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Fostering love

ONE PHOTOGRAPHER'S MISSION TO HELP CHILDREN

Five years ago, photographer Joan Brady became a volunteer tutor for foster children in a group home in the Washington, D.C., area. Having no children herself, she was surprised at having to persuade the kids to do their homework. One day she brought in a point-and-shoot digital camera and dangled the promise of taking pictures as an incentive. The children not only did their homework, but took on extra reading as well.

Brady quickly realized that photography was a novel experience for these children. While she had grown up being photographed by

loving parents, these children had no one to make pictures of the significant moments of their lives. "There is no photo album that captures their first day of school, first lost tooth, first report card," says Brady. "The pictures that help them remember milestones and reinforce their sense of importance in the world simply don't exist."

Brady began producing small photo albums for each child in the group home. She photographed them doing things they enjoyed, and included pictures of the people who were important to them. Every time she added a picture, the kids got excited.

Brady's work with foster children led to an association with the Wednesday's Child program produced by NBC4, the NBC affiliate in Washington. Every Wednesday, local newscaster Barbara Harrison introduces a foster child or group of siblings to the TV audience in hopes that a viewer will step forward to adopt.

Sponsored by Freddie Mac, Wednesday's Child also gives the kids dream days with such activities as visiting the National Zoo, taking an ice skating lesson, visiting a theme park, touring a CSI lab or shooting hoops with NBA players. Brady goes along to photograph the children throughout the day. Her intent to provide keepsake albums soon expanded to providing digital images and photo books to social workers, who show them to adults looking to adopt. "Last year, one adoptive parent told me that when she saw the photo book, she knew those were her children," says Brady.

Brady says that getting involved is as easy as offering your services. "Anyone who has the time and the heart, I urge you to contact your local family services agency and see if there might be an opportunity for you to make a child feel valued," she says. "I have met the most wonderful kids, photographed the most moving adoption ceremonies, and been witness to some heart-wrenching stories. People often ask me how I happened to become the photographer for Wednesday's Child. My answer is simple: I offered." ■

To see more by Joan Brady, visit www.joan-bradyphotography.com. Learn more about the Wednesday's Child program at www.adopt.org/wednesdayschild.

Share your good works experience with us by e-mailing Cameron Bishopp at cbishopp@ppa.com