



Heart Gallery Alabama

THE HARRIS FAMILY

ADOPTION SUCCESS STORY



My name is J. Kevin Harris. My wife, Sugoi, and I were foster parents. Our foster daughter was featured on the Heart Gallery Alabama (HGA) website.

After she was adopted, I would check the Heart Gallery website and read about other children on the site. That's when I came across Devan. His profile always stood out to me. Maybe it was because our names rhymed or maybe because I thought he looked like my wife and me.

It would be two years before I actually met Devan. He spent his weekends in the residential facility where I worked. We became very close over the three months that I worked with him. So close, in fact, that when I moved to Arizona I was put on his phone call list. We talked weekly for six months.

My wife and I couldn't have kids, so we fostered because we wanted a family. However, in the course of our foster parent training in Arizona, we decided to consider adoption. In December 2015 we inquired on Devan. It would take a year to finalize our paperwork and get Devan in our home.

After Devan was placed in our home it took another year before the adoption was finalized. We had many challenges. He had been in the system for 7 years and struggled with the idea that he was lovable. He would start to let his guard down and get close to us but then, upon realizing this, he would push us away so he wouldn't have to deal with the hurt of leaving. We all struggled,

wondering if we would make it through this. But in the end all the love, anger, sorrow and disappointment built trust. A year later, even though our adoption was finalized, he has his days where he still wonders "Is this real?" but we pull together as a family and we endure. Every day we grow closer. He went from pushing away a hug to daily asking for hugs.

Adoption was more than I expected. Due to his past, I knew Devan would need more attention but I had not expected the amount of attention he would need. Whereas before my weekends were filled with chores, now they are filled with adventures. He has struggled with accepting two parents so we do a lot of one on one. He spends at least one weekend alone with each parent and one with all three of us. This has taught him to accept us both equally. We learn about things he likes and he is learning a new culture in Arizona.

If you are considering adopting from foster care, I suggest you find classes and foster parent courses on trauma. Otherwise, your idea of parenting is going to be so far away from reality that you may get overwhelmed at the hardest moments. The way children who have been in foster care think is so different and when you accept that you can understand that many of their behaviors are them trying to reassure themselves that you will stay. Most of the people in their lives didn't and it is hard for them to accept that you mean what you say.

Our home is not the home next door but it is the perfect home for us.