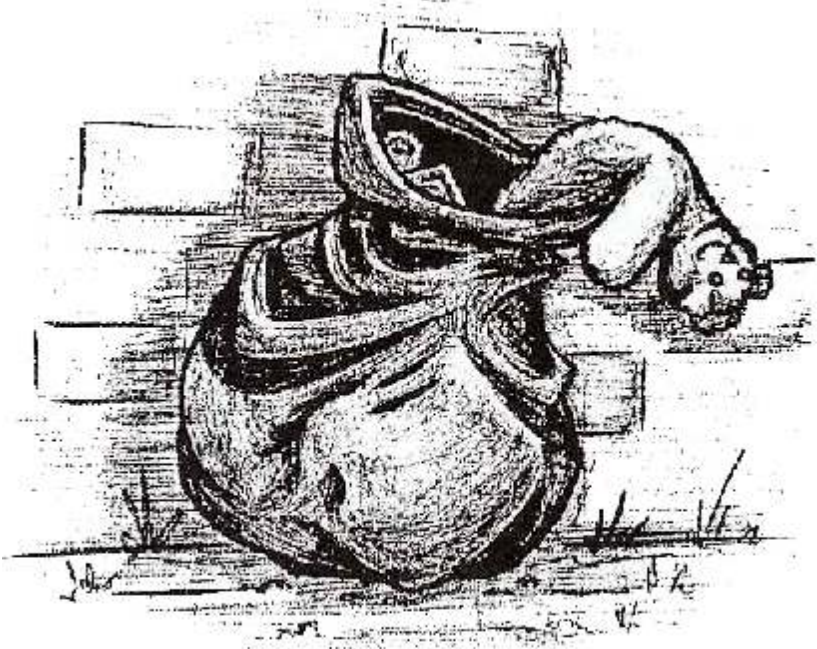


# Life in care

By Jade Sugden



Illustrated by Glenn Petterson

## About the author

**The author is a 15 year old girl who has been in and out of care since she was 9 years old.**

Jade has a younger brother and sister who are also in care or adopted. She has many personal issues and her behaviour in school has been outrageous, shocking, abusive, offensive and yet, more recently, calm, caring, understanding and focussed. She has an amazing ability to empathise with other young people and their problems.

Jade was on the verge of permanent exclusion when she decided to write this book. The writing of the book has given her the opportunity to focus on something worthwhile and this has resulted in vastly improved behaviour in school.

Jade is already planning her next book, an autobiography and hopes in the future to have a career in psychology or counselling.

## Acknowledgements

A great thanks goes to Joanne Wilkinson and Lauraine Wharton these amazing people who encouraged me to write my feelings and thoughts on paper. This has helped me a lot more with the way I handle my life and anger inside me.

## Dedications

This book is dedicated to my beautiful little sister Toni-Leigh whose memories I have missed in the past until the next time we meet.

Also to my young brother who has been through a tough time. I will always love you both very deeply and with all of my heart.

# So you want to be a foster carer?

So, you have probably had training and been on lots of courses, to lots of groups and meetings on how to look after and fulfil a young persons needs.

But I bet you have never really understood what it's really like for them. As you read through this book it will help you to kind of know how they're feeling and what is going on inside their head.

This book is based on my personal experience. Let me give you a few words of advice:

**"Don't expect your young person to be perfect, treat them fairly, forgive them but not too many times!" (especially if you decide to look after teenagers!).**

**Please read on..**

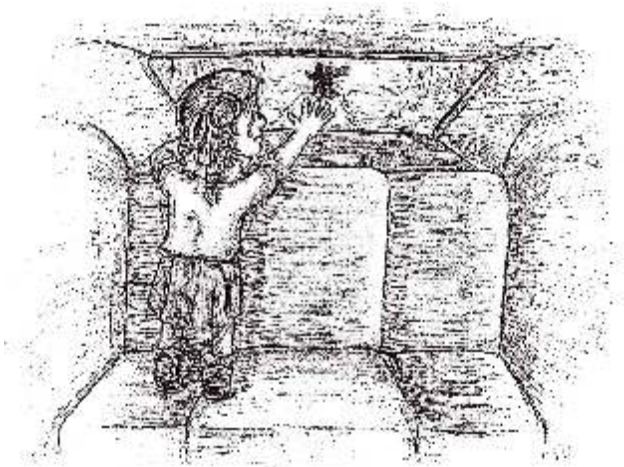
# My personal experiences

The memory of my family being torn and broken to pieces, having to love them and leave them! With my teddy bear in one hand and big thick, untidy bin liners. I remember just blanking everything out and not having the strength to hold on. It was like I didn't have a care in the world, but really I had everything to care about!

