

Behind Closed Doors

Diaries of three foster moms



OVER FIVE WEEKS in early 2008, three New York City women shared with reporter Kendra Hurley the ups and downs of their day-to-day lives as foster moms. Through weekly phone interviews, these women spoke frankly, revealing not only the compassion and generosity behind their decision to take on the all-consuming task of foster parenting, but also the frustrations, struggles and self-doubt that come with the territory. Following are their stories, in their words, providing an uncensored glimpse into the homes of women looking after children whose parents have been accused of abuse and neglect. In these stories, we have changed the names of all of the children, as well as the foster parents, in order to protect the children's privacy.

Like all of the city's foster parents, these three women work with the nonprofit foster care agencies that are responsible for housing children sent to them by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). It is the agencies' responsibility to oversee these foster homes and manage the children's cases, including, whenever possible, keeping the children involved with their parents and planning for their return home. But in many cases, long-term foster care or adoption are the only choices available.

FEBRUARY 25: HAZEL DAVIS

EASTCHESTER, THE BRONX: Today Ruby wrote on the school wall that she wanted to kill the teacher. The school said they're not suspending her, but there would be a meeting. You have to wait for Ruby to calm down to talk to her, so I waited before asking, "Ruby, did you write on that wall?"

She said, "I wasn't the only one."

"But did you write on that wall?"

And she said yes. I said, "I'm glad you told me the truth, but you're responsible for Ruby. I don't want to know what anyone else did. You're smart enough to know better."

I said that because I believe you have to give these children something positive. I know, because when I was young, it was very negative. People told me, "You're dumb and stupid," and I don't believe in that.

I've been 20 years a foster parent, but when I got Ruby it'd been many years since I'd taken in new kids. I raised the seven I had before taking more. Then, about three months ago, I took in three kids: abandoned baby girl Josephine—I'm planning on adopting her; Ruby, who's 11; and Ruby's foster sister from her last home, Gina, who's 2.

Ruby and Gina were in a foster home where there were

six of them, and the father was accused of raping two of Ruby's foster sisters. The school said the kids were coming to class with no coat on and smelling like cat feces. The cops came over and said the house was disgusting, unlivable.

Ruby lived in that home nine years. She says that her foster mother started beating her all the time. She stopped when Ruby was 11, and then the foster father picked up there.

Now I've been having to retrain Ruby. She acts like a savage. Gina is only 2 years old but she has tantrums too. Still, she's a little easier than Ruby.

When Ruby came to me, she was ripping up the room, yelling and screaming, "You're not my mother! You don't tell me what to do! You're nothing!"

The social worker said to me, "You do what you got to do. What you do behind closed doors is your business." This came from a social worker!

I said, "But you are telling me what to do. You're telling me to slap her up. I don't put my hands on no kids."

That first week I took Ruby to the mall. In the parking lot she started yelling, claiming I was abducting her. A white lady called security. That was the most embarrassing thing. Thank God I had the papers from the agency to prove Ruby was a foster child! When the security guard left, Ruby started kicking my van. She yelled, "Fuck you! If you put your hands

Ruby tells me she has a lot of secrets, and I say, “I know you do, Ruby. And I know when you’re ready to tell me you will.”

on me you’re going to jail! You’re going down!” When she screams like that, it’s like a whole different personality, like a man’s voice.

Now Ruby talks to me. She tells me she has a lot of secrets, and I say, “I know you do, Ruby. And I know when you’re ready to tell me you will.” A lot of foster parents, they force these children to talk, but I won’t.

Ruby tells me, “You’re going to put me in the hospital if I tell you the truth. You’re going to put me away.”

I say, “I can’t help you if you don’t tell me the truth.”

Today I think I got a breakthrough, because when I asked her if she wrote on the wall at school, she told me the truth.



FEBRUARY 26: GABRIELA GUZMAN

DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN: I grew up with foster children in the house, and now I’ve been a foster parent myself for 19 years. I usually do the little ones. I like ages 3 to 10, and boys. The agency says, “You got a bad little boy, give him to Gabriela. She can handle it.”

But now I also have two teens in my home. Anthony, the 18-year-old, I’ve had since October. He’s been in the system a long time. His parents are deceased. Anthony doesn’t give me too much of a problem. He’s just home most of the day on the damn computer.

