

On the evening of May 4th 2007 there were 2 tragic events that happened in Kansas. The one you know about is that was the night a tornado blew Greensburg away. The other was our 2 youngest grandsons were taken into protective custody by the Wichita Police and SRS. Protective really doesn't describe what they did to those little boys.

The boy's mother had abandoned them and their dad, our son, after years of drug abuse isn't parent material so taking them out of the home seemed like the only way to go. What happened next is where things went wrong.

A neighbor who lived across the street from them called us that evening and said "the police have taken the boys". If she hadn't I don't know what would have happened, maybe no worse than what did happen. I called the Wichita Children's home the next morning because I have several friends on the Wichita Police Dept and they had told me that is where they take them. As soon as I gave my name the lady who answered said, "The boys are here and they are fine". I didn't have to tell her whom I was calling about because the key for correcting any problem for Barry the oldest boy had always been "Call my grandpa" and he was doing that at every opportunity. Everyone there knew who Wendell Turner was. She gave me a name and phone number at SRS and said I should call Monday and they would tell me what to do.

On Monday I called the number I was given and the lady asked if we wanted to be declared as interested parties. I was stunned by that question. We were grandma and grandpa. Of course we were interested parties. We were the most interested parties in the world.

We weren't real concerned yet because the boys had spent about as much time at our house as they had at home and we thought the people who had them only wanted the best for those kids. I have never been so wrong about anything in my life at a time when I needed to be right.

We were notified that the boys would be in court Wednesday and we were to appear. There was no question the boys would be coming home with us so we dusted their room, cleaned their bathroom and grandma fixed their favorite food. When we got to the court house we were in the waiting room and the boys came in with a guy we were to learn was their keeper and would be with them at all times when they were in Wichita. They broke away from their keeper and came over to us and we hugged them and Troy,

Senate Judiciary

2-7-11

Attachment 13

the youngest one said how did you know we were here? That poor little boy thought he was lost forever. Their keeper said, "we have to go see the judge" and took them away. After about an hour someone called our name and escorted us into the courtroom. The judge looked up and said, "Are these the grandparents" and that was the last time we were recognized as living in the same world as the rest of that group. We were dismissed and someone gave us a business card and told us someone would be out to see if we could be considered for taking the kids and if our home was a fit place for them to live. They wouldn't be going home with us.

That was when we learned about SRS contractors. SRS had no control over the boy's case. That had been turned over to a contractor called Youthville. Their keeper worked for Youthville. The job he had prior to that was building fences and now he was in charge of our grandkids. To give you some idea what we were dealing with when our granddaughter graduated from WSU Youthville tried to hire her for a case manager. She had worked her way through collage as a receptionist for a real estate company. Youthville offered her \$2 an hour less than she had been making. What we were about to deal with were the people that finished at the bottom of their class.

The next day I called the children's home and asked if we could come see the boys. The person, who answered the phone said, "they aren't here, they have been moved to a foster home in Lyons". They had been taken from court to the foster home and no one told us. I couldn't believe it but we were to find that the courts and SRS contractors did a lot of things I couldn't believe.

We were invited to a case plan meeting at Youthville a couple of weeks later and were told we were no longer being considered for the boys being placed with us. When we objected we were told it will do you no good to object because, "GRANDPARENTS DON'T HAVE RIGHTS". We thought they were lying. They weren't. We would be allowed 1 hr supervised visits once a month. I never did understand the supervised part.

I won't bore you with the details of what happened next but after writing a lawyer a rather large check the boys came to live with us after 2 ½ months.

They lived with us for 10 months and out of the blue we were ordered to appear in court. Why I don't know because we weren't allowed to say a

word. Everything our lawyer said was discounted as unimportant. The judge said the boys were going back to their dad that day and we had 8 hrs to get them moved over there.

A few weeks later we found out they were having another case plan meeting although we weren't invited which is a violation of the law since we were listed as "interested parties" so we went anyway. We were told we didn't need to be there because it was just a formality. We stayed anyway and when I objected to some of the things they were doing the Youthville case manager ordered us to leave. Since we were such bad people we were no longer allowed to see the boys.

We went back to court to gain visitation rights and were ordered to have counseling before we could see the boys and that took about 5 months and \$750. We now get to see them 6 hours on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. We have spent well over \$6000 and this is all we have.

If for some reason our son loses his parental rights we won't be given a chance to gain custody, they will be taken away and we may never see them again. When parents lose their rights grandparents lose also because there is no law giving grandparents rights and they are cutoff from the children at the same time as the parents.

Barry will graduate from high school in May totally unprepared to support himself. He can't even drive a car. This is a child who had so much potential'. I know because I had him tested at WSU when he was 7 years old.

His brother Troy will be going to middle school next year and has no activities except school and video games. He lives on fast food and at 11 years old weighs 200 lbs.

Before I go further I would like to tell you about another family and about their experience with SRS and the courts. I won't give you their names because of ongoing litigation. I will call the Grandparents Larry and Mary and the children Chris a little boy and Brooklyn a little girl and they live in Coffeyville.

Larry and Mary had 2 adopted daughters and one of them was a single mom with 2 children. The single mom wanted to go to collage and finish her degree so she could support her kids. She started school at Pittsburg and Mary and Larry kept the kids during the week and Mom would come home on weekends. When she got her degree she got a job in Wichita and rented an apartment and got daycare and she and the kids moved to Wichita. Three months later Mom got sick and died. Larry and Mary took their daughter and grandchildren home to Coffeyville for the funeral. After the funeral the kid's dad asked Larry if she had insurance. That was all he had to say at that point.

Chris and Brooklyn lived with Larry and Mary again until one day their dad showed up with the police and said, I have come for my kids. The grandparents could only watch because grandparents don't have rights. I won't go into all the details but the dad had a girl friend that didn't like little 22 month old Brooklyn and beat her to death. Now Larry and Mary have lost their daughter and granddaughter. But to make it worse in place of SRS taking Chris to his grandparents they took him to a foster home. Larry and Mary's lawyer did get a judge to order Chris be returned to his grandparents that night. Chris still lives with his grandparents but they have not yet been given custody of him. Grandparents don't have rights you know.

The bill before you doesn't go as far as the Silver Haired Legislature proposed but it's a start. The way the current bill is written if the neighbor hadn't called that night we may not have known what was going on with our grandkids until it was too late to be declared an interested party.

I have talked to many grandparents about this and was amazed at how often this happens. 1 in 10 children live with a grandparent but they can be taken away at anytime with no recourse for the children or grandparents.

Our lawyer told us we would need to get the law changed if we were to have any chance of staying in the grandkids lives if they were taken again so here we are.

One more thing you may want to consider, grandparents work a lot cheaper than foster-parents and with the need to cut back on cost in the state budget this is good place to start.

Unless you have been there you can't imagine how heart rending it is to have the people you love the most taken away and know there is nothing you can do about it.

Please, I urge you to give children and their grandparents some help.