

Love is Patient CONT. FROM PAGE 9

brain activity by parting her hair, pasting dozens of electrodes to her scalp, and recording the electric impulse levels of her hundreds of billions of neurons. He analyzed the data and found Angelica could not quickly process large amounts of complex information like emotions. Also, the part of her brain that should act like a thermostat for the limbic system, where emotions are produced, was acting more like a light switch. Neglect and psychological trauma had left her brain unable to process or regulate emotion.

Over the course of 30 or so visits, she strengthened the inefficient and underdeveloped parts of the brain using video games as one might use weights to train muscle groups. Only she wouldn't get a controller with buttons for the video games. She would have to control them with the impulses of her brain, as read by the electrodes.

After 30 days in the group home and the first two weeks of neurofeedback, she was excited to come home. It was now December of 2009, and this time the holidays

were different. The girl who had hated physical touch wanted only to snuggle with her parents.

A FAMILY REDEEMED

In the following months Angelica's emotional mind grew by leaps and bounds through the neurofeedback treatments and counseling. There were missteps and an eruption or two, but each time she descended into tantrum, Ramona says she came back ever closer to her true and maturing self.

Change is still difficult for her, since many of the changes in her life have meant sorrow or harm. When school ended for the summer and when it resumed in the fall, she went into a few days of sadness, but it's nothing like it used to be. She's come so far that the sad days were actually a surprise to Don and Ramona.

Angelica sometimes helps out at school translating for Spanish-speaking students as they learn English. This summer, she served the Summer of Hope program as a translator for the kids from Colombia. She even reunited with

the counselor whose office she trashed, translating for her as she evaluated a new batch of Summer of Hope orphans.

Things are good now, and the Linabary's say they haven't once regretted adopting any of their kids. They even seem grateful for the struggles they had with Angelica.

"I've been tempered by a better understanding of who I am and the role I play," says Don. "Sometimes my human instinct, my flesh, took over and it was really hard to love her. Really hard. I still was convinced, though — convicted — that I needed to do it, to overcome my anger and just pour out love. The hardest thing is having to look back on my parenting skills earlier and realizing that I didn't always get it right."

"It was a humbling time," Ramona says. "All my insecurities were laid bare going through this, and it has made me so much stronger and such a better mother. God bringing Angelica into my life was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Alex Tenenbaum is managing editor of LEAP, At Home and Business to Business magazines.

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Love is Patient

With their adoptive daughter gripped by a violent attachment disorder, a local couple perseveres and triumphs

BY ALEX TENENBAUM | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LEE

ANGELICA LINABARY HAS A COOL AND AIRY DEMEANOR. She sits at the dining room table, relaxed, comfortable and visibly joyful. You can hear in her voice that this 14-year-old loves her adoptive family, and especially her mother, Ramona.

"I look forward to coming home from school and being with them," she says, smiling. Ramona is joyful too. She cherishes the relationship she and Angelica have forged through fire, and though her heart no longer feels the pain and her mind is forgetting the details, her body still remembers how bad things got. Premature arthritis makes her thumb pulse, flashing with images of how Angelica wrenched it backward on the day the deputy had to restrain her, working the handcuffs ever tighter to make the girl comply, to make her settle.

Ramona also remembers how before Angelica, she used to worry about what

people thought of her and her family. But frequent sheriff visits — the kind with flashing lights and verbal warnings — made a show for the neighbors and made it easy to let go of any false claims to perfection.

As the family seemed to be falling apart, all she wanted was for her children to feel secure, loved and to grow close to her and her husband Don. For more than a year, little else seemed to matter.

ADOPTION

Don and Ramona had two biological children, Adam and Alicia, who grew up and started families of their own. In 2000, they adopted Samuel and Gabriel, now 14 and 15, from Sierra Leone. They'd been orphaned by a bloody civil war, and the percussion of a bomb had ruptured Gabriel's eardrum.

Don and Ramona Linabary pose with their four adopted children. From left are James, 13, Samuel, 14, Angelica, 14, and Gabriel, 15.

Summer of Hope, a program that introduces international orphans to families in Montana, had more kids than families in 2006, and the Linabarys decided they would consider adopting once more. Angelica and her brother James stayed the summer, and the Linabarys fell in love.

Angelica, 11 at the time, was very intelligent, well-behaved and timid, while James, 10, was loud, funny, and outgoing. Angelica kept her brother in line, pinching him when he misbehaved.

Even though adoption was never mentioned, Angelica says she knew exactly what was going on. She thought if she and her brother could keep it together and be perfect, this family might adopt them. She kept everything light and fun as much as she could, but at times sadness would press her lips into silence.

