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The girl in the window danielle

The girl, who was locked up by her mother in their house for the first six years of her life, could not eat, read or write. The detective who discovered it said it was the worst case of child abuse he'd seen in decades. The girl, named Danielle Crockett, or Dani, was discovered by a Florida detective who responded to a report of child abuse in July 2005, reported the Tampa Bay Times. The clerk, Mark Holste, said someone saw the girl looking out of a broken window. When officers arrived at the scene, they found a room full of dirt, insects and other types of garbage. She was a wild child, neglected beyond belief in a house in the Tampa Bay area. Ten years ago, she was adopted by a family that... Tampa Bay Times
စေ့တင်ရာတွင် အသုံးပြု၍ ၂၀၁၇ နိုဝင်ဘာ ၃၀၊ ကဏ္ဍသပတေးနေ့ Dani, who was 6 at the time, was discovered on a mold-covered mattress with all the flies, and worms covering it. Her case was the worst neglect situation I've ever seen, Holste said, according to the Daily Mail's writeup of the Times' feature, which reported that her birthday is in September. He said the smell inside the house made him sick, CBN reported, which described her as a true wild child. The girl weighed just 46 pounds, could not speak, could not walk and could not eat food, doctors said. I've been in law enforcement for 27 years, and that's far from... worst, Holste added in the CBN video. After some time, detectives discovered that she had been nearly 7 years old and was being held behind closed doors, in an area the size of a walk-in closet, alone in the dark, reported the Times. Michelle Crockett, a single mother, was arrested and told officials she did what she could. Three years after her daughter was found in filthy conditions, she waived her parental rights and was sentenced to only two years of house arrest, The Associated Press reported. Dani was then admitted by social services and hospitalized for about six weeks and could only use a bottle. We did genetic tests, neurological scans. There was nothing wrong with her. But she wasn't stimulated at all, Kathleen Armstrong of the University of South Florida told the Times. I've been a school psychologist for 20 years, but I've never seen a kid like Dani. Before the 2005 incident, someone called to report seeing a girl who was starving. Social workers offered to help Crockett, but she refused and left her in custody. For the first seven years of her life, she didn't see the sun or eat solid food. Daily Mail
စေ့တင်ရာတွင် အသုံးပြု၍ ၂၀၁၇ ဇီစင်ဘာ ၂၄၊ တနင်္ဂနွေနေ့ 'You Definitely Don't Want Her' Two years after she was rescued, Dani was adopted by Bernie and Diane Lierow, who told the Times that they wanted a daughter and thought God had placed her in their lives. She looked like she needed us, Bernie said. They first met with the adoption agency about Dani. All they would say was 'you definitely don't want it,' Bernie said in a CBN video. But according to Dianne, I she felt attracted to her. In the end, one of the ladies told my wife: 'There's something wrong with her, the girl's not fit for adoption,' Bernie said. But despite the warning, they took her inside. We didn't know if we'd ever eat with a fork and spoon,' Dianne said. You start to think, I don't know how far this kid's going to go. Dani screamed several times a day and didn't want to go out, given that she had been kept inside for years, according to a CBN report. According to the Mail article, Lierows had to potty-train Dani and teach her other basic developmental things that children teach. He can go in the closet, have a drink and drink some water. And it is much more open; now he looks at people and sometimes goes to people he doesn't know so well, they told the Daily Mail. However, raising Dani apparently took a toll on their marriage, and they divorced in 2015, according to Bernie. Dianne didn't want to talk to the Times about the girl. When I got Dani just with me, she really relaxed,' Bernie told the Mail. But I couldn't work at all in the summer. And then there were those times with the cops. There have been two incidents where police have been called about how he behaves in public. It's one thing for a man to take his 9-year-old daughter to the men's room. Or take a 12-year-old out of the carnival and scream. But when she's 17 and weighs 40 pounds more than her father, and still needs help with her diapers, and won't always walk into a car, things get darker, the Times reported, adding that during another time, she started banging around in the back seat, banging on windows before a police officer stopped him and asked what kind of drugs he had her on. Eventually I had to admit: God, that's a bit much for me,' he told the Mail. When the police finally rescued the seven-year-old girl, she was wearing a diaper, couldn't talk or feed, and she was never out. Her mother's reaction to how this could have happened shook investigators. Mamamia
စေ့တင်ရာတွင် အသုံးပြု၍ ၂၀၁၇ ဇီစင်ဘာ ၂၇၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဟူးနေ့ when she was 18, Dani became eligible for Medicare and Social Security. She was then sent to a group home near Nashville, Tennessee, near where Bernie lived.

