studies suggest that this fat does not promote cancer development the way some other fats reportedly have the potential to do. Just buy portable moderate olive oil to add to your diet.

Q: I have a problem with getting up in the middle of the night to see. I don't

know why I do it, and I don't know how to stop.

A: Some people who have this problem are because they wake up with strong hunger signals. Perhaps you need an evening snack. If your dinner tends to be small or mostly grain products such as rice or pasta and vegetables, you might find the problem solved with more substantial

foods that include meat, dairy or beans protein and a moderate amount of fat. Discuss this situation with your doctor, especially if you or others in your family have diabetes, because it could be your blood sugar is dropping too low in the night. On the other hand, some people's night waking is a reflection of

troubling emotional circumstances. People who use food to cope with stress and emotions are most vulnerable to this problem. Talk to a therapist or registered dietitian trained to work with eating disorders to help you resolve this problem.

Q: Is it true that when children are constipated they should not drink milk?

A: As new study addressed that very question and concluded that neither milk, dairy products in general or iron (another nutrient people often lack) had any effect on constipation in children. If a child has not been drinking much liquid, then increasing liquid might help, but adding more food is an already adequate intake does not. This study did find that children who ate the most fat had the greatest problems with constipation. Since, based on fat alone, there is no reason for this finding... The opposite might have been expected — a drop in fat is that those with the highest fat intake were filling up on chips, sweets

and meat, and therefore eating little fruit, vegetables and whole grains, which are important sources of dietary fiber. Another study found that even after families were told to give their child a high-fiber diet, a dietary assessment found fiber below recommended amounts. Adding one piece of fruit to a diet filled with fiber-empty cereals and snacks is not enough. Recommended grams of fiber each day for children and adolescents equals their age plus five (so for a 5-year-old, 10 grams of fiber). You probably want to avoid using their supplements, but focus instead on including several servings of whole grains, breads or cereals and five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. If constipation continues to be a problem, be sure to discuss it with your child's doctor.

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