In 2007, Ramona, Don and the boys flew to Bogotá to finalize Angelica and James' adoption.

"I expected she would be really excited to see us," says Ramona. "We had such a great time when we hosted her, and she was very well-behaved. But when we got there, she really was shut down... We'd go out to a restaurant in a big barn painted in bright colors, where the tables surrounded a horse arena. They had Paso Finos, Spanish dancing horses, trotting around and putting on a show and all the kids were really into it. There were clowns painting the kids' faces. But Angelica just looked really disconnected and sad and she wouldn't say anything when you asked what was wrong."

When Angelica and James came home, she behaved well and helped out around the house, but her spells of silent sadness continued.

She was also hyper-vigilant — always had been — looking for queues, reading everything from people's mannerisms to the arrangement of furniture to whatever books and papers were around.

And she would listen. As an infant, her birth parents likely left her lying on the floor alone for entire days, just looking up at the ceiling. All she could do then was listen, and each sound carried meaning, perhaps someone coming to give her attention and affection. Perhaps food.

She paid attention to everything, because for her and the world she came from, everything was of consequence. Anything could impact her survival.

But while Angelica understood matters of life and death, she had no understanding of family relationships. Her brother James had connected with his house father at the orphanage and seemed to be adapting well to his new family. But Angelica had never connected with any parental figure before. She wasn't growing any closer to Don and Ramona, and her sadness grew. It began showing up as anger.

REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER

She was showing signs of what's called Reactive Attachment Disorder, a condition brought on by severe neglect. Like overused Velcro, she had been ripped away from important relationships until she just couldn't attach anymore. She was incapable of developing deep, trusting and loving relationships.

"For me, it was a very troubling to see a child in that state and not know what to do for her," Ramona says. "Physical touch was not comforting to her, she didn't like it at all, so you couldn't even give her a hug and tell her she was OK."

Angelica's sadness-turned-anger erupted 14 months after adoption, when Ramona went back to Colombia to develop contacts for Summer of Hope. With Don at work, the kids stayed with friends. Angelica performed well for



Angelica Linabary

the family she stayed with, and they even commented on how kind and helpful she'd been.

But when Angelica came home, she could no longer keep up her perfection act. She raged, screaming and crying and throwing things. When Don and Ramona tried to send her to her room, she grew defiant and uncontrollable. It was December of 2008, and, "The holidays were horrible," Ramona says.

As advised by a therapist, Don reversed the doorknob to her room so that it locked from the outside. It was a desperate attempt to keep her under control, to make her give up and calm down. But Angelica quickly dismantled the doorknob, unscrewing the plate with a hair clip to escape. Another time, she just kicked the door out of its frame.

Angelica wouldn't get violent with people unless they physically

prevented her from doing what she wanted to do. To her, control meant survival, and she would fight for survival. Ramona often had to step in and stop her from taking the other kids' things or damaging the house, which led to more physical altercations.

"It looked like wrestling," Angelica says. And that wrestling led to a string of 911 calls and sheriff visits. On one of the worst days, the Linabary's called the sheriff to their home three separate times.

Yet in public, Angelica acted like everything was fine. She could handle the perfection act in small doses, and since she didn't feel safe acting out around friends or at church, she always seemed polite and timid. *continued*

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Love is Patient CONTINUED

Angelica played the part of perfect daughter so well that a few friends began to think Don and Ramona were exaggerating. Others asked if the couple or the boys weren't doing something extreme to antagonize her.

Angelica was visiting a specialist in attachment disorders who diagnosed her with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, along with RAD. She said that Angelica must have experienced multiple psychologically traumatic events starting just after birth, and said that in some PTSD cases, emotional development stops at the time of the trauma. She told Don and Ramona that behind the veil of worldly wisdom and ruthless survival instincts, Angelica had the emotional maturity of an infant.

Angelica soon turned on her counselor, howling and flinging toys and trinkets all over her office. The counselor said she could no longer help her. For the family's safety, Angelica was temporarily placed in a residential psychiatric facility in February of 2009.

THE DARKEST CHAPTER

The Linabarys drove an hour-and-a-half away to a special facility for children and said their goodbyes. Angelica was admitted to the acute treatment unit, but she didn't fit in. These kids were suicidal and addicted to drugs. They used words she'd never heard before, words she learned were called cuss words.

The staff seemed normal enough, though, so she put on her mask, became the perfect kid, and was released a week later. The psychiatrists scratched their heads, telling Don and Ramona that the \$15,000 stay, paid for by insurance, had been unnecessary.

When Angelica came home, she showed a real desire to be close to her mother. But the closeness freaked her out, and ten days later the raging violence came back stronger than ever.

