American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Fostering love on Mother's Day

5/10/2019

Susan and Olivia board an American Airlines flight.

Susan Beyer has always known that it takes a village to raise a child. The single mom has doubled as a Chicago O'Hare (ORD)-based Flight Attendant at American Airlines for the last three decades, a job that often requires time away from home.

What she didn't know is what it would take when her heart compelled her to do more — to also raise the village.

Susan works with organizations commissioned by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) to provide a safe and loving environment for children who need emergency placement. She's made it her mission to shine a light — her light — on the darkness of child abuse, addiction and neglect.

"The cycle ends with me," Susan said. "If I have one more seat at the table, I can do something. I can figure it out."

More than just figure it out, she's created unbreakable bonds and provided a safe home to more than a dozen foster kids in the last decade. Those children are in addition to her daughter, three step children and a little girl who arrived at her home in the middle of a cold January night in 2016.

When DCFS knocked on Susan's door with nearly two-year-old Olivia, she and the toddler bonded right away. The next day, she began preparing a nursery, arranging for child care and scheduling doctors' appointments. "From the moment we met, I just loved her," Susan said. "I wanted her to walk. I wanted her to be the best version of herself."

The next couple of years were filled with joyous milestones like Olivia's first steps. They were also filled with court dates and supervised visits with Olivia's birth parents. But after two years, Olivia's birth mother surrendered her

parental rights. Susan officially adopted Olivia in August 2018.

Josephine, Olivia and Susan (left to right) on top of the Eiffel Tower.

Today, Olivia is a bustling five year old starting kindergarten this fall. Susan's oldest child, Josephine, attends college in Santa Barbara, California. One of her step children is also a flight attendant for American. And Susan continues her mission to educate others on foster care, often attending events to speak on behalf of children who very often can't speak for themselves.

She is dedicated to dispelling myths about foster care, and she shares her story to help break down barriers for potential foster parents. "People say they're never home, they're not married or they're too old," she said. "Well, I'm a flight attendant, a single mother and I'm over 50 years old."

Like many moms, Susan will spend this Mother's Day thinking of everyone but herself, reminding anyone she can that May is also National Foster Care Awareness Month. She says she's proud to share the day with mothers everywhere and she honors those who have helped her live her motherhood mission — friends, family and especially her colleagues.

"I'm only as good as the people who support me," she said.

Susan notes that her fellow flight attendants have been her rock, taking last-minute trips for her when needed and encouraging her to stay positive. Her managers have also helped her navigate scheduling issues and show her that she's not alone. And even before Olivia was officially adopted, Susan made sure she was a true airline kid. She took Olivia to France, Mexico and Florida, all before her fourth birthday. "American became a bigger family for us, even though it's outside of what the 'perfect' family should look like," she said.

And though Olivia doesn't know it yet, she's the youngest grandchild in a family — "perfect" or not — that has come full circle. Susan's mother, a nurse, was also adopted at the age of two. She and Susan's late father, a pilot, taught Susan to always show up for and take a chance on children.

"If you see a mother having a hard time, use the opportunity to see how you can help lighten her load," she said.

They also taught her just what it would take to raise her village — something, it turns out, she had all along: a mother's love.

Olivia in the cockpit of an American aircraft.