Gam Lorie and the twins

I was sitting in my little Toyota pickup truck at the parking lot of a Salinas Public Library. My grandkids (the twins) were inside the library stretching their legs and trying to shake off some of the boredom they had from sitting in our truck most of the day. It was a cold day and the fog was starting to roll in. **Thinking about having to sleep outdoors in the heavy mist or rain from the fog and the cold Salinas weather started tears rolling down my face.** I called on two of my best friends and asked their opinions of the twins and my situation, "being homeless" and "was I being selfish?" The fear and sadness of what I had just been told by my two long-term friends was too much for me to bear. **Both suggested I give up my grandkids to the foster care system.** I couldn't hold back anything that comes with crying. The previous drippy nose became a huge swollen red faucet that wouldn't shut off, along with my red swollen weepy eyes. My head was throbbing from crying and I knew I couldn't get a migraine because it could put me in bed for two to three days. Okay, enough whining.

I had tried anything and everything anyone had suggested for me to do for the twins. **"What was I doing wrong?" "How come things only seemed to get worse, not better?"** Every time I thought we were at the bottom of the ladder and couldn't go any lower, another rung would appear with one foot already on it**. I started talking to God as I continued everyday to believe it should get better anytime now.** My talking turned into cursing and yelling at God, "What kind of God are you? I may deserve this horror of a life, but my grandkids? They're so good and loving to everyone. They don't deserve to live this way."

At the end of the 2013 school year, about a week into summer vacation, my daughter had signed the twins over to me. It was now August and I only had $ 21.01 left to last us for two weeks until I received my next unemployment check. This meant I would have to break my promise to the kids. I promised they would be indoors with a roof over their heads by the time school started. The first two weeks of the school year we were able to pay for a motel room. **But now, with what little money we had left, we would be outdoors under the stars that night and for the following two weeks.** I felt I failed my grandkids. A grandmother's code is honor. I try to go by the grandma code. I hated not being able to show the kids what honor was. The kids will be disappointed again. My thoughts were multiplying how I must be scarring the twins for life.

As for myself, having to go back and live with the fear of being attacked by anyone who walked by the open truck bed and saw me sleeping. They may think that I have something they want and for me, that's a very scary thought. **I imagined my head being bashed in with a bat, or much worse, being raped.** Then I imagined what the kids would wake up to and the trauma it would cause them. I didn't have to worry about the twins being attacked as much as myself because I would lock them inside the cab at night.

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We regularly had lessons of what to do if someone knocked on the cab doors or tried to open the doors. The twins were taught over and over… "anyone without the *secret code* was considered an intruder and they were to make as much noise as possible and call 911." My unemployment check didn't go far but I made sure the kids and I always had good communication (cell phones). If I were to have to use the restroom while they slept and one or both were to wake up and find me gone, it could be traumatic for them. They often needed reassurance, when they started living with me, at least a couple times a day. They would ask if I was going to come back or say, **"You won't leave us here, will you? You are coming back, aren't you?"** *That just broke my heart every time they asked me.* We couldn't leave the truck at the same time because all our belongings were in the truck. Everything we owned was in the back of that open truck. Either the kids or I would have to stay with the truck if I was unable to find a suitable parking spot that was void of thieves.

O yes, I forgot to tell you about the dogs. Not only were there three humans living in the truck; we also had two dogs! I refer to the dogs as the twins' aunts! There was my six-pound Terrier mix. Then there was my inheritance from my father, a nine-pound Basenji mix. Dad had passed in March of 2013, three months before I received the twins. The dogs were very good noisemakers and that was a good alarm system.

Back to my wet, teary face. I remember either Mrs. Rains or Tina (both from Lincoln School), two of the nicest and generous people I know, gave me the number of a homeless liaison, Cheryl Camany, from the school district. This must have been the only phone number I hadn't used previously. **The fear arose in my throat as I heard the ring sound from my end of the phone.** My fear of what I had already heard from my two friends and the insecure part of my own thoughts of *what I needed to do for the kids' sake* was all riding on this phone call. To my unworthy surprise, the lady spoke to me and said, **"Don't you even think about letting go of your kids. You are the best possible person to take care of them. You belong together."** Cheryl said I was "not scarring them for life, but I was loving them for their lives." She made me see a light at the end of the tunnel that evening and made me believe I was the *best one* to get the kids into the light. In all of Cheryl's life she will never know how grateful I am for her voice in my ears that evening. I will not ever be able to repay her for the wonderful and love-filled impact her guidance has made in all three of our lives. There are so many ways that she and those who help her with this program have helped the three of us throughout the school year. During the school year, the kids and I bumped heads with Cheryl a few times. She was real strict to keep us in line. On the other hand, as soon as we were doing better and didn't need her help as much, the twins and I would say to each other about twice a week, "We miss getting to see Cheryl."

With much appreciation and love,

Gam Lorie
Kiki
Bubba