Next thing I knew I was in a social workers car, wondering where I was being taken to, who would be looking after me and when would I see or speak to my family again? Also would I ever see the day when my family would be normal and happy again?

At the time my emotions were all over and I was quite young and had to grow up fast. The only thoughts which kept creeping into my head were, where have my poor little brother and sister gone? All I wanted was for them to be safe and happy.

Even though we all have ups and downs with our families you should NEVER put a young persons family down, because they might seem ok about it, but underneath they're really not!



# Putting on a brave face

I finally arrived. I met so many different people, the only thing was, I got very shy and scared especially when I felt crowded. Some young people love to be the centre of attention but some really don't.

Mind you they were all very sympathetic towards me. They tried to make me feel very welcome. Then I was horrified to find out that I had to share a room with someone I had never met in my life before.

**In a way I got lucky because the girl I met had some of the same problems as me, so we communicated after we had chatted, and gave each other a chance.**

I started to really fit in and like my carer then. She came across as kind, loving and caring. So I thought to myself if I just give this a chance, maybe I'll like it. Although this placement was miles away from home I needed my space and security but only for a short while though.

As my first few nights passed all I could do was lie awake and cry, or worry thinking of how my mother was handling all of this. Also how my little brother and especially my little sister who was only 4 yrs old were coping with this!

The worst of all of this was I felt I had a responsibility. I was the oldest and I felt I had to do something about it and know what was going to happen but that was the thing, I didn't, I also did not like to think about that either!

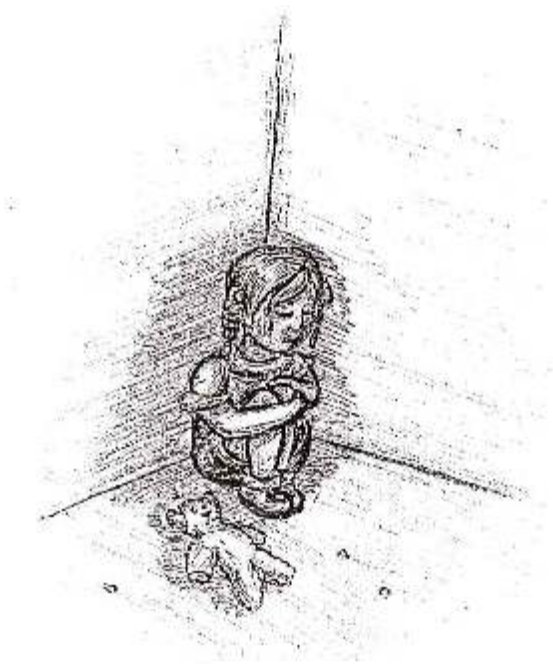
# Really fitting in

Over the first few weeks I had been there I had the pleasure of meeting my carers family members, which sometimes is a good thing for a young person who just wants to be loved and needed by a family, but for me it felt strange. I think mainly because of the environment which surrounded me.

**As time went by and I was doing something at a certain time, I would wonder where each member of my family were, what they were doing and if they were having fun.**

But it started to hit me that I wasn't going to be here for just 2 weeks and I realised I had to start and make an effort and try to fit in. As I started fitting in I got to see my little brother and sister in supervised visits, which made me feel better but we were still all miles away from each other!

As time passed I got used to the area and ended up in a local school. I didn't really want to be there but it was apparently in my best interests.



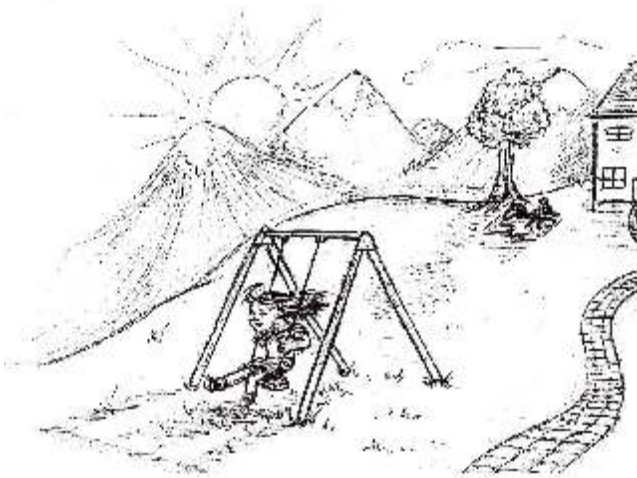
# One year on...

