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HERALD

SEPTEMBER 29, 1983

# Magazine



*Foster families*

# HERALD Magazine

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*Sitting in the living room of her parents' home, Jennifer Trafton, 8, shows a foster baby her Hollie Hobbie doll.*

Cover photo by Tony Kirves

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Joseph and Paula Trafton have two children; Arvin and Corry Vos have five. That's enough for most people, but both couples have taken parenthood a step further. They've become foster parents. The Trafton's have cared for seven infants and preschoolers in the past year, and in a decade, the Vos's have taken in more than 40 teenagers.  
 Story by Craig Dezern.  
 Photos by Tony Kirves.

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Bales of hay line Charles Anderson's "classroom" on a farm south of Bowling Green where the 30-year-old teaches Western's equestrian classes. He has worked with horses since he was 16 at a ranch near Owensville, Mo., and has been at Western since 1978.  
 Story by Barry Rose.  
 Photos by Ray Thomas.

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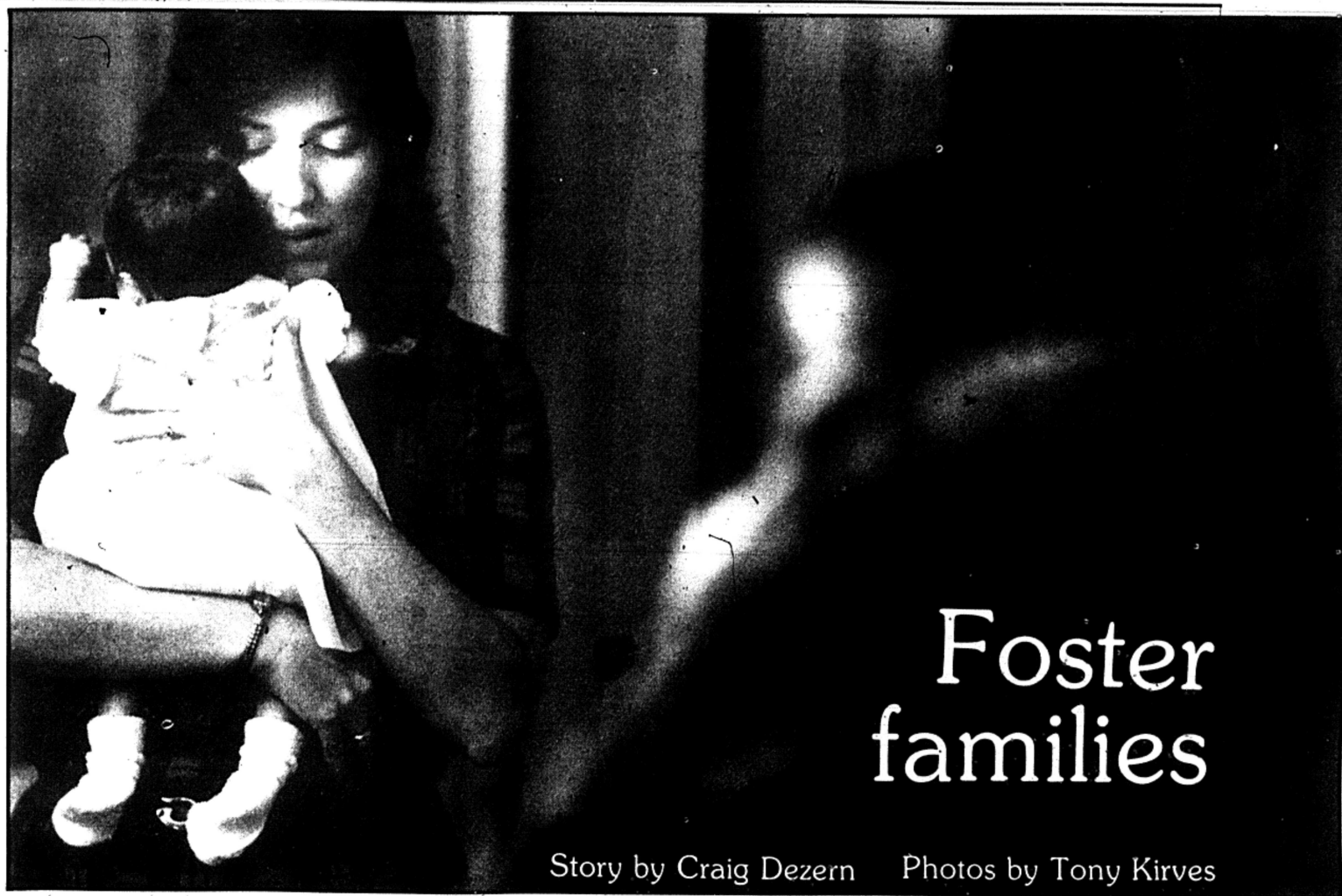
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# Foster families

