



When Jaymi entered foster care as a teenager, she was placed with a nonrelative extended family member from her church. While the placement provided basic stability, it didn't offer the support she needed to feel connected to her identity and family. To make matters more challenging, her siblings were placed with nonrelatives, straining ties that could have been a source of emotional support during an already difficult time.

"I really wish that there was a targeted effort to both maintain and build the relationship with my siblings," Jaymi reflects. "My maternal half-siblings and I were separated during my time in foster care, and I was very parentified as a child. I really felt that I held a great responsibility over their care, which was then abruptly taken away from me. While I reunified fairly quickly with my mom, my two younger siblings did not reunify until much later, which really placed a large strain on our relationship [which] still has not recovered even all these years later."

By the age of 17, Jaymi was living on her own, navigating the challenges of adulthood without a safety net. Around this time, she began receiving messages on social media from two younger paternal half-siblings. Recognizing an opportunity to reconnect and rebuild family bonds, Jaymi initiated a relationship with them. A few years later, when the siblings faced instability at home due to their mother's incarceration, Jaymi stepped in and filed for probate guardianship. "I did not want them to experience the things that I did, and I also did not want them to become lost in the foster care system," she explains. "I had the goal of providing something better, something different for them."

Becoming a sibling guardian at such a young age wasn't without its challenges. "It was difficult to make ends meet," Jaymi shares. "I also had no training and definitely wasn't trauma-informed. I did the best I could with the tools I had, but it was very difficult for all of us. And I definitely don't regret that decision, and at the same time, it was very difficult for all of us. Because I became their caregiver, I never really was able to build a sister relationship with them. Even now, as an adult, my peers have their siblings that they can turn to in hard times, and I feel like I will never have that."

These experiences revealed systemic gaps in the support available to families and how the system handles sibling connections, particularly in cases of adoption. She shares the story of her younger sister, who was adopted by non-relatives and raised without contact with her biological family. Jaymi explains how her sister and her adoptive family faced challenges and didn't receive the support they needed: "I think about how different our story could have been if I had been able to either adopt her myself or, at



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau



the very least, have a relationship with her throughout her childhood." Jaymi became her sister's probate guardian, although she recalls the frustration she felt when comparing this experience: "I received more support as a probate legal guardian to her, since her adoption severed our legal ties, and I was no longer her relative in the eyes of the law. However, when I was raising my other siblings, there was no support simply because we were related."

Now a social worker and foster-adoptive parent, Jaymi applies the lessons she's learned to advocate for families. She emphasizes the importance of prioritizing family connections and providing resources to kinship caregivers. Jaymi also reflects on the unique challenges faced by kinship caregivers, often overlooked in child welfare. "Kinship caregivers experience so much more in regard to secondary trauma, their own feelings and experiences being mixed in with their children, and having to hold boundaries with family members," she explains. "The vast majority aren't prepared for this kind of life change, and the system doesn't always see that."



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