According to the Times, Dianne lives in Carthage, about an hour from Dani. Now, Bernie said, she has shown improvement and is more compliant. However, she still can't talk or write. And despite all the tribulations, Bernie said he would still take her in. I am so glad that we could give her a home and a family to grow up, the Mail was quoted as saying. The biggest thing I gave her was love and respect, Bernie and Diane decided to adopt a young girl despite people's warnings. Even after they told her the truth behind her... Sharing is a care
စေ့တင်ရာတွင် အသုံးပြု၍ ၂၀၁၇၊ ဧပြီလ၊ တနင်္ဂလာနေ့ 2017 update in 2017, the Associated Press reported on May 19, 2017. at least once a year. He retired two years ago, after 29 years in the police force. He said dani showed him the importance of communicating with his children in the early years. I'm a single father. I retired when my son was eight. The house in Plant City where Dani lived with her birth mother is gone. The city tore it up a few years ago. Michelle Crockett lives nearby in a trailer. She didn't want to talk about Dani because of this story. When I went to see her, she threatened to call the police. Bernie said he tries to see Dani every month. He was her only visitor. He's not nearly as exhausted anymore, he said. Despite the gray beard, he looks 10 years younger. But missing Dani pulling him around while he feeds the goats, leaning on his shoulder while they watch Alvin and the Chipmunks, The AP reported. I took care of her as long as I could because that was my job. The lord gave it to me, Bernie said. But just when I wished he'd come here and helped me out a little bit, he found this place for her. For us, the Associated Press contributed to this report. Originally published as August 3, 2008 Story LANE DEGREGORY Photos melissa LYTTLE Times Staff Part 1: Feral Child PLANT CITY family lived in a dilapidated rental home for nearly three years when someone first saw the baby's face in the window. The little girl, pale, with dark eyes, lifted a dirty blanket over the broken glass and looked outside, one neighbor recalled. Everyone knew there was a woman living in the house with her boyfriend and two adult sons. But they never saw a kid there, they never noticed anyone playing in an overgrown yard. The girl looked young, 5 or 6, and skinny. Too thin. Her cheeks seemed sunny; her eyes were lost. The child stared at the sun square and then slipped out. Months have passed. The face never appeared. On July 13, 2005, just before noon, a Plant City police car pulled up outside that broken-down window. Two officers entered the house and one stumbled back. Clutching his stomach, the rookie vowed in a tuft. Plant City detective Mark Holste had been with police for 18 years when he and his young partner were sent to a house on Old Sydney Road to stand up during a child abuse investigation. Someone finally called the police. They found a car parked outside. The driver's door was open and the woman collapsed into place and sobbed. She was an investigator with the Florida Department of Children and Families. Unbelievable,' she told Holst. The worst thing I've ever seen. MELISSA LYTTLE | Times I still have nightmares about what this child must have lived with for the first six years of his life. The idea that he'd have to lie down every night with 1,000 cockroaches on a mattress soaked in urine... Mark Holste, detective from Plant City. Listen to an excerpt from the interview. Officers entered the cramped living room through the front door. I've been in rooms with bodies rotting there for a week and it never so bad, Holste said later. It just can't be described. Urine and feces - dog, cat and human excrement - smeared on the walls, mashed into the carpet. Everything wet and rotting. Torn curtains, yellow with cigarette smoke, hanging from bent metal bars. Cardboard and old blankets crammed into broken, dirty windows. Garbage covering the stained couch, sticky counters. It seemed that the floor, walls, even the ceiling were swinging under legions of flood cockroaches. It sounded like you were walking on eggshells. Without crunching German cockroaches, you wouldn't have taken a step, the detective said. They were in the lights, in the furniture. Even inside the freezer. Freezer! As Holste looked around, a burly woman in a faded semi-trailer wanted to know what was going on. Yes, she lived there. Yes, it was her two sons in the living room. Her daughter? Well, yes, she had a daughter... The detective walked past her in a narrow corridor. He