Story by Craig Dezern Photos by Tony Kirves



Maybe it's an abandoned infant or a teenager whose dad has a drinking problem. It

could be that some kid's mom beat up on him, or maybe she had to go to the hospital and there's no place to send him.

Maybe he's lonely and scared. Maybe he doesn't understand why his parents can't get along, and why he can't stay with them.

And maybe he needs everything anybody can give him.

Maybe he needs foster parents like Dr. Joseph Trafton and his wife Paula. Or Dr. Arvin Vos and his wife Corry.

The Traftons have cared for infants and preschoolers for about a year. The Voses have housed about 40 teenagers over the past 10 years.

The families have covered the range of foster parent problems and triumphs.

Mrs. Trafton has spent Saturday night nursing a sick baby and missed church the next day because she was too tired to move. But she's also had the thrill of taking a 2-day-old baby home from the hospital and watching him grow for more than a month.

And the Voses have given up a foster child because his drug problem was destroying their family life. But they have also taken in a 14-year-old girl and have seen her grow into a responsible adult and permanent friend of the family.

Good and bad, they've taken the foster

parent experience, and neither family looks back with regret.

**S**upper's cooking at the Trafton's. Above the simmering and clanking cutlery, a baby's fussy cry can be heard.

Trafton, an assistant professor of philosophy and religion, sits in a blue easy chair. A studio portrait of his children, Joe Joe, 5, and Jennifer, 8, is on a table by his side.

He holds a newborn girl on his knee, and while Jennifer practices handstands, he pats the baby gently on the back, coaxing a burp.

The infant is the Trafton's seventh foster child, but Joe Joe treats her as if she's the first. While the food is placed on the table, he kneels by the baby, cooing, making faces, tickling her feet. But the baby is sick — Mrs. Trafton has just taken her to the doctor — and Joe Joe's efforts are wasted. She starts crying again. Finally, Mrs. Trafton lays the baby on her lap, and she hushes.

"You never know with a baby if he'll be calm and let you eat, or if he'll want to be held or fed," Trafton said.

But even with the crying, the dirty diapers and the 4 a.m. feedings, the Traftons prefer babies for foster children.

"Some have been probably neglected," Mrs. Trafton said. "I was expecting to spend a lot of time with them, but they need constant attention. That sort of surprised me."

Paula Trafton remembers the televised appeal for foster parents in 1975 that lured

her into foster parenthood.

"I think that's what got to me — that it was for babies."

She was ready to start then, but Trafton was writing his dissertation and working full time. So they put it off. It was March 1982 before they were certified.

They take short-term and emergency cases. They never know when the social worker will call, or how long the child will stay when he gets there.

Their first case came that May. A mother was giving her son for adoption, and he needed a place to stay until it could be settled.

"I went into the hospital when the baby was 2 days old and just brought the baby home," Mrs. Trafton said. "It was the easiest baby I ever got."

Appropriately, they called him Adam. "When I did pick up Adam at the hospital," Mrs. Trafton said, "I said to the social worker — 'Gee, Brenda. How am I ever going to give this baby up?' And she turned to me and said, 'You have to.' And she just turned around, and that's all we said about it."

The thought of getting close to a child and then giving him up keeps many people away from foster parenting, she said. But the Traftons have learned to cope with the loss.

"We knew when we got into it that they would come and they would go," she said. "Not that you haven't shed a few tears," her husband reminded her.

They still think about their 1½ months with Adam because he was the first, and he was so young, she said.

