

My name is Lydia Daniel Goin, and I am a wife and a mother. I have eight children, some biological, some adopted, and some foster. I have a great love for all my children and that is why I am here today to show my love for Bradley and Kimber McLaughlin because these children are worthy and deserve love. This is their story, a story of captivity in America, first formally by their own parents and now by the child welfare system. In this testimony, I will give just some of the horrors and heartbreak of Bradley and Kimber's life as we know it and know them, as well as an estimate of who they are now.

My goal is that today, as you listen, you will find your heart moved with compassion for Bradley and Kimber and your mind filled with wisdom to see the places in our system that failed and are still failing Bradley and Kimber. My hope is that you will receive knowledge of how to amend and fix these places in our child welfare system so that it can become a place of safety, security, and hope for all children.

On July 30, 2024, we received a call to see if we would be willing to take a sibling set of two: Bradley, a seven-and-a-half-year-old boy, and Kimber, a two-year-old girl. We were told that they had been kept in dog cages, were covered in feces, had seizures, were not potty trained, and were both nonverbal. We accepted the placement.

Upon their arrival, we quickly realized their condition was far beyond the light description given to us. They were children, but with no humanity or real life left in them at all; feral seems like a gentle term to describe them eight months ago.

First, let's talk about Bradley's physical condition. When he arrived at our house, he was 43 inches tall and weighed 33 pounds. To put his weight into perspective for you, it was the average weight of a three-year-old child. He was a seven-and-a-half-year-old boy! When we took him for his first kph in September, he was 43 inches tall and weighed 36 pounds for his age, which still put him at only at 0.09% in height and 0.01% percentile on the national child growth scale. He had gained 3 pounds during the first month and a half he was with us.

According to documentation from his previous school, in November 2022, he weighed 31 pounds and was 42 inches tall. This means that in two years, he had only gained 2 pounds and grew 1 inch. Today, eight months later, Bradley weighed in at 41 pounds and is 45 inches tall. That is an 8-lb weight gain and a 2-inch growth in just 8 months. I tell you all this so you can picture the severity of starvation that Bradley had been enduring for years. You could see every bone in his spine, ribs, arms, etc. He was 7 1/2 and could barely keep 3T clothing on around his waist.

Bradley had learned to survive, though. Through animal instincts he had started eating his own feces when he would have a bowel movement. When Ember Hope dropped the two children off, they told us that both children ate their own feces. I can tell you if you ever clean up a child after they have eaten their own feces because they fear when their next meal will come, and it's been their means of staying alive, you will never unsee or will it ever leave your heart. That moment you will carry with you forever. As I cleaned him up and wiped his hands and mouth, grief struck my heart like a knife, and hot tears streamed down my face. I was left with just the question of how this could be. What did I witness? The second night Bradley was here was the last time he has eaten his own feces.

Bradley quickly realized there was food, and he would be fed. Eating was all he could think about. We could not keep him out of the refrigerator or cabinets. We had to buy locks for every place that held food. Bradley also struggled, and still does, with drinking enough water to stay hydrated. I have to monitor his water intake daily and remind him to drink.

Bradley also arrived with teeth that had never been brushed and long and dirty nails. He didn't know what it was to brush his teeth or to get his nails cut. He only had wild behavior, like an untamed, caged, provoked animal that had been let free and didn't know how to do anything but attack and survive. He had no human skill set.

At first, Bradley howled, hissed, and screeched, and growled. He had no language besides the animal noises and screaming. Trash was his favorite plaything, and he would try to use it as a toy. He had to be leashed and harnessed if taken out of the home for his safety, as he would suddenly bolt and flee without any idea of danger or where he was going. He also had to ride in a 5-point harness car seat for his safety, and he did not show any behavior indicative of a little boy.

His fear of going to bed and falling asleep was beyond anything I had ever seen. When it was time for bed, he would harm himself, scream uncontrollably, and beat the walls, windows, and door of the bedroom until his palms were bruised. He would claw his chest and try and harm his privates. The torment and terror that came from him before falling asleep was more than heartbreaking. It was soul-shattering.