turned the handle on the door, which opened into a space the size of a dressing room. He smounded in the dark. Something moved at his feet. (Photos 1 of 9) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times From a small broken window in the room where Danielle was being held, she saw a neighbor's house and a scattered garden. (Photos 2 of 9) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times The old blanket covered the window, but it could not protect itself from insects. Cockroaches and worms filled the room, and the body of the little girl was covered with bites. (Photos 3 of 9) Plant City Police Department The family has lived in this dilapidated rental home for years, but neighbors have never seen a child play in the yard. (Photos 4 of 9) Plant City Police When detectives arrived to investigate child neglect, they found Danielle covered in feces in this filthy room. Blankets and stuffed animal were also soiled. (Photos 5 of 9) Plant City Police Department took photos around the house. Every room was destroyed, covered in cobwebs and stained with cigarette smoke. (Photos 6 of 9) Plant City Police Department Michelle Crockett, Danielle's biological mother, told police that she didn't realize having a dirty house was a crime. (Photos 7 of 9) Plant City Police Department Kitchen was full of rotten food and garbage. Cockroaches were everywhere, even in the freezer. (Photos 8 of 9) Plant City Police Department House, on a residential street, was surrounded by broken bottles and cars. (Photos 9 of 9) Plant City Police Department Four people - and sometimes five - lived in the house, but Michelle Crockett said she got sick and no one would help clean her up. ♦♦ First he saw the girl's eyes: dark and wide, out of focus, not blinking. She didn't look at him as much as she did at him. She was lying on a torn, moldy mattress on the floor. She was curled up on her side, her long legs tucked into her emaciated chest. Her ribs and collarbone protruded; one thin hand was thrown over the face; her black hair was matted, crawling with everyone. Insect bites, rashes and she weaved through her skin. Even though she looked old enough to be at school, she was naked - except for swollen diapers. Plant City Police After Danielle was removed from a filthy, beetle-infested room, she was taken to Tampa General Hospital. Malnourished and poor, she spent six weeks there. The pile of dirty diapers in that room must have been 4 feet tall, the detective said. The glass in the window was broken, and the baby was just lying there, surrounded by his own excrement and bugs. When he bent down to pick her up, she cried out like a lamb. I felt like I was picking up a baby,' Holste said. I put it over my shoulder, and the diaper started leaking down my leg. The girl didn't like her. Holste asked, what's your name, honey? Apparently, the girl didn't hear it. He was looking for a dress to wear, but all he found was packed laundry, stained with feces. All he was looking for was a little girl, a doll, a stuffed animal. But the only ones I found were covered with worms and cockroaches. He choked with rage and approached his mother. How could you let that happen? My mother's statement was, 'I'm doing the best I can,' the detective said. I told her, 'The best you can do is shit!' He wanted to arrest the woman right away, but when he called his boss, he was told to let DCF do it himself. So the detective carried the girl down to the dark hall, past her brothers, past her mother in the doorway, who was screaming, 'Don't take my baby! He sached the child to the state investigator's car. The investigator agreed they had to get the girl out. Tampa General is clamoring for us, the detective recalls how he told his partner. If the baby doesn't get to the hospital, he's not going to make it. For the first seven years of her life, Dani had never seen the sun, felt the wind, or tasted solid food. Her name, as her mother said, was Danielle. She was almost seven years old. She weighed 46 pounds. She was malnourished and poor. In the children's intensive care unit, they tried to feed the girl, but she could not chew or swallow solid food. So they put her on an I.D. and let her drink from a bottle. The helpers bathed her, scrubbed the sores on her face and trimmed her torn fingernails. They had to cut her tangled hair before they could comb out the lice. Her case worker found out she'd never been to school, never been to the doctor. She didn't know how to hold a doll, she didn't understand hide-and-peek. Due to severe