"When he was a year old, I thought, he's

*After changing a diaper, Paula Trafton gives the foster baby a hug of affection in front of the Trafton's bedroom mirror.*

walking, and he's talking, and I'll probably never see him.

"The kids talk about him all the time. They say that he was their favorite."

Jennifer said she doesn't like to see any foster babies leave. "It really bothers me when I'm at school and they leave," she said.

That's probably because she spends more time helping take care of the baby than most girls her age spend playing with dolls. Joe Joe also does what he can.

"They both really love babies," Mrs. Trafton said. "They both want to hold them and touch them. Joe Joe is always touching the baby. He'll be a great father someday. He'll know everything."

**B**ut he doesn't always get along as well with older foster children, Mrs. Trafton said.

"He gets kind of threatened sometimes," she said. "If he's the same age Joe Joe is and he's vying for my attention, Joe Joe gets a little jealous."

But Joe Joe doesn't mind sharing his toys, and sometimes, that's all it takes to break the ice.

"Most of them have been kids who apparently didn't have too many toys," Trafton said. "So you could put them in Joe Joe's room with all the stuff he has, and they think they are in heaven."

"The simplest thing, perhaps, is just letting them play and have fun and not have

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The Trafton's 5-year-old son, Joe Joe, feeds the foster baby a bottle of milk as Paula helps him.



At the dinner table, the baby gets attention from Paula as the Traftons eat dinner.

Paula tries to hush the foster baby from crying.



to interact with these strange people. Whether the child is an infant or a preschooler,

Mrs. Trafton said, her children learn from helping him.

"I think it's teaching them a whole lot," she said. "It's teaching them to care about other people."

**J**udy feels lucky to have been placed in the Voses' home.

"I found someone who cared," she said. "Most foster families don't care. Maybe it's because they don't know how to reach out, or they don't want to spend the time, but the Voses did."

Judy, now a 24-year-old nurse at The Medical Center at Bowling Green, moved in with the Voses when she was 14 and stayed until her high school graduation.

After four other foster homes, she found herself in a six-bedroom house with three little Voses and three temporary foster children. But she still felt alone.

"I wasn't sure if Corry would be a physical person with her emotion, which I really needed. At first, she wasn't, but she warmed up after a while."

Because Judy stayed longer than any other foster child in the Voses' career, they learned from each other.

Their quiet but firm attitude was new to her. "I was used to people hitting me all the time," she said. "They never hit me, not one time. And I did some pretty rotten things. Like one time I didn't come in until 3 in the morning, and Arvin was standing on the porch waiting."

She was grounded for a month, she said, laughing.

"They were probably more reasonable than the other families. They listened to what I had to say."

"Corry was so traditional. I think I really broadened her."

Mrs. Vos agreed. "We went through the usual type of conflicts parents go through with young adults," she said. "She was growing up, and we had to give her more liberty than we had been."

Judy taught her that she couldn't control every aspect of a foster child's behavior, and she taught Mrs. Vos to listen.

"We would have 'passionate discussions' where she would be adamant about her positions," Mrs. Vos said. But the important thing was that Judy felt at home enough to stand up for her opinion. "And she would just keep expressing it until we heard."

Mrs. Vos described Judy as their star foster child, a mature teenager and academically motivated.

Judy keeps in touch with the Voses, and the bond between them is strong. Several times a week, they babysit for the 7-year-old sister Judy cares for.

"Some ways, I think we still function as parents for her, but as an adult, not as a child," Mrs. Vos said.

When Judy visits, it's a quieter house than the one she stayed in for four years. Vos, a professor of philosophy and religion, might be playing the piano, accompanying his oldest daughter, Jolene, while she plays the bassoon. The other four Vos children might be playing their instruments, doing homework or watching television.

But the foster children are gone. Mrs. Vos is working on her doctorate in psychology at Vanderbilt and doesn't have time to care for them.

The last child left this summer, but the way the Voses handle their children shows what kind of foster parents they were.

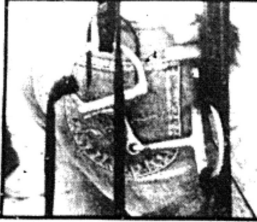
Vos is affectionate, holding Sarah, 8, or Daniel, 6, as he talks. Later he excuses himself to read the two youngest a bedtime story.