But Greg, my 20-year-old, now he’s a problem. I’ve had him since October as well. He’s been in care since he was little. He opens stuff up in the kitchen—fine, the food is there, eat it—but he leaves it out. I put things in zippy bags so it don’t get stale, but he opens them and leaves them there. He eats like there’s no tomorrow.

I just redid my bathroom and he started messing it up. When he showers, he steams the bathroom so there’s mildew coming out of the ceiling, and I be telling him, “You don’t need to steam the bathroom like that. What is wrong with you? You have to redo my bathroom if you fuck it up.”

Then he answers me back: “I can do what I want. I’m a man and I’m mature.”

I tell him, “You’re a boy here. You’re a young man and this is my house, and no one is the boss but me here. If I wanted a man here, I would have a man here.”

We have arguments like this all the time. I’m tired. So a few days ago I called his worker and said, “You have to get him out of here.” Since I’ve been going through this for so long, the worker said they’d send him to a group home, but it’ll take some time before they find an opening. They don’t want to put him in a foster home because of the way he is.

When I told Greg he was going to a group home, he said, “They can’t do that. I’ll sign myself out of the system.”

I said, “The world is not a pretty place. If you sign yourself out, you’re going to be all on your own without anyone to count on.”

He said, “I’m going to be fine. I’m going to be happy.” That’s how these kids think. He’s going to be 21 in October, when he’ll age out anyway. I don’t know what he plans to do with himself then.

Greg has a 43-year-old girlfriend he met on MySpace. She’s old enough to be his mama. I knew he wasn’t all there since I got him, but he’s gotten worse since he’s been with this woman. He used to go to church. He used to go to therapy. Now he’s stopped and has been smoking weed. He lost his job at McDonald’s because of her. He jumps hoops for this woman. This kid has literally gotten up at 1 o’clock in the morning, arguing on the phone with her, and put on his coat to go to New Jersey where she lives. I tell him to wait until morning and he says, “No, I got to fix it now. She’s mad at me.” And he goes all the way to New Jersey after her ass.

Teens, they’re all lost souls. They don’t care about going to school, and you have 18- and 19-year-olds and they have not finished ninth grade. And it’s a more dangerous situation for them now with the drugs, and they’re having sex left and right and not protecting themselves.

When I was a teen, we went to school. There wasn’t people getting into gangs. And if there was a fight, it was punches. Now everyone has a gun. Your kids aren’t even safe in school.



MARCH 3: RUTH DIXON

EAST NEW YORK, BROOKLYN: Jason is a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful baby. I couldn’t ask for more. He doesn’t fuss. He’s always smiling and laughing. He is just a pleasure. I’m looking at him now and I’m seeing him growing, and he’s doing all the things that a child needs to do at six months.

I decided to be a foster parent because I don’t have any kids and I wanted to give back to the community. I am 47 years old with a home with three bedrooms and two were empty, so I thought, “Why not?” But I wasn’t interested in changing diapers or pushing strollers or the sleepless nights, the whole thing. I wanted a child who was in school, who would fit into my lifestyle instead of me fitting into theirs. But the social worker who trained me asked me to take an

infant. She said, “You’re a great person and you have a great home.” She saw something in me that she thought that I needed, and she turned out to be right.

Jason was a week old when he came to me. The agency gave me papers for the WIC food program and that was it, nothing else. I decided I’d take a week of vacation to be with the baby. Then I realized he needed more of my time, so I took family care leave, for which the company has to let you take off unpaid time to care, not just for your newborn, but for a child in foster care. My friend, thank God, filled in my work slot for me, and he gave me money every single week to help me afford it. That allowed me to stay home with Jason for two months.

Jason took a lot of getting used to. He wanted food every three hours. I learned how to care for him by trial and error, and I made some calls to my girlfriends. They were very supportive.

But when those two months were almost up, no one could tell me how to get Jason daycare. The daycare centers I called were booked, and most can’t take young babies. The caseworker knew absolutely nothing. She had no suggestions at all. I was so irate with ACS and the agency that I almost thought of giving Jason up. The only way I found daycare was by going to a Web site I found about Circle of Support, a support group for foster parents. I attended one of the meetings, and in that meeting there was a representative from ACS who helped me, and I was able to get child care and go back to work.

