

Anitra Parmele 1 Feb 2017

## The Smallest Kindness

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In her book, *Etched In Sand*, Regina Calcaterra writes how as children, she and her siblings would write their names in the sand of the beaches of Long Island.

Cherie   Camille   Regina   Norman   Rosie

Then they encircled each name with a heart and watched as the relentless waves wiped their work away before they raced down to the water to write them again.

Then Regina shares the details of growing up with an unstable mother seemingly incapable of caring for her children and the harsh reality of what it took not only for Regina to survive but to ensure her siblings did as well. It's easy to remember those names in the sand and to think of them as a picture of the children's daily struggle to survive not only their mother's neglect but also the system that was designed to protect them.

But listen to more of Regina's story and you realize she looks at this same image as the key to their survival. Rather than focus on the futility of their actions in the face of the waves' destruction, she points us to the children's perseverance in continuing to write even though they knew the outcome.

Just another hint that no matter how much you think you know about the foster care crisis in our country and in our community, that behind the statistics are individuals who refuse to fit nicely into the expected categories. Children, social workers, teachers, neighbors and store owners who dismiss the statistics to reach out to one child, to make a difference in one life.

A gathering of angels

Recently a group of world-changers gathered at the Seagate Country Club to hear Regina speak about her experiences as part of Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Known also as the Angel

Moms Women's Volunteer Group for Place of Hope, they sat enthralled as the New York Times best-selling author matter of factly shared the details of her horrific childhood and the reality of the future they faced.

It's hard to glimpse the girl who described herself as a "bag of bones" in the self-assured, articulate woman behind the podium as she shares, "When I was growing up, only two percent of children in foster care would attend college." She continues. "Today that percentage has risen to. . .three percent." The numbers she cites are as familiar to Regina as her last name—the percentage of our prison population that were foster children, the odds of older children being adopted, the number of children who are the victims of neglect or abuse.

Regina defied the odds and attended not only college but also law school. She was appointed chief deputy executive of Suffolk County and oversaw the area's recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, an irony that does not get past her. In the very same county where she and her siblings endured so much devastation, Regina was now in a position to delegate the very resources she herself lacked—housing, food, shelter, hope.

### Bridging the gap

In a question and answer period after the presentation, a member of the audience asked a question so many of us had, "What can we do?" Regina's response was simple. Continue to support agencies such as Place of Hope that are making a tangible difference in the lives of children in foster care and reach out in kindness. The first part was expected but the second part was astonishing.

This woman who had endured so much and had to scramble for every scrap of joy shared that what made the difference for her were the mothers of her classmates who let her stay on their couch for a night. It was the teacher that glimpsed her intelligence and fire and opened up the thought of college. The store workers who looked the other way when the children pocketed food. The parents who didn't call back their children in alarm but allowed them to play with Regina and her siblings despite their ragtag appearance.

It is easy to understand the impact of a meal to someone who is starving but I'm not sure we give the same thought to the impact of a kind word or gesture to someone who is also starving but for hope, love and understanding. Regina's story is a reminder that we can change the world for a child in foster care.

### Hope

As a state-licensed children's organization in Palm Beach County, Place of Hope is on the forefront of the work to rescue and restore the children in our foster care system. Through their family-style foster care, maternity care, work with victim of domestic sex trafficking and family outreach and intervention, Place of Hope is battling every day for the future of the children in our community. For more information on how you can be a part of changing the life of a child in foster care, contact [PlaceOfHope.com](http://PlaceOfHope.com).

In Broward County, contact 4KIDS of South Florida at [4kidsofsfl.org](http://4kidsofsfl.org).

For more on Regina Calcaterra's story, visit her website [ReginaCalcaterra.com](http://ReginaCalcaterra.com) and grab a copy of her award-winning memoir, *Etched in Sand*, as well as her second book, *Girl Unbroken*, the story she wrote with her sister about her life in Idaho