Ramona was trying to get Angelica to calm down and give back a book she had taken so that the boys could continue with their schoolwork. Angelica slapped her mother across the face, dropped to her knees, pulled

a heating vent from the floor and threw it across the room.

She ran to the garage and Ramona followed, afraid she might get at the tools and harm herself, the kids or the house. Ramona cornered her daughter away from the tool bench. She told her son to call 911 while she kept Angelica in a bear hug.

Angelica tried to break the hold by wrenching her mom's thumb backward. She thought it might snap. In unbearable pain, Ramona bit her daughter's finger and it bled. Angelica let go of the thumb, and Ramona pinned her in the corner of the garage until the sheriff's deputy arrived.

With no good options, the Linabarys sent their daughter back to the psychiatric facility where she spent two months, racking up another \$45,000 for the insurance company.

The doctors seemed to hurt more than help. Used to dealing with issues like depression, parental abuse, drug addiction and the like, Reactive Attachment Disorder seemed completely foreign to them. They had Angelica develop a "personal protection plan" with steps like who to call when things got bad at home. She says she thought she now had to protect herself from her family, compounding her issues with trust, survival and attachment.

While Angelica was away, Ramona found her journal. One entry read, "Dear God, nobody understands me." When Angelica was released from the facility a second time, she moved in with family friends for three months. As



Ramona Linabary helps her kids, from left, James, 13, Angelica, 14, Samuel, 14, and Gabriel, 15, with tea. Ramona says the teens have tea every day after school.

always, for them she was helpful, polite and well-behaved — which confused them since it didn't line up with the Linabarys' portrayal.

"It's the story of Jekyll and Hyde," Don says. "We didn't feel like there was a place to turn, and at times, it felt pretty hopeless."

At the end of their rope, Don and Ramona brought Angelica home again, and it only took her three days to erupt. She got hold of a lighter, stood high on the kitchen counter, ignited a paper towel and grinned wildly, saying, "I don't care if this house burns down. It's not my house."

She then ransacked Ramona's room, opened her chest of old, sentimental items — photos from high school, letters, gifts — and hurled them to the floor, saying, "Your life sure wasn't very interesting."

Ramona locked herself in her bathroom, and Angelica pounded on the door and screamed until Don got home.

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He told Angelica how upset he was with her. She screamed that he had no right to talk to her and ran away to a friend's house where she used their phone to text her mother, saying, "I hate you."

Ramona texted back, "I love you."

"Don't talk to me," came the response.

Another family friend offered to take Angelica for a while, and then another. Angelica bounced from friend to friend, five families total, while Ramona and Don tried to figure out what to do.

Don says that despite all the difficulty, he never seriously considered disrupting the adoption.

"If it came up, it was just kind of a flash. The whole thing was tearing me apart, seeing the abuse, especially toward Ramona. I'd try to keep things light, though, telling myself, 'This is a test. You will be graded, so take notes.'"

HOPE

As Angelica paraded from home to home, she saw a new clinical counselor who began to make headway.

The Linabarys were way beyond their insurance limit on counseling, so they paid out of pocket. With the recession, Don had been going weeks, sometimes months, without construction work.

Ramona heard about an alternative medical procedure called neurofeedback, which had been successfully used to treat ADHD, PTSD and other psychological disorders.

It sounded a little strange, but the Linabarys didn't have a whole lot of options. The epileptic daughter of a family friend had been treated successfully with neurofeedback, and though it carried a price tag of \$3,700 that their insurance wouldn't cover, they decided it was worth a shot.

The Linabarys wrote fundraising letters to friends and family. The overwhelming response funded her neurofeedback, and even covered the mounting counseling bills.

"When we found out there was this community of support around us, we were finally able to start making progress," Ramona says.

But before Angelica could begin treatment, she got the

idea she would be happy in a group home, an institutional setting she guessed would be like an orphanage paired with all the attention she wanted. Don and Ramona didn't feel comfortable keeping her with friends if she didn't want to be there, and they were afraid to bring her home.

But they needed to get Angelica into the mindset that home was a good place to be, and that a loving family was a good thing to have. They pled with their insurance company to get her into the group home just to show her it wasn't all she thought it would be. The case manager said it would be the first — and last — time his company would ever fund something like this. He gave the group home 30 days to show her that she belonged with her family.

The group home provided rules, structure, care and nothing else. No sympathy, no fawning, no making Angelica feel waited on or overtly loved. Nothing to make her think this was where she belonged.

Two weeks into her stay, Angelica began neurofeedback.

The doctor measured Angelica's *continued on pg. 12*



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