When I got back to work, I rearranged my schedule to make sure I pick up Jason from daycare by 6 o’clock. After that, the daycare starts charging something like \$5 a minute, so I’m always hustling to get there on time. I also switched things around to make sure he has visits with his mother and father. We do two every week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I leave my job in Manhattan early to be in Brooklyn at 5 o’clock for the two-hour visits. I leave work two hours early those days and I do not get paid for that time, so I’ve taken a pay cut.

The mother comes to the visits more often than not, but the father very rarely shows up. Some days no one shows up, and I don’t find out until I get to the agency. Both the mother and father live in the Bronx, so it’s really difficult for them to come to Brooklyn, and they complain about that all the time. I gave them my cell phone number and have asked them repeatedly, “If you’re not going to make these visits, please call me so I don’t need to leave work early.” But yesterday no one called to tell me they weren’t coming, so I missed two hours of pay to go to Brooklyn, for nothing.

One thing the agency is trying to do, but that hasn’t happened, is have a meeting to discuss how well the parents are doing. The first time we were supposed to have that discussion was in October. It still hasn’t happened, and it’s March. But we really need to talk because everyone is now so attached to this child, and my thing is I really want to adopt him. I am so attached to him, it’s like he’s my own child. I’m talking about it now and I’m tearing up, and if he can’t be with me, it is going to hurt tremendously. You look at Jason

and you fall in love. And I just want the agency to let me know what to expect.



MARCH 5: GABRIELA GUZMAN

This week Anthony, my 18-year-old, the one who’s usually good, got out of control. He was doing laundry and the machine got off track because it was too heavy. So I took out his jeans. On the way to my foster parent support group, I told him that when the machine is done, take out the clothes and put the jeans back in. Then I’m at the meeting and he calls me on my cell phone. He said, “What the fuck? You took my pants out of the machine! They’ll shrink!”

I told him it would be fine, but he starts saying, “Nobody touches my fucking pants!” Then he tells me he punched a hole in the dresser.

When I get home, I tell him, “Listen, you have no business breaking anything. Everything in the house I work for.” I clean apartments for a living. And he starts yelling about his pants. So I said, “Who the hell do you think you are, yelling and screaming at me? I don’t need foster kids in my house! This is a favor out of my heart!” Then I told him that since he broke my property, he won’t get his allowance from the agency.

He said, “Oh, no! No one takes my money! Do you want to get your face busted?”

I said, “Come on, let’s get it on,” because I don’t back down.

“Oh, why? You’re going to put your sons after me?”

I said, “I don’t have to call my sons. You have to go.”

The next day I saw his caseworker and signed the 30-day notice to get him out of my house along with Greg. The worker told me that next time I feel threatened by him to just have him arrested. She said, “If he’s really ballistic, we’ll just lock his ass up in Kings County.” He’s been hospitalized there before.

That happened on Wednesday and Anthony didn’t talk to me until the next Monday. I didn’t talk to him either. The only reason he talked to me Monday was because he wanted his allowance. I said, “Here you are, asking for money after what you did to me. You didn’t respect me, and you broke my property.”

He said, “Yeah, I’m sorry.”

Things are better now, but I’m still having him moved because one thing I’ve learned is if they do it to you once, they do it to you again. But I have mixed feelings about it ’cause I really like the kid. He suffers from depression and he won’t take medication. He is supposed to go to therapy, but he won’t. So I’m letting him stay until they find him a home.

I don’t like getting rid of kids, but there’s little things they do that I’ve been telling them not to since October. And here we are in March.

I’m not a tape recorder. My rules are clear. I don’t make a fuss when they stay out too late or don’t come home. I just say, “Let me know where you’re staying.” Sometimes they

My rules are clear. I don't make a fuss when they stay out too late or don't come home. What I don't tolerate is: don't break my property, don't disrespect me, don't threaten me.

come home drunk, and I won't make a fuss about that either. What I don't tolerate is: don't break my property, don't disrespect me, don't threaten me.

I feel bad for them, but like I tell them, there's consequences to everything you do.



MARCH 11: HAZEL DAVIS

You can't go day by day with Ruby. She goes hour by hour, and she doesn't stay steady.