My behaviour got worse and worse because of the whole care thing and I used to bottle things up inside of me and let people think that I was alright but the thing people need is someone to be there for them when they're down. So if you are ever in doubt just comfort them and try and get the problem out of them.

This made my relationship with my carer and her family get worse and I started getting kicked out of school on purpose just to see if my mother was coping and alright. Then I started thinking, and putting things into perspective and my behaviour at school gradually started improving, also they supported me that little bit extra.

**Thinking of this from another young persons point of view, you have to listen to their opinion and if you don't agree, try your hardest to compromise.**

For instance when it comes to education it is in your hands to give them the best one they need. But one thing is to make sure they are not just agreeing for your sake or to make others happy, because people do have feelings underneath. Also they might struggle to fit in and make new friends because I know I did in the beginning.



## Two years on ...

I started to run away and get into trouble and my carer expected me to be perfect, which is something no human being could ever be! Also, as I was a teenager I started drinking alcohol and going in the house drunk. I only used to do it because I was angry, depressed and I felt I never had anyone to talk to because I didn't like sharing my problems with others, also I just wanted to fit in! Because of this behaviour, more of my privileges were stopped and more rules put in place, which isn't always a successful punishment as it may make people's behaviour even worse and they may react even more.

I did these things for a number of reasons, like I couldn't cope with all the stress, not sleeping and being quite depressed. The thing was, I needed someone or something to take my anger out on or take my mind off it. Things got even more complicated when my younger sister got adopted, also when I was told I would never see her again until she was 18 years of age.

**So, if you have a young person who has circumstances like this, you need to be as supportive as possible and always be there for a chat.**

Even if they don't want a chat just start a conversation with them about anything. Also try and take their minds off their problems and do something creative or logical.





If you decide to be harsh on your young people, (which I would advise you not to be), be easy going and have limits because they may start to be disrespect you.

The one thing I would tell a young person is that: “ I regret most of my mistakes, but at the end of the day I have learned from them and now think about the consequences of my actions”.

I learnt from them while moving on at the same time, because I will be moving out of my placement of nearly three years shortly, not because I am choosing to, but because of all the trouble I have been through and caused!

Also, when you have been through a rough time it sometimes makes you a stronger person and wonder would you ever let your family or children get in a bad situation? Another thing I will always try and stick to is, if I ever have children, I would never dream of giving them the life that I have been through.



# Friendly suggestions

- **As a teenager my biggest need would have been to have my own space and privacy.** You may want to take this into consideration if you decide to foster in the age group 12-16 year olds. Fair enough have ground rules but have certain limits also.
- **Another point is to make the bedrooms as homely as possible.** Say if you have a small child you would need it to be colourful. If you have an older person you may let them have a few posters or pictures of their family up, within reason.
- **Be as easy going and supportive as you can.** At least for the first few months if the placements are going to be long term because young people like a good level of security. Also try and base your relationship on trust and honesty.
- **Help them with their schoolwork as much as you can.** Also keep in touch with their thoughts and feelings.

# Thinking points

## Young persons actions

Shouting and screaming abuse and being very aggressive towards you!

Pretending to get on with you and your family, putting a fake smile and a brave face on then crying at night.

## Young persons mind

I just need someone to take my anger out on! But I didn't mean anything I said or did.

I really would like to fit in but I just wish I was with my own family.

## What they would like you to say or do back

Give them some time alone, get them a hobby outside of school like boxing, dancing etc.

Let them ring a member of their family if possible and try to include them more.

**"I hate you and I can't wait to leave this dump!"**

That's just one of the many things children say.  
Especially when they're put into foster care or into a home.

From this book you can acquire many tips and some good advice that you may want to take into consideration if you're a foster carer, training to be one, or you work in a home. It will give you a better understanding of what it takes to handle children.

**So please take a look inside and find out!**