Bradley also wouldn't sleep in a bed or sit on furniture. We had to bolt his dresser to the wall and finally take it out of the bedroom for his safety. He ripped off the closet doors and would tear up the carpet and either try to eat it or play with it like a toy. He was only sleeping a couple of hours a night, which usually occurred right before dawn when his body would just finally give out, and he would fall asleep on the floor.

So, as you can imagine, school was almost impossible for Bradley when he had to attend. Bradley's previous school initially diagnosed him as developmentally delayed, but a year later, say he was just intellectually delayed. There was no part of Bradley's life where he was thriving or experiencing growth. As Bradley's therapist has said, Bradley was in a severe state of failure to thrive, and the therapist is shocked that he made it out of that setting alive.

Now, let's talk about Kimber; Kimber was a little over two years old when she came to us. She could not walk well as both legs were very bowlegged and turned in. She tripped over her feet. She had no core strength and was unable to pull up from the ground. She was unable to climb and she could not run. When she would sit, her arms and legs would turn in because of lack of use. She couldn't sit in a chair that didn't have a back to it and needed straps, or she would fall out and backward. When I would pick Kimber up, her back would give out, just like when you hold a newborn that can't hold its head up, and it falls back without support.

Kimber had to sleep in a crib for her safety instead of a toddler bed. She arrived with dark circles under

her eyes from malnourishment. It took months for those circles to lighten. For months, Kimber also had to wear specific clothing to keep her from digging her hands into her diaper. Otherwise, she would dig into it at all times, and if she had pooped, she would try to eat it.

Kimber didn't know most foods and had to learn to eat; she lived in a constant diaper rash for months from never being exposed to the foods she should have. She pooped at least 8 times a day because her stomach wasn't used to eating solids. She refused to be fed from a spoon or fork and still won't, as if no one had ever fed her. Kimber had no attachment to anything when she came. She never cried or made sounds. She just went to bed like it was the only place she had known. She didn't want a blanket, stuffed animal, sippy paci, or anything else, just her in bed. Kimber hated to be held or touched. Anytime anyone got near her, she put both arms up, clenched her head, and tucked it down as if in protection mode.

Kimber only knew Kimber. She had no reality of others' existence. She was fully content with a ball and herself. At her kbh in September, she didn't meet even one of her milestones on the ASQ. For those who don't know, the ASQ is a questionnaire filled out to look at the child's development and identify potential developmental delays. The doctor was very concerned. She was barely wearing 12-month clothing at 2 years old.

Kimber's first attachment was food. So, she became very food-aggressive and had to be taught a normal food routine. Kimber also wouldn't drink enough to barely wet her diapers. We tried all kinds of bottles and cups. She was just used to going without it, and her body was trained to take enough to survive. Kimber had to be bathed like a little baby, not knowing what to do in the bath or what the water really was.

One of the saddest things was that Kimber did not know her own brother nor he of her. They were complete strangers. Although Bradley and Kimber had lived together since Kimber's birth, they didn't even know the other person existed. Kimber and Bradley were not kept anywhere near one another, caged and confined separately, so they did not develop any sort of bond.

According to Kimber's therapist, this is the worst case of neglect she has ever seen. Her therapist has been doing social work since 2009; she worked at the courthouse in juvenile and cinc cases as a CSO and has been a therapist since 2015, so she has seen and worked many cases and has lots of experience. The therapist stated this is the first case where she ever recommended that reintegration should not be viable.

The therapist also stated that the reason Kimber had a seizure the day DCF went in to get her out of her crib was because part of her brain was dying from not being used, and that moment when DCF arrived overwhelmed her brain. Her brain was dying from neglect. It should be stated that there have been no seizures in either child since that day. There is no other medical documentation of seizures in either child. There is also no medical documentation that either child had ever taken medication for seizures.