Today Ruby's teacher said Ruby might get suspended for walking out of the classroom. The agency told me, "Don't get upset. It might get Ruby in a class where she gets more attention." But probably not until fall.

At home, Ruby is doing pretty good, but she's wanting to be a baby again. She says she doesn't think it's fair that when you're a baby everyone takes care of you. Sometimes Ruby regresses to a 3-year-old, and she doesn't remember how to bathe or feed herself.

I say, "You are going on 12 years old, and you're starting to be a teenager, and that's the way God wants it."

Ruby says, "God made a mistake."

You can tell that in her old foster home Ruby was the one taking care of Gina. When they first came here, Ruby said, "I'll change her Pampers. I'll wipe her. I'll feed her." She was the little mother and didn't want no one else taking care of Gina. I let it go for a little while, 'cause you can't do too much at one time with Ruby. You have to slide your way in or all she'll do is rebel, so I just took my time.

Then Ruby and I took care of Gina together. I'd say, "Sometimes you need a little help." Soon I told Ruby, "I'm the mother, you just be the child."

Now Ruby don't want to be bothered with Gina. But Gina, she's so attached to Ruby, she cries for her. But now Ruby runs around saying, "I'm not your mother! I'm not your mother!"

Today I was going to give Ruby an iPod because she loves music. But after the school called, I told Ruby I'm not going to reward her with it yet. I told her that if she stays in her classroom for a week, then I will give it to her.

She told me I'm not being fair. "But Mommy!" she said. That's her favorite thing to say: "But Mommy!"

"Why not three days?" she asked.

I said, "I think you could do better and I'm going to push

you. You can walk around the classroom, but don't walk out the door."

When Ruby gets angry, it's big fears that come up, and she gets scared I won't keep her. She'll say to me, "You're going to put me away. You'll get rid of me!"

I tell her, "I'm going to keep you. I'm going to adopt you, but you gotta help me. I can't get in your brain."

Ruby wants to change her name to mine. She knows that all the kids I raised were adopted, except for Cassandra, who didn't want her name changed because she was looking for her father, but he turned out to be dead. Now my kids talk to Ruby about how when they first came to me they felt they didn't belong, too. One, Jenna, calls from Fordham University every night. She says, "I know how you feel, Ruby, but Mommy has your back." And I tell Ruby I was a foster child too. I let her know my parents were alcoholics and I was in and out of homes, back and forth. You didn't know how long you would be there. That's why I said I'd never make a child feel uncomfortable, like they don't belong. That's why I won't lay a hand on a child. Now my parents live in the house next door. At least, that's the mother I chose.



MARCH 11: GABRIELA GUZMAN

They still haven't found a group home for Greg, the 20-year-old, and this week when I moved his dirty sneakers from the radiator cover I had started painting white, he yelled, "Don't touch my fucking things!"

The sneakers are a gift from his girlfriend, so he thinks they're made of gold.

When we have our arguments like that, I don't feel threatened that he's going to hit me, but I do feel threatened that I'll hit him and he'll hit me back. So I said, "Go to your girlfriend's 'cause I can't deal with you."

But he wouldn't. So I called the police. When the police came, I said to Greg, "I'm not having you arrested. You just have to leave."

The cop looks at him and says, "Don't you have nowhere to go?"

Greg says no. This doesn't make sense since he spent most of last week at his girlfriend's. So I said, "What's happening at your girlfriend's house that you can't stay there? She have the next man with her?" That's when Greg came at me screaming



and yelling, and the police officer restrained him.

Eventually my neighbor told Greg he could sleep on her sofa. She feels sorry for him. But Greg just left. Two days later he shows up at my door late at night with the police, saying I have to let him in because I'm getting paid to look after him and he's not officially discharged from my home. Then Greg tells me there's a law that if you let someone stay in your house for 30 days, you can't throw them out, and if you do throw them out, the cops could arrest you.

Now it's the weekend, so there's no one to call at the agency for help. All you can do is call the hotline and complain. So I said Greg could stay the night. The cop says to him, "Don't look at her, don't talk to her, just go to your room and sleep."

Greg left in the morning. He was supposed to go to the agency so they could find him a new home, but he didn't, and no one knows where he is now. If he's in the street, it's because he wants to be there.