neglect, the doctor would write, the child will be disabled for the rest of his life. Danielle, hunched over in an overgrown crib, curled up on herself like a potato bug, then shrugged, kicked and punched angrily. To calm down, she was teetering on her toes and sucking her fists. As a child, wrote one doctor. She wouldn't contact eye contact. She did not react to heat or cold - or pain. Insertion iv needle did not choose any reaction. She never cried. With a nurse holding hands, Stand and walk sideways on your fingers, like a crab. She couldn't talk, she didn't know how to nod yes or no. She grunted once in a while. She couldn't tell anyone what happened, what was wrong, what hurt. Dr. Kathleen Armstrong, director of pediatric psychology at the University of South Florida School of Medicine, was the first psychologist danielle examined. She said medical tests, brain scans and eye, hearing and genetics checks found nothing wrong with the baby. She wasn't deaf, she wasn't autistic, she didn't have any physical ailments like cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy. MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Your heart just goes out to this child. What happened to that poor girl? How am I supposed to figure out how to help her? DR. KATHLEEN ARMSTRONG, Director of Pediatric Psychology at the University of South Florida School of Medicine. Listen to an excerpt from the interview. Doctors and social workers had no way of knowing everything that happened to Danielle. But the scene in the house, along with Danielle's almost coma state, led them to believe that she had never been cared for beyond basic nutrition. Although it was hard to imagine, they doubted that they had ever brought her out in the sun, sang to sleep, even hugged or held her. She was fragile and beautiful, but whatever she was doing seemed to be missing. Armstrong called the girl's condition ecological autism. Danielle had been deprived of interaction for so long, the doctor believed, that she had retreated into herself. The most remarkable thing about Danielle, Armstrong said, was her lack of engagement with people, with anything. There was no light in her eye, no response, no recognition. ... We saw a little girl who didn't even respond to hugs or affection. Even a child with the most severe autism responds to those. Danielle was the nastiest case of neglect I've ever seen. ♦♦ The authorities have discovered the rarest and most pitful creature: a wild child. The term is not a diagnosis. It is based on historical records – some fictional, some true – of children being cared for by animals and therefore not exhibited by human care. Wolf boys and bird girls, Tarzan, Mowgli from the Jungle Book. It is said that during the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick II gave a group of children to some nuns. He told them to take care of the kids, but they never talked to them. He believed that children would eventually reveal the true language of God. Instead, they died because of lack of interaction. Then there was the Wild Boy of Aveyron, who wandered out of the woods near Paris in 1800, naked and grunting. He was about 12. The teacher took him in and named him Victor. He tried to socialize with the child, teach him how to talk. But after a few years, he gave up on the teen and asked the housekeeper to take care of him. In the first five years of life, 85 percent of the brain is developed, said Armstrong, the psychologist who examined Danielle. These early relationships, more than anything else, help wire the brain provide children with experience with confidence, develop language, communicate. They need this system to be related to the world. The importance of care is manifested time and time again. In the 1960s, psychologist Harry Harlow put a group of infant rhesus monkeys in a room with two artificial mothers. One, made of wire, was handing out food. The second of the terry cloth, with elongated cradles. Even when they were starving, all the monkeys crawled into warm cloth arms. Primates need comfort even more than they need food, Armstrong said. The last case of a wild child was in 1970 in California. The girl that therapists came to call Genie was strapped to a potty chair until she was 13. Like Wild Boy, Genie has been studied in hospitals and labs. She was in her 20s when doctors realized she would never talk, she could never take care of herself. She ended up in foster care, cut off from the world, totally addicted. Watch a video of Danielle's case – which unfolded out