

#1 p1

Friendships to Family

We picked up Nick, Maria, and Sam at their house with their bags packed and a for sale sign at the front of their house. Nick is 11, Maria is 9 and Sam is 14. This story starts off very happily. The Carter family had a very good life with loving parents and happy children until their mom made some very poor decisions. The father also could not handle this and became an alcoholic and had to enter rehab. This is when our home was opened up to the Carter children. This started a new life for both the Carter kids and the Grays.

We added new beds and dressers for the three children in our rooms so they could comfortably stay at our home. We had to share our clothes with them, our food, our rooms and our parents. After a couple of months with the Carter kids living with us, their dad decided to stop drinking and start over again. He needed a place to live after losing his home so we offered him our finished basement with a kitchen, bedroom, living room and bathroom. He could now be closer to his children. We now have three more kids living in the main part of our home and a father living in our basement. Life was going to be much different.

Each day we had to take the kids to school, to sports practice, and of course feed them. And the two older boys had huge appetites. I can remember going through ten pounds of grapes in one weekend. Our grocery bill more than doubled! A memory I have from this time is shooting basketball in the driveway and their dad would come home from work and yell, "Hey Mitch, can I have a shot?"

I would always respond saying, "Sure, here you go," and then throw him the ball. He always wanted to take a shot and shoot hoops with us. Then he would walk down in the

basement for the evening until it was time for dinner. It was a great time having the kids at our house, but it was also hard for them because they missed their mom so much and knew their dad was continuing to struggle.

Summer was now approaching. I was so excited for our family trips. My siblings and I talked and asked each other, "Were we going to go out west, Disney World, or a cruise to the islands?" I remember my parents sat us down and we had a family meeting. My parents quietly stated, "We would not be able to go to any far places or big trips because of the expense of having the extra children and adult living with us." At first I was upset, but soon quickly realized it was going to be a better life for the Carter kids, and their dad, and I was satisfied. My parents still planned day trips to the beach, a day walking around in New York City, and a trip to Boston for a night where we all stayed in one hotel room. It was crowded, but we loved it because we were all together. For both the Carters and the Grays, it turned out to be one of the best summers ever.

Once summer ended, it was now time for back to school shopping. I usually loved shopping for back to school clothes in the mall but this year was different. Instead of going to the mall and the outlets we had to go to consignment stores and thrift stores. Back to school shopping for six kids was much different for the budget than shopping for three kids. The kids all had a great time picking through the racks at the thrift stores. We were all thankful for the blessings of each other. I remember after coming home from a long day of shopping, my mom had a surprise for us all. She had bought each of us a pair of new Nike shoes that she had found at a very low price. All of us were so excited and screamed, "Yes!" We took these shoes and cared for them because they were the only ones we were getting brand new this school year.

This cycle continued on for three more years. The Carter's mother was out of the picture and the father continued to be in and out of rehab. At the end of these three years, the day finally came when the dad was able to take care of himself and take the kids home with him again. It was a time of mixed emotions for all of us. After the Carter kids packed up their bags and prepared to leave our home there were tears. These were tears of both joy and sadness. Joy that their dad was able to care for them again, and sadness that they would be leaving our family and the stability it had created for them the last few years. I can remember them saying, "We miss our dad and want to be with him, but we do not want to leave your family." We had become just that; a family.

As I look back on these last three years, I can easily apply it to the 4-way test of things we think, say or do. Is it the truth? Yes, the truth is this family desperately needed our help and our resources because they were suffering and in need of hope. Is it fair to all concerned? Yes, this act of servitude taught our family how to show compassion to others and how to share the resources we had. The benefits for the Carter family were numerous. Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Yes, the Carter family are our lifelong friends. They still spend many weekends with us and they know they can come to us anytime and our home is always open to them. The three years they spent with us created an unbreakable bond. Will it be beneficial to all concerned? Yes, both families benefitted greatly from this experience. The Carter family had a family life and a stable home with loving parents for three years. The Gray family had three new siblings added to their family and gained wonderful lifelong friendships and valuable life lessons in giving, compassion, and showing love to others less fortunate than yourself.

#1 p4

I am thankful every day for this situation that was brought into our lives. I will continue to apply these lifelong lessons learned through these past few years. I will also continue to apply the 4-way test of things we think, say or do in my daily life to continue to make me a better person and a better friend to all.