MARCH 12: RUTH DIXON

Baby Jason is just a joy to take care of. A friend and I went to see the play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," and the neighbor looked after Jason and said he was very good. Saturday I had

to make time up at work, so I left Jason at my mother's. When I picked him up, she seemed like she wanted him longer. She said, "You're already here?"

Every day Jason gets up at 4 o'clock in the morning. He drinks about four ounces. He plays in the crib and by 5 o'clock he's fussing, and that means I pick him up and bring him into my bed, and he goes back to sleep until 6 or 7 a.m. He is definitely up by 7 o'clock. That's when I give him a sponge bath and dress him, and we're out by 8 a.m. I bring him to daycare with my neighbor's son, then I drive to the subway and get to work between 9 and 9:15 a.m.

Last Thursday the mother didn't show up for Jason's visit and she didn't call. The father showed up but he only stayed there for 45 minutes of the two hours. He was in there and out. We don't really have a conversation when he's there. It's just, "Hi, how are you doing?"

He was happy to see Jason, but he really doesn't know what to do with his son. Sometimes he just plays his video games.

In that visiting room, the kids and the parents are there, but I don't see that one-on-one bonding much. I think a lot of them don't know how to bond, so they're yelling, going on and cursing, and no one is stopping them or trying to help.

Compared to Jason's father, the mother does more of the

bonding. But this Tuesday the mother called to say she was at another appointment for the agency in the Bronx, and wasn't going to make the visit. She called me at 3:05 p.m. and usually I'm on the train by then, so I told her I need a call at 3 p.m. so I don't miss work when I don't need to. She agreed. She's pretty good about that. I don't think the mother knows that I would love to adopt Jason. Her attitude toward me may change once she does.



MARCH 17: HAZEL DAVIS

This is the most difficult case I've had, but I'm going to beat this. I'm never going to turn a kid away.

We had to go to the agency this week, and Ruby always gets agitated when we go to the agency. Sometimes she won't even go into the building. So in the car I said to Ruby, "We are going to the agency. What do I not want you to do?"

Ruby said, "To show off and run around."

But the minute Ruby enters the building, she starts running and throwing her stuff. The security says, "She's really wilding out. You need to get her."

I pulled her aside and told her she could kiss her iPod and Chris Brown CD goodbye. Ruby said, "So what? I'm not going to do what you say, 'cause you're a bitch."

Now I'm always trying to understand Ruby, even through her mishaps. But I will not let her call me that. I won't allow that to happen.

I said, "I'm going to let you know, and I'll let the agency know, that you have one more time to call me a bitch and I will pack your stuff."

Whenever I get upset with her, she jumps like I'm going to slap her, and she says, "Sorry Mommy, sorry Mommy, sorry!" Gina, the 2-year-old, does it too. I tell them, "I'm never going to hit you. I promise you never have to worry about that." But they still jump.

Now Ruby said, "Oh no, Mommy. I love you. I'm sorry. This is the best house I've been in. You treat me real good."

But when we got home she started picking fights with the kids on the block. And then the school called and said she's in trouble again. She's only been there six weeks and she's already been suspended twice.

My kids and me hear Ruby talking to herself as a third party a lot. She says, "Ruby, you're stupid. Ruby, you're ugly. Ruby, nobody likes you. Ruby, you're never going to be nothing."

When my daughter Jenna hears her, she says, "Ruby, you're smart. Ruby, you're pretty. Ruby, we love you."

Sometimes I hear her sisters from her old foster home talking. Me and the foster mothers who have them get together so they can visit. The girls will say, "Remember when Ruby got peanut butter put in her eyes and ears for stealing it?"

Or Ruby will say something disrespectful, and they'll say, "If you was with that other mother, she would have knocked your teeth out of your mouth."

I don't understand how this lady got away with that. It hurts me that she was abusing these children.

Last Sunday I took Ruby to Target in Mt. Vernon, where her old foster parents live, and Ruby started to get agitated in the car. As we get closer to the store she says, "Ma, if someone snatches me, would you fight for me?" Then she started to have a panic attack. Ruby is always acting like she's real tough, but here she was sweating from the palm of her hand to her face. So I turned the car around.