They have high expectations of their children. Every child plays the piano, and when they are older they take up another instrument. The children seldom watch television, and never before they finish their homework.

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# Teaching horse sense



*Students in the basic equestrian class return riding gear after class*

*Demonstrating how to saddle a horse to the basic equestrian class. Charles Anderson explains the importance of binding the stirrups so they don't flop down and hit the horse's gut*



Connected by braided ropes held by their riders, eight horses walked a figure-8 — their noses almost in line.

"I'll tell you what. There's a lot of horsemen who've been riding for a long time who can't do that," Charles Anderson told his basic equestrian class, which included several who had never ridden before.

Dressed in boots, jeans and a western shirt, he looked at home in the middle of the dusty makeshift ring on the John O'Brien farm 7 miles south of Bowling Green. Western keeps 22 horses there because there's got enough money for a barn.

"This won't work if you're looking at the ground," he said with a Texas twang. "You've got to talk to the person you're riding with."

The riders alternately slowed their animals, and then urged them on with a kick, trying to keep the wavering line straight.

Cowboys and Indians it isn't, and equestrianism is a lot more than jumping on and saying, "Giddy up!"

Students learn that from the beginning.

Each learns to catch his horse, brush its coat, comb its mane, clean and dress its hooves to keep them soft, and finally saddle and bridle their animal.

The work continues as they warm up on the horse each day — stretching and then turning 360 degrees in the saddle as someone else leads the animal, standing in the saddle to learn balance, dismounting and getting back on as the horse walks.

"Heels down, toes up, knees up.

There's so much stuff to remember," said Marjia Torok, a Louisville sophomore who had never ridden before. "The first time I got on, it was so exciting."

Anderson estimates that three-fourths of his basic equestrian students had little ex-

perience on a horse.

Most of his students are female. "Some men come in thinking it's going to be cowboy and Indian hour. We part company real quick."

Anderson has worked with horses since he was 16 at a ranch near Owensville, Mo., which was owned by the grandfather of the woman he later married. During summers the three ran a horse rental concession in the Ozarks State Park in Missouri.

Cheryl, his wife, said they were once trail riding when her husband's mount refused to cross a puddle of water. She said there were several ways around the puddle, but she waited an hour as he persuaded his horse to cross.

"It's very important not to let them get away with anything," Anderson said. "They're just like kids."

They now own one quarterhorse and are part-owners of a thoroughbred. "We hope some of these days to get started in the thoroughbred business," he said.

When he came to Western in fall 1978, Western had neither horses nor a barn, and he began the program with animals donated the next spring. Since then, he has tried to build the original herd of "genetic junk" into quality, sometimes trading 2 for 1.

In addition to a training class and two basic equestrian classes, he also teaches a class in feeds and feeding, advises the Horseman's Association and coaches the riding and judging teams. Western offers an emphasis in horse science under an agriculture major, Anderson said.

Linda Taylor, a Richmond junior, transferred from Eastern to enter the program, wanting to learn the proper way to ride western style.

She has ridden horses for at least 10 years, "but it's not like anything he's doing," she said. "You had ponies, and you rode them anyway you could."

Donna Johnson, a Bowling Green

sophomore, first met Anderson when she was in a horse show at the Agriculture Exposition Center while in high school.

"Some people are afraid of horses," she said. "He takes the time to teach them not to be. You let the horse know that you respect him, and that he can trust you."

A typical college professor he's not.

"If you had told me five years ago that I would be teaching," Anderson said, "I'd have been looking for a fellow with a beard, a pipe and a tweed suit. I don't think I fit that."

A broken Royal Crown Cola machine rests in a corner of the barn as Anderson explains what to look for when buying a horse.

"The first thing you do is back up and take a broad look at him. See which parts don't fit. Then, go over and analyze those things particularly closely."

Anderson pulls "So Boy" from his stable to illustrate. A long and thin neck is important, he said, so the horse can change its center of gravity; short, straight bones make the horse more solid, and muscles determine how the animal will perform.

