

Teen discovers meaning of family living in Glass household_62705

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Arlene Sanchez (left) was able to graduate with her class thanks to loyal friends and her family.

Teen discovers meaning of family living in Glass household

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Baptist Child & Family Services

GONZALES—Even the most strong-willed person needs some unexpected

help when a rough life gets even rougher, Arlene Sanchez discovered.

Nearly three years ago, Sanchez reached such a spot. After living at the Baptist Child & Family Services Youth Ranch for six years, she was a sophomore taking honors classes at Gonzales High School, playing sports and staying active in community service projects.

She had weathered the resentment of her siblings when she chose to stay at the ranch instead of returning home with them to live with their mother, and she had worked through her own anger and fear spawned by that choice.



Arlene Sanchez pets an abandoned fawn brought to the home of Bryan Glass, a veterinarian in Gonzales.

But an increased demand for emergency shelters for abused children led Baptist Child & Family Services to convert the youth ranch facilities from residential homes to short-term care units. Suddenly, the dependable world she had worked so hard to build threatened to

collapse. She had to choose between a foster home in Port Lavaca-almost

90 miles away—or a group home in San Antonio.

The 16-year-old broke the news to her teammates at volleyball practice. One of them, a casual friend named Cydney Glass, still was emotional when her mother arrived home from work that evening.

“I don't think I was even all the way through the door when Cydney blurted out, 'Arlene has to move,'" Mrs. Glass recalled. “Even though they weren't best friends, they were in honors classes together and had played sports together. So, we knew some of her history, and it just didn't seem fair after all she'd been through that she would be uprooted again."

No one remembers who first suggested Sanchez might move in with the Glass family. But for two weeks, the idea dominated family discussions and prayers.

“We all were involved, because it would have an impact on all of us. But we told Cydney the biggest part of the decision was up to her, because it would obviously have the greatest effect on her," Mrs. Glass explained.

Bryan and Celia Glass rushed through the foster-home application procedure at breakneck speed, taking training classes, having their references checked and their home inspected.

Two months later, just before Thanksgiving 2002, Arlene moved in. After a smooth honeymoon period, the hard realities of family living emerged.

“Arlene had to learn that just because we fussed at her, it didn't mean we didn't love her," Mrs. Glass explained. “We had battles over her cleaning her room, just like I had battles with Cydney about her room. And she didn't like it at all when I grounded her one weekend after she was rude to her caseworker."

But everyone adjusted, and Sanchez became a part not only of the Glass

family, but also part of the family at First Baptist Church in Gonzales.

"I have a lot of questions for God about why my life has been so hard," she admitted. "But a lot of people have helped me understand that God really does love me."

"The Glasses are real 'God people.' They don't just talk about religion, but they live it out, and I've seen that up close for more than two years now.

"Our youth ministers at church have been awesome, too, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes huddle at school has been great. Cydney, especially, has shown me how a Christian should live, because I've seen her live it day-in and day-out, at home, as well as in public."

In May, Arlene graduated from Gonzales High School-fifth in her class with a 97-plus average.

"I don't think any of us, including Arlene, really knew what we were getting into," Bryan Glass conceded. "It's been challenging, but all of us have benefited, too."

His daughter concurs. "I had never had to share my family before, and there were times when I would think, 'I'm ready for you to leave now.' Had I known how much we'd go through, I probably wouldn't have made the decision to say yes. But now, I'm glad I did. It wasn't easy on her, either, but my family had always had each other. Who did she have?

"This has made me appreciate my family more, helped me realize that life really isn't fair. God has shown me that if I make a choice because it is best for someone else—even if it makes my life more difficult—in the long run, it proved to be the right decision for me, too. God has blessed all of us through Arlene."

As Sanchez heads to the University of Texas at Austin and Glass packs for

Texas A&M in College Station, the next step in the foster family's relationship with Sanchez still is evolving.

"We are trying to figure out how to be available but not to be a crutch-to recognize Arlene's freedom but still be a resource, the same as we're doing with Cydney," Glass explained.

"She knows she'll always be a part of us," his wife added. "I guess we'll have to wait and see how much dirty laundry she brings with her the first time she comes back from Austin."

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