Later I learned that Ruby's old foster mother shops there every Sunday, and Ruby was afraid she'd see her. Her therapist said I handled it right, but we need to let Ruby know what she should do if she does see her old foster parents. He says she knows we're going to bump into them sometime, and she's worried what will happen. He said that if there is security, she can say "hello," because even though they neglected her, it's all she knew. She still has a bond with them, and knowing she can say "hello" might make her feel better.



MARCH 20: RUTH DIXON

This week I had to take off Monday because Jason came down with a cold. He wasn't drinking and he was throwing up and everything. Now he's taking juice and milk.

We went for his visit at the agency on Tuesday. This time the father did not show and the mother only stayed an hour. I overheard a conversation she had with the caseworker. The mother had tested positive for cocaine and she was saying that she wants to give up her apartment and go into a treatment program. Whether she follows through remains to be seen, but it may delay the process of knowing whether Jason can be adopted.

The caseworker finally told me they're thinking of terminating her parental rights, but it's a wait and see how it goes, and we still haven't had an official meeting to discuss it. My heart tells me the mother won't follow through. When she's with Jason, she should be bonding with him, and there's not much of that going on anymore. Jason sits on her lap, but she's not talking or playing with him. She's there for that time and she's rushing to get out. She'll say to the caseworker, "Hurry up, I need my Metrocard."

Tuesday when I came into the room, Jason heard my voice and he started fussing. She said, "Look at him. All he hears is your voice and he starts to act up."

I said, "He just wants something to eat, is all."

She said, "You know that he's fussing for you."

That's the first time I saw a little bit of jealousy from her.

I basically feel that she is just waiting for the cause that will make her have to give Jason up. She's coming to visits, but she's just showing up. And she never asks me about Jason or for a picture. I'm waiting for her to ask me about whether he's crawling or turned over, but she doesn't.

I'm getting Jason baptized in April, and I asked for her

permission. The father didn't want me to, but the mother said fine. But she never says, "I would love to be there." I don't even know what her religion is, and she didn't ask me mine.

I want to get Jason circumcised, too, so I asked the caseworker whether I needed to get permission from the mother. She said, "Just go ahead and do it. What's beneficial to the child, you can just go ahead and do."



MARCH 20: GABRIELA GUZMAN

The agency had a meeting to discuss Greg's future. It was kind of tense. Greg's parents abandoned him when he was a baby, so he doesn't have family and he didn't bring anyone with him. All he would say was, "I don't have nothing to say. I just want to be left alone."

Once you're 18, you can sign yourself out of the system, and they want him to do that because he's wasting everyone's time. But he refuses. So they were going to place him in a group home, but he didn't want that either. He just left, and for days no one knew where he is. They told me that eventually he showed up at the agency, but I don't know what happened after that.

So he's out of my house, and I already have a new kid. They called me at 5:30 last night and he came at 10 o'clock. I don't know too much about his situation, but he's 8, and he's a handful. He's speech impaired, he has problems walking and he's not fully toilet trained. He and my other little one feed off each other. They argue all day long, fighting and throwing toys at each other.

Anthony, the 18-year-old, got arrested for getting in a fight and having a knife. He has to go to court and do community service. But we're getting along better. Now that he sees what happened to Greg, he's begging for me to let him stay. He's saying, "Please give me a chance. If I start over in a new house, I don't know what's going to happen."

I told him that since the other week was the first time I'd had problems with him, I'd let him stay. But I let him know that if he messes up again, he's leaving. So we'll just have to see what happens.



MARCH 26: HAZEL DAVIS

This was a very, very adventurous week. Ruby roamed the hallway at school and threatened to knock a teacher in the face. The teacher said she needed Ruby's caseworker's number because she would have to suspend her. I don't even know who Ruby's caseworker is. I've had three since Ruby's been with me.

Then Friday night I had friends over with their children and my grandson, Brian, who is 5 years old. Ruby came into the room where the adults were and said, "Brian touched all of our private parts."

So I called Miss May, the foster parent advocate, and she came over. She lives just blocks away. Then I called the girls in. When allegations happen, I like to clear it right there. Brian started crying hysterically and both girls said that he did not touch anyone. I told him, "Brian, to protect yourself, don't ever go into Ruby's room again."