of the public eye, without a word in the media -- raised troubling questions for anyone trying to help her. How could that happen? What kind of mother would sit year after year while her daughter suffered in her own filth, starving and crawling with bugs? And why didn't someone intervene? Neighbors, authorities - where were they? It's shocking that in the 21st century, no food. No one talks to her or reads her a story. He can't even use his hands. How can this child be so invisible? But the most pressing questions were about her future. When Danielle was discovered, she was six years younger than Wild Boy or Genie, which gave hope that she might still be teachable. Many of her caregivers hoped to heal her. Danielle probably missed an opportunity to learn speech, but maybe she could understand the language, communicate in other ways. Yet doctors had only the most modest ambitions for her. I was hoping she'd be able to sleep all night, that she'd ran out of diapers and that she'd feed,' Armstrong said. If things had gone really well, she said, Danielle would have ended up in a nice nursing home. But where could she go? Not at home, not at home. Judge Martha Cook, who oversaw the addiction hearing, ordered that Danielle be placed in foster care and that her mother should not be allowed to call or visit her. The mother was investigated on child abuse charges. The baby broke my heart,' Cook said later. We were so upset about her condition that we were worried about what to do. Eventually, Danielle was placed in a group house in Land O'Lakes. She had a bed with sheets and pillows, clothes and food and someone who at least changed her diapers. In October 2005, A few weeks after she was 7, Danielle started going to school for the first time. She was enrolled in a special class at Sanders Elementary School. Her behavior was different than any child I've ever seen, said Kevin O'Keefe, Danielle's first teacher. If you put food around, he grabs it and folds it up like a baby,' he said. She had a lot of episodes of great agitation, screaming, waving her arms, rolling into fetal position. She was schmounding in the closet just to get away from everyone. She didn't know how to climb a slide or swing on a swing. She didn't want anyone touching her. It took her a year to become conscientious, he said. By Thanksgiving 2006 - a year and a half after Danielle went into foster care - her case worker was thinking about finding her a permanent home. Danielle could be cared for in a nursing home, group home or medical foster home. But she needed more. In my entire career in the childcare system, I never remember a child like Danielle, said Luanne Panacek, executive director of Hillsborough County Children's Council. Does it make you think about what quality of life means? What's the best we can hope for? After everything she's been through, is it just safe? In the fall, Panacek decided to include Danielle in the Heart Gallery – a set of portraits depicting children available for adoption. The Children's Council displays pictures in shopping malls and on the

Internet in the hope that people will fall in love with children and take them home. There are 600 children up for adoption at Hillsborough. Who, Panaček mused, would choose an eight-year-old who is still in diapers who doesn't know her name and may never speak or let you hug her? ◆◆◆ On the day Danielle was due to take a picture for the Heart Gallery, she appeared with a red Kool-Aid dribble after a new blouse. She hasn't made it to the Sippy Cup yet. Garett White, Danielle's carer, scrubbed the girl's shirt and washed her face. She brushed Danielle's forehead wounds and begged the photographer to be patient. White stepped up behind the photographer and waved at Danielle. She stuck her thumbs in her ears, twisted her arms, stuck out her tongue, and rolled her eyes. Danielle didn't blink. White was about to give up when she heard a sound she'd never heard from Danielle. The child's eyes were still dull, seemingly unseerly. But her mouth was open. She looked like she was trying to laugh. Click. Heart Gallery Everyone said there was nothing in the baby. But I felt it. I even saw it. There was this look on her face. Bernie Lierow and his wife Diane saw Danielle's photo at the Heart Gallery, a children's exhibition available for adoption. Listen to an excerpt from the interview. ◆◆◆ Teenagers ripped through the arcade, firing fake rifles. Sweaty guys hunched over air hockey tables. The girls squealed as they stomped on the flashing squares. Bernie