



The baby girl came in to DCS custody anonymously, surrendered with a quiet knock on the door of an East Nashville fire hall on August 26.

This child became the 77th newborn relinquished under the Tennessee Safe Haven Law, a little-known provision that allows biological parents to surrender healthy and unharmed newborns in designated safe places – without fear of prosecution and a 30-day window to reclaim the child.

Nancy Rhoda, a volunteer with the Department of Children’s Services, began photographing the baby, whom DCS staff named Carolyn Love, and her foster parents, Shawn and Bryan Roach, days after the baby was placed in their home.

The department’s goal was to document a child’s passage through the foster care system, from surrender to permanency, whatever that permanency would look like. Would the baby be adopted by the Roaches? Would she be placed with a relative who came forward? Would her biological mother return?

The photo story also would allow the Department of Children’s Services to promote greater understanding of the Safe Haven Law and spread the word about this loving and legal option available to women who are unsure they will be able to parent.

The department also wants to eliminate headlines of tragedy, of babies unsafely abandoned or harmed.

What Rhoda caught in megapixels was the development of a love story and the essence of a foster parent’s devotion — a devotion the department staff sees played out on a daily basis. The relationship with children in foster care may not be life-long, but it is life-changing.

The baby’s mother, who has requested continued confidentiality, has given permission for these photographs to be shared. No parent had reclaimed a baby in Tennessee until this baby’s mother came forward in September.

“The law worked the way it was supposed to, giving a mother a chance to safely relinquish her baby. This mother was also able to deal with a crisis situation, change her mind, and reclaim her baby, all while keeping her child safe,” said Shannon McCloud, Executive Director of a Secret Safe Place for Newborns of Tennessee, which promotes awareness of Safe Haven.

“We want any mother in that type of situation to choose the alternative of a safe haven surrender instead of unsafely abandoning her newborn. It is a safe and legal option, both for the baby and the mother,” McCloud added.

Share

Please take a moment to view the photo gallery and share it with your circles. Help us reach those who may not know about Safe Haven nor about the work of dedicated foster parents.

Learn more

- To learn more about Safe Haven, please visit [a site](#) dedicated to information about the law.
- You can call the Secret Safe Place for Newborns of Tennessee Help Line at 1-866-699-SAFE. It is a confidential service.
- Learn more about becoming a **foster parent** in Tennessee.
- To report child abuse or neglect call the DCS hotline: 1-877-237-0004

Facts

- 78 children have been safely surrendered in Tennessee since the law took effect in 2001.
- Nationally, nearly 39 percent of women who have relinquished custody of their children are older than 25, according to the national Safe Haven coalition. Nearly half are white.
- Advocates say they struggle to raise awareness of Safe Haven laws, according to [this news story](#).

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