Then, Saturday, my son, who's in his 20s, brought three friends over. Ruby put on tight, tight shorts to show her butt and tied up her shirt and pulled it down. Then she paraded in front of the boys. I said, "Go put clothes on. You don't parade in front of grown men like that."

Another day my friend and his wife visited. Ruby went into her room, then came out with less clothes on and her shirt tied in a knot. You should have seen the way she walked in front of the man! He left with his wife right then. He said, "I'm not going to be arrested for molestation."

Sunday night Ruby threatened my little sister who lives next door. She shook an umbrella at her and said, "I would kill you, you bitch! You don't know who you're fucking with!" She was screaming on the top of her lungs, so the neighbors came running. My son started crying. My daughter tried to calm Ruby down, but Ruby started yelling at her, too, saying, "Fuck you. Eat my pussy!"

I said, "That's it. I don't allow none of my kids to talk like that."

Ruby said, "Fuck you too!"

I said, "Time out!"

She started throwing things out of her dresser and screaming and hollering, "I hate you!" My other daughter, Jenna, put Ruby in a lock. Jenna said, "I love you, Ruby! It's going to be all right!" After about an hour Ruby calmed down.

That's when I said, "You know what, Ruby? I've had enough. Whenever you can't get your way you go into your rages, and I've been nothing but nice to you. Do you see anyone else talk to me this way?"

She said, "No."

I said, "You know what? I don't have to allow you to curse at me and tear everything up. I'd rather let you go."

The next day the school calls again. The teacher says something has to be done because Ruby is affecting all the kids. I said, "The same thing is going on here. The kids think Ruby is getting special treatment and is above the law."

Miss May said this girl has to be hospitalized so they can evaluate her and give her the right medicine, because this medicine she's on doesn't do crap.

So Ruby will have to leave my house. I'll take her back, but she's starting to stress me, and it's not fair to my children.

When Ruby came home today, I talked to her. I told her I love her very much but she needs special help that only a hospital can give. I told her I would take her back, but only after she gets the help she needs. She started crying. She said, "This is the best house I've ever been in."

After that I prayed. I said, "Please let me know what the



reason is, God. I know you don't make mistakes. I know you do everything for a reason.”

MARCH 28: RUTH DIXON

This week is going very well. The mother didn't show up for any visits. At first, she showed up regularly. Then the visits got shorter. Now she's not showing up more than showing up. The caseworker says she's proceeding to separate their rights.

Jason is turning over now. He can really roll over, and he's trying to stand up in the crib and trying to walk. And this week he took his first step! It happened on Saturday—a baby step. He was with me and my mom, and I was holding his hand, and I said, “Come on, let's walk,” and he stepped off. I was excited. I was very, very excited.

APRIL 2: HAZEL DAVIS

I went with Ruby to the hospital and stayed with her 'til 10 o'clock at night. Before I left she said, “Mommy, don't leave me. Don't give me up. Don't lie to me and tell me you will come and get me and then send me somewhere else.”

It was hard. It was very hard.

The staff told me that the next day she had to be locked down about 10 times and she stole someone's stuff. Now she calls me about six times a day. She wants me to write a letter promising that she would come back home to live with me, and that I would adopt her. She leaves messages saying, “Mommy, I love you. Mommy, please let me come back home. Mommy, I miss you.” I save those messages.

In some ways I feel like I failed her. Even my children are sad. But Gina is doing better. She's depending on us more, and she's talking more. So in some ways it's a good thing that Ruby is gone, 'cause I can deal with Gina now. And when Ruby comes back in a month or two, I can focus on Ruby. ❀

UPDATE: At the time this story went to press, Gabriela Guzman had not heard from Greg, but she and Anthony were getting along well. Despite Ruth Dixon's request, Jason's pediatrician would not perform a circumcision without the birth mother's permission. The city is pursuing the legal termination of parental rights against both Jason's mother and father, and Dixon plans to begin adoption proceedings as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Hazel Davis recently met Gina's mother, who is 19 and in foster care herself. The young woman had begun visiting Gina, and planned to join Davis' family to celebrate the toddler's birthday in June. Ruby was scheduled to leave the hospital shortly, and Davis had begun legal proceedings to adopt her as her daughter.