and Diane Lierow remember standing inside GameWorks in Tampa, impressed. They drove three hours from their home in Fort Myers Beach hoping to meet the child in this foster home. But all those kids looked too wild, too big, and, well, too worldly. Bernie, 48, will redo the houses. Diane, 45, cleans houses. They have four adult sons from previous marriages and one together. Diane couldn't have any more kids, and Bernie always wanted a daughter. So last year, when William was 9, they decided to adopt. Their new daughter would have to be younger than William, they told the foster workers. But she'd have to be potty-trained and able to feed. They didn't want a child who could hurt their son or who was deeply disabled and unable to take care of themselves. They found a girl online in Texas, another in Georgia. Every time they were told: This is dangerous. He can't be with other kids. That's why they were at the Heart Gallery meeting and scanned the crowd. Bernie's head ached from all the trembling games; Diana's abdominal pain when she saw all the abandoned children; And William was tired of shooting aliens. Diane went from chaos to a niche under the stairs. That's when she saw it. The little girl's face on the flyer, pale with sunk cheeks and dark hair chopped too short. Her brown eyes seemed to be looking for something. Diane called Bernie. He saw the same thing she saw. She just looked like she needed us. They go to work, they go to church, they visit with their neighbors, they go down with their dogs. They do not travel or pursue exotic interests; holiday for them hangs at home with the family. Shy and soft-spoken, both are slow to anger, and say rarely argue. They said they had everything they wanted. Except for my daughter. But the more they asked about Danielle, the more they didn't want to know. She was eight years old, but she worked as a two-year-old. She was left alone in a musty room, ignored for most of her life. No, she wasn't in the video game room; She was in a group house. She was wearing diapers, she couldn't feed, she couldn't talk. After more than a year at school, she still won't make eye contact or play with other kids. No one knew what was going on with her or what she might be capable of. She was everything we didn't want, Bernie said. But they couldn't forget the sore eyes. ◆◆◆ When they met Danielle at school, she drooled. Her tongue was hanging from her mouth. Her head, which seemed too big for her thin neck, rolled from side to side. She looked at them for a while, and then she made it through a special class. She turned to her back, swung for a while, and then threw herself on her toes. Diane approached her and spoke quietly to her. Danielle didn't notice. But when Bernie bent down, Danielle turned to him and her eyes seemed to focus. He reached out his hand. She let him pull her to her feet. The teacher, Kevin O'Keefe, was impressed; He didn't see her warm up to anyone so quickly. Bernie led Danielle onto the field, she was pulling sideways and jumping on her toes. She sneezed at the sun, but let him gently push her on to the swing. When it was time for them to break up, Bernie swore he saw Danielle waving. He had a dream that night. Two huge hands shriped through the ceiling of his bedroom, bringing their fingers together. Danielle swung on those hands, dark eyes wide open, thin arms reaching for him. ◆◆◆ (Photo 1 of 5) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Dani can quickly move from happily building sand castles to throwing a fit. Her parents are trying to calm her down so she knows she's safe. (Photos 2 of 5) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Therapists help Dani learn to perform simple tasks such as using a fork to stab green beans and tater tots. (Photos 3 of 5) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Dani loves water, she likes to go to the beach and she learned to swim in the Lierows pool. (Photos 4 of 5) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Dani wasn't even interested in children's toys. Her favorite pas time was batting mardi gras beads. (Photos 5 of 5) MELISSA LYTTLE | While big brother William, 10, prepares for bed, Bernie has to help Dani brush her teeth. Everyone told them not to do it, neighbors, coworkers, friends. Everyone said they didn't know what they were getting into. What if Danielle isn't what we were hoping for? Bernie and Diane responded. You can't pre-order your own children. Take what God gives you. They brought her home over the Easter weekend of 2007. It was supposