



The Beginning

In the late 1970's our family met a local high school girl – Julie. Through having her around the house with the other young people, we learned that she was in foster care, that she'd been apprehended from her mother's care with 5 of her siblings in Ontario when she was only five years old. She and two of her sisters had been adopted, and moved to the west coast with their new family; things didn't go well for the family here and they returned to Ontario – leaving Julie behind in BC's foster care system. Her journey hadn't been a good one; she'd experienced every kind of abuse along the way. She was a bright and pleasant girl, and was welcomed to our family circle.

During the next six months, she was moved through 3 foster homes. The father of the family she was with when we met abused alcohol; she was often asked to care for their 2 year old when the mother went out. She was nervous of the father's drinking and the placement broke down. She was next placed with a family with 3 young children. The family had no understanding of Julie's distress and needs, expecting her to be a helpful baby-sitter and a model student. Surprisingly, she'd managed to get to grade 10 in spite of having moved through far too many schools, even managing her school's football team. But she was too upset to concentrate, and was missing classes. Soon that placement had broken down. Julie's final foster home was with 'Auntie Lil', a tough-talking rough diamond of a woman. At times there were 12 kids in her home, two severely disabled. She was always on their side, and I credit her with saving Julie's life.

The month before she turned 19, Julie was informed that on her birth date she would receive a cheque for \$400 and would thereafter be an independent 'adult' – no longer supported by foster care, and she would have to leave Auntie Lil's house to make space for another foster child. She was utterly unprepared for that move and the impact was terrible.

This had all been new life material to me. I'd met children in care before, and often wondered what their lives must be like, but had never had a long relationship with one of them, nor witnessed first-hand the chaos, instability and injustice of their young lives. I was accustomed to research, so I undertook a study of foster care in this country and beyond.

My search led to me to learn about the SOS Children's Villages and the amazing work they'd been doing since 1949 with children who were in need of both temporary and permanent care. I began to correspond with Dr. Hans Reinprecht, Secretary General of SOS Kinderdorf International [KDI] in Vienna, in September, 1981. In 1983, a Founding Committee was established and began meeting regularly.

By 1986, we were affiliated with SOS Kinderdorf International, registered as a society in BC, and given federal charitable status in Ottawa, with permission to accumulate funds for 10 years toward a building project. From 1986 to 1992, we did up to seven fundraising events a year and by 1992, \$38,000 was in the bank for Village construction. In 1994, the organization saw the purchase of 2.5 acres of land in Surrey for \$630,000, funded by KDI. In 1999, after a very long journey, the first home was opened and the Ministry referred the first child to the Village.

Today, there are five homes in the Surrey Village, housing 22 children. Community outreach to other foster children and their families has been in place since 2003 in the form of literacy support, art therapy, neurofeedback training, transition to adulthood and autism services.

-Gilles and Lois Bouchard, Founding Members