By the end of the semester, he hopes the riders can control a horse and know the basics of owning and caring for them. "To be a good horseman, somebody has to like horses first," he said. "You have to understand them, respect them — but not fear them."

"You have to be born a horseman to some extent. All I can do is give them my knowledge. They're going to have to get thrown a couple of times and get in a couple of messes."

"But if you work with them time after time, you're going to get better."

Frances Vjalobok, a Bowling Green graduate student, and Jody Secondino, a junior agriculture major from Indiana, apply dressing to help keep the hooves from splitting.

Story by Barry Rose  
Photos by Ray Thomas



Continued from page 4

Some of the Vos children were toddlers, and some weren't born when the Voses joined the foster parent program.

Mrs. Vos said she wanted a teenage foster child because having small children wasn't enough of a challenge. "I had enough diapers to change and beds to make," she said. "But I really was interested in providing a home atmosphere for an older person. It really complemented the responsibilities I already had."

But teenagers came with "a whole raft of problems" they had never faced, Vos said.

Mrs. Vos was 25, mothering girls only 10 years younger than herself. "It was a strange feeling and a big responsibility to have authority over someone as tall as myself," she said.

It may have helped because I could identify with them. But with less experience, it meant I had to learn as I went along, and perhaps I was insecure. And that never helps."

No matter what problem the children brought into the house, the Voses welcomed them.

"We approach them with concern for their welfare, so we try to communicate to them that we are ready to love them, and at the same time we communicate to them that we expect them to adhere to some minimum rules," Mrs. Vos said.

These rules included a flexible curfew, no smoking in the house, and chores.

The Voses were forced to handle adolescent sexuality before their children were in grade school. They once sheltered a teenage girl whose child was kept in another home in preparation for a permanent separation.

Another couple had a child who was twice pregnant. Mrs. Vos dealt with a difficult infant.

At last, since the problems were too great to handle. With one of them, it was

an involvement with drugs that made him hard to get along with," she said. "It was very difficult for us, because he was one of the persons that we had become closer to than some of the others, and he was really good with the children."

"It was just causing more crises than our family could put up with and remain the family that we were."

But even then, the Voses were reluctant to give up on the boy because they thought he would see it as one more defeat. He was sent to live with a retired pastor, Mrs. Vos said, and he overcame the problem.

They didn't try to conquer every bad habit the children brought into the home, just the disruptive ones. And they weren't worried about their children picking up bad habits.

"Our children identify with our own values to such a great extent that they seem insulated from other viewpoints," Mrs. Vos said. "In a way, it has been an example to them by negative example."

"And on the other hand, persons like Judy have been a great example — someone who has been able to overcome circumstances."

**M**rs. Trafton and Mrs. Vos are reflective when they think of reasons for foster parenting. Their quiet answers are full of words such as caring and loving and sharing.

For Mrs. Vos, being a foster parent is an expression of religious faith. "We feel committed to help others as much as we can," she said. "Because God loves us, and we should reach out to others with love."

Mrs. Trafton has a different reason for her involvement. "It hurts me to know that there are children who are being physically and mentally abused," she said. "In some small way, I could make an impression on them that is good. Every child we've had needs love, and I think we can give it."

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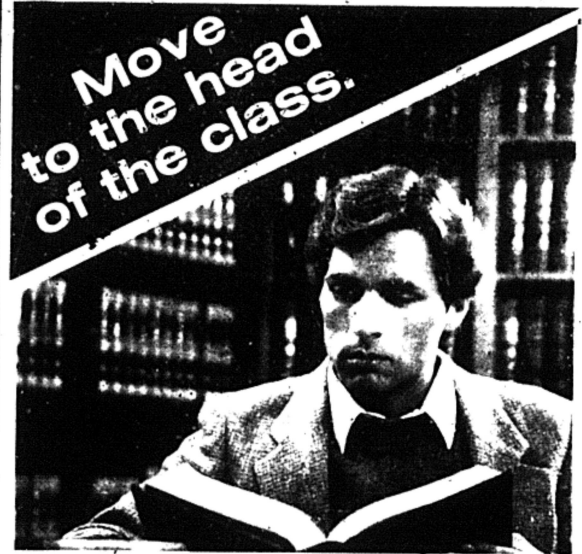
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