

Debra's Story ~

If you were given the opportunity to save a child, what would you do? Thousands of grandparents and other relatives are faced with these questions in Massachusetts and around the country every year. In this "Real Story", Debra tells us what this challenge, and opportunity has meant to her...

It is hard to talk about, but my son is a drinker and so are his mates. He and his girlfriend were living with my grandson in a shack with only a wood stove to heat and barely enough money for diapers and formula. Neither of them had jobs, or were responsible, or had suitable housing for a child. I'd go to visit my grandson, only to find him alone in his crib with a bottle to feed himself, and cheerios scattered in the crib in case he got hungry. His diaper was usually wet, and his eyes were sad. I would pick him up and hold him rocking him gently until he fell asleep and then I'd go home. Their home was littered with broken bottles and beer cans and the smell of pot filled the air.

I told myself I would not get involved. I was a full time employee with a gracious salary and a full life, with 5 grandkids, camping trips to Maine, and Caribbean vacations in St. Thomas. My heart had been broken before and I promised myself I would not let it happen again.

December, 2012 a miracle happened. It was a Sunday night and my son came over with my grandson to visit. His girlfriend never returned that night so the plan was for them to sleep over. Late in the night she showed up and stole my son's car out of the driveway. We set out to find her with the little guy in tow. We found her broken down on the side of the road and offered to help her get back home. In an alcohol fueled rage she came over to my car and snatched her son from my car seat in the back. He cried for me to come and get him. I got out of the car and followed them down the dark road, and when I reached them, she swung at me and knocked me on the ground. She continued to beat me until I could not get up. I got up, dazed and confused, bleeding and swollen in the face. We went back to the house and called the police. When they arrived, the police immediately took the little boy and put him in a safe place. For two weeks on a Sunday I would visit him in a stranger's home. He wasn't eating much, had constant diarrhea, and wanted to go home. He was so sad I could hardly stand it. My son and his girlfriend now had to go to court, and knew they would not be able to keep their son. They had asked if I would be interested in becoming his guardian. I had to think about it, what would this mean? At the age of 56, and always at work, how would I do this?

I went to church that Sunday and talked to my pastor's wife who often spoke of her trials and tribulations of trying to raise her two grandkids at the age of 56. She looked at me and said, "If this is what is in your heart to do, then maybe you need to do it". And that's when I knew. Of course it would never be easy, but deep in my heart I love this little boy and wanted to save his life. I knew I had the resources. I prayed on it. I said God, if this is what you are asking me to do then let it happen. I went online and researched any information I could find. The pastor's wife was a member of a Grandparents raising grandchildren group and gave me lots of resources to find the help I needed. I went to court on December 4th with God on my shoulder. The family my grandson had stayed with was also looking for guardianship. I was scared. Going through this process I realized how much I wanted this and how important it was to me that this little boy have a happy life. It took all of 10 minutes for the judge to decide. I was now the legal guardian of a 2 1/2 yr. old.

I still work, but less hours. Little Al attends preschool Monday – Friday and has little friends to play with every day. The staff at the preschool has been very supportive and encouraging to me and my grandson every day. Little Al has improved in so many areas of his life since that day. His speech is greatly improved, he loves to talk. He laughs and plays well with other children. He no longer hurts or bites when he's overwhelmed. Life is not easy by any means. My life is so much harder now. Friends and family I used to spend time with don't want

to be around young children. It's hard to run errands and find dependable sitters. Some days, I just need a break! Looking back, I would not have done it differently. I know he's safe, his needs are being met, and he is very happy living with me. He'll tell you that himself. He makes me laugh and I cannot imagine my life without him. This summer we're spending time at the beach, and fishing. We're enjoying life!!!

To learn more about the work of The Massachusetts Grandparent Commission, and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support groups in your area, log on to their website at www.massgrg.com.

Also, if you are a grandparent or other relative raising a child who has a story to tell, please share it with our editors, [Kerry Bickford](#) or [Skip Stuck](#).