Kimber also doesn't know how to speak or make sounds like a babbling baby would. A child of Kimber's

age should have a vocabulary of 200-1000 words. It should be noted Kimber does not have a diagnosis of autism, and the therapist firmly believes this is not autism. Kimber's condition is that of one from severe neglect and abuse. She also stated that even with all of Kimber's growth in the last eight months, she will need years of rehabilitation and support to continue her growth.

While this is fresh in our minds, let's address DCF, the intake process, the DA and courts, and what Ember Hope is or isn't doing for these children.

On July 25, 2024, DCF reported that Bradley and Kimber were being kept in cages at home, were autistic, had seizures, and were covered in feces. When they finally got into the home that day to do a welfare check, Bradley was trapped in a room with a metal cage-like door you could see through, but it was shut with no access for him to get out. The door was tied shut from the outside with a dog leash. He was covered in his feces and feces were everywhere in the room. The room was filled with trash and rotten food. The bed that was in his room had stuff piled high on it and it was clearly unused for sleeping.

Kimber was found in a separate room in a crib, and when DCF pulled her up, she had a seizure. After the shaking stopped, she was not responsive to them, although she was awake. The house was filthy, with dirty dishes, bugs, carpet torn up, trash everywhere. Dogs were running free in the house, but the children were captives.

At that point, the children were admitted for overnight observation at the hospital, and DCF liaison Daniel Menninga told the mother that she could pick them up the next day upon release because he believed her to be able to care for the children, but the mother never came for them. The next day, upon release, the DCF liaison, Daniel Menninga, waited for the children's mom for 4 to 5 hours and tried to reach her, but when she was finally contacted, she told them it was more important for her to check on her dogs at home than to pick up her children. DCF finally decided that the mom didn't have the cognitive ability to follow through and that the children were placed in PPC.

It should be noted as well that neither child had a diagnosis of autism. Neither child was receiving medical care for seizures. There also were at least 8 DCF intakes before this one.

The father has a criminal history of drug use, manufacturing drugs, aggravated battery, and 3 counts of child endangerment. It was stated that the father used to hit Bradley in his head if he did not do what he was told. The father has reported that the mother was keeping the children in cages and that when he came home from work, that's how he would find them. He also stated that the mother would keep the children put up for 9 hours at a time, not speaking a single word to them or tending to their needs.

Upon DCF intake, the father was out of the home due to a PFA put in place against him by the mother. The mother went to the court and asked that it be dismissed. Her request was denied. It was reported that the father was to have no contact with the mother or children until the court date on October 10, 2024.

When the children were at the Ember Hope office before arrival at our home, it was stated that Bradley

hovered over the food they gave him in a corner and growled if they got close to him. It was also noted that he ate his feces in front of the workers. Kimber did not want them to hold her at all. Ember Hope immediately tried to facilitate parental visits even with all the abuse that had been happening to the children.

We hired an attorney at that point because of the failure of DCF, the DA allowing reintegration as the goal, and Ember Hope pushing parents to have immediate visits. We could not understand why the parents were not charged with criminal charges. No one can cage and starve a person almost to death. The neglect was so severe it is criminal. Where was the protection for these kids? Parental visits meant they were going to be forced to face their abusers over and over. I could not stay quiet; I had to fight for them.

I talked with the guardian ad litem, and he also believed parental visits were not safe, and we needed to get the kids into some therapy and let the therapists decide if and when any parent visits could occur. As of this day, there is still no recommendation from either therapist for parents to have visits with their children, not now or in the future. The therapists have said continually this is not a reintegration case. Every professional that has touched or had any affiliation with this case has said the same thing: this is the worst case or one of the worst cases they have seen: the kids cannot go home, reintegration isn't viable, it isn't safe for parents to be around the children, and there should have been charges brought against them.

However, here we are 8 months later with the next case plan scheduled for April 23, 2025 still having reintegration as the goal. Why?

I understand, as a foster mom, that reintegration is always the goal, but is the goal above the law? The legal counsel told me that the occurrence of death is usually the only time the DA will take reintegration off the table when first receiving the case. How much closer to death can you come at a weight of .01 growth chart percentile and a dying brain? To me, that is worse than death. We call that torture.

