

Our dear little man

His Nan says he looks just like a little elf and has been through so much in his short life. But she hopes that if she works hard enough and loves hard enough that her dear little man will be fine.

My dear little grandson Raymond was born 1st February 2000. My son Sean thought he was Raymond's father, but he wasn't completely sure. Pauline, Raymond's mum, is alcoholic and had been with other men. By this time my son was living back at home. Soon after Raymond was born a DNA test was performed which found that Sean is Raymond's father. My son moved back in with Pauline and again tried to work it out with her but after she had another attempt at rehabilitation, Sean moved back home again with his father. He then shared custody of Raymond with Pauline, and her mum, and myself and Sean had weekly turns of caring for him. At the same time he lodged forms through family law court to gain full custody.

If we thought we had already been through hell, then we were mistaken. Our dear little man was living on a roller coaster. One of the things he was subjected to when he was little was being dropped on his head at four weeks old. I picked him up on one occasion and he had 60 mossie* bites on his face and legs, he had been mauled by one of the four dogs and 29 cats that shared his house.

* mosquito

He saw his mother try to stab her mother and father, and on those occasions was driven in the car by his mother, both of them covered in blood. The stories would be a book in themselves but there are too many of them and they are very painful to bring to the surface again, so I will let them be buried for the time being.

When Raymond was a little baby people would say to me 'He looks funny, are you sure he is ok?' I would get a bit defensive as this is my grandson they were talking about. My eldest daughter (who is a registered nurse) used to say to me 'He looks funny, Mum, just like a little elf.' This same daughter gave birth to another little grandson James, eight weeks before Raymond was born.

When Raymond was about 11 months old we took him to a paediatrician, as he was falling over all the time and he was very active and very skinny. The doctor said to Sean and me that he looked like he had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome – we had never heard of such a thing. I decided to go to the library and see what I could find out about it. One of the books I looked up had pictures of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in it. I began to cry, just as I'm doing now, as there in black and white was a picture of little Raymond.

We could not do much about it as Raymond was just a baby. Then there was the court case to deal with, plus ongoing things happening with Pauline, plus work and a family to deal with. At court Sean was given joint custody of Raymond. It was settled out of court on the barrister's advice.

Pauline went into another relationship, with another man. We knew this man and felt that he would watch out for Raymond. Pauline then had another baby McKenzie; she was still drinking, and at three months of age this baby was taken by the father and is still being cared for by him and his mum. Pauline has not seen McKenzie since then, he is nearly three years old. I have mentioned FAS to McKenzie's grandmother but I don't know if she has taken it on

board. We don't see much of them. I also think the past is very painful for them, but they have told us only some things that happened and all I can think about is what else our dear little Raymond was subjected to.

After several more bad things happening to Raymond, Sean decided to go against court rules and not send Raymond back. We went once again to DOCS for the umpteenth time – there have been so many visits to DOCS that we have lost count. We begged them. We went to the doctors, we begged them. We went to the hospital, we went to the chamber magistrate, but 'Sorry, you have to send him back.' So back he went.

Then about six months later another bad thing happened and we did not send him back. This time the chamber magistrate did listen and we had new police evidence. Once again DOCS would still not take any notice, even when we took Raymond to their office with his head shaved (his mother's doing) to prove it to them. We also had the evidence that Pauline said she 'was going to go to heaven and take Raymond with her'. She also had three police cars chasing her as they thought Raymond was in the car with her. Back to the family law court we went, and after about another 14 adjournments Sean was given full custody of Raymond.

Pauline has just faced an attempted murder charge, as she stabbed another boyfriend and put him in intensive care. She pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentence.

We started Raymond in a new preschool two days a week, he was four by then. We felt he needed more interaction with kids, and also this new preschool had a very good reputation. They picked up that Raymond was a bit slow and maybe not ready for big school, so we started looking again. I found Sue Miers, who was very helpful (thank you). We also took Raymond back to the first paediatrician. He more or less told us not to worry as FAS was a spectrum. We then took Raymond to Dr Elizabeth Elliott; she was good but needed his birth records, which we obtained for her. We also had an occupational therapist do an assessment on Raymond. His fine motor skills are affected. Last week we went back to Dr Elliott and she was wonderful. She recommended occupational therapy for him, and has written to his school.

Now for my inner battle – Raymond now lives with my husband and myself and his dad, full time. He visits his other grandmother every second weekend. I worry on those weekends as Pauline lives on the same property, and he sometimes comes back very disturbed. Although he is not supposed to see his mum (court's idea), there is sometimes phone contact. You also you have to know the full story to know what could happen. Sean, my son and Raymond's dad, tries hard, but sometimes not hard enough.

He works full time, he has his own retail business, which takes a lot of his time and also he is not very paternal. I love my dear little man; he is like one of those defenceless little kids that you see on television from Africa. He needs extra love, and care, and protection, and for doing this there is a downside. My dear husband whom I love dearly and who adores Raymond has to miss out sometimes, not that he seems to mind. But I just know and I am very aware of this. There is also sibling rivalry, my other three children see me very tired at times, and they get a bit resentful. And I have two other grandchildren, James and Amanda, and their mum sometimes feels that they miss out as Nan is too busy with Raymond. So Nan turns herself inside out to make sure that all the others are okay. Now that Raymond has started big school, things are a bit easier, but one can only live in hope that if you work hard enough and love hard enough that our dear little man will be fine.