Considering all this information I have presented; I would now like to focus on who Bradley and Kimber have become. Today, Bradley is talking and is beginning to tell us his wants. He also sings songs. He can now communicate with words and on a communication device at school. He can undress and dress himself each morning. He can put on his own shoes. He can sit at the table and use silverware to eat his food. He can go to sleep at an appropriate time in bed all night with no night terrors, trauma or waking. He can share a room with his sister now in safety. He no longer needs a harness or a leash to keep him from trying to bolt. He doesn't need to always hold our hands when we are outside the house. He walks with us and can understand and follow directions.

Bradley can self-regulate his behavior most of the time with the tools we and the school have put in place for him. Bradley can play with other children without harming them. Wild is not the word I would use to describe Bradley now; calm, quiet, sweet, and loving are more descriptive of who he is.

Bradley can do work tasks at school now. He is up to 14 a day and has already exceeded 3 of 4 of his top

goals for November of 2025. Bradley is now taking himself to the bathroom to pee, and we are working on full potty training. Bradley now allows his teeth to be brushed and his nails to be cut. Bradley loves to play with toys now and has fun doing it. Bradley, for the most part, is calm in the vehicle now. Bradley has been able to receive love and now give love. Bradley continues to grow and thrive every month in every area of his life. Watching Bradley come alive has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life.

In terms of growth, Kimber also has many areas of improvement. Kimber can walk, run, and climb now. She no longer needs to sit with assistance without falling. Her arms and legs are no longer turned in when she sits or stands. Kimber has grown in size from 12 month to 3t clothing. Her hair is finally growing and is healthy. Kimber loves to be held now and will run up to us and put her arms up to be held. Kimber has discovered her hands and feet, opening a whole new world for her. She can stack blocks and color and likes to look at books. She can pick up her silverware and put food on them. She is learning to take off her clothes and really tries to put shoes on her feet. She also knows her surroundings and is aware of the people around her.

Not only is Kimber now aware of others, she is engaged with those around her, plays with them, and seeks attention. She has started showing signs that her personality is forming by knowing things she likes and doesn't like and using appropriate behavior to show that. Kimber still can't talk and only makes a few sounds. We have requested Rainbows services from Ember Hope since Kimber came into our care, but they have yet to provide that for her. The therapist also recommended it to Kimber, and Ember Hope has not followed through. Kimber is the most joyful child to be around. She is just full of laughter, giggles, and smiles. She truly is the best.

In conclusion, I want to give glory to God. When Bradley and Kimber were close to death, He continued to sustain their lives. He took notice of their oppression when it wasn't severe enough for others to act. He faithfully delivered them from that house of horror and evil and put them in a home that believes He can do all things. Even in the most challenging moments with Bradley and Kimber, we never felt God couldn't or wouldn't help us. We just always believed that God would heal them. He gave us faith to endure and love to provide them with. We faithfully prayed along with hundreds and hundreds of believers and spoke Scripture over them. God gave us wisdom on how to meet Bradley and Kimber's daily needs.

God surrounded these two children in every aspect of their lives with people who love Jesus and love them with that love. He, indeed, performed a miracle on Bradley and Kimber. I have seen it with my own eyes, and everyone watching has seen it and is left in awe. When I got the call asking us to accept Bradley and Kimber, I told God, "I will do this, Lord, but I can't do it unless you come here and help us." He heard me cry out to him and answered.

As I look at Bradley and Kimber's journey, I see hope. The child welfare system has given us an opportunity, a kind of gift, to foster hope, taking every precious life into account. We have a childcare system that could be used as a refuge and place of safety for healing and restoration. We must

remember the importance of that place. It's not just a broken system. It's a place full of lives in need of hope, and the light of that hope seems to grow more dim with every case taken on. If we can't acknowledge and reform a system that is broken, how can we expect that brokenness won't be the fruit born from it, leading to cases like Bradley and Kimber's?

I will leave you with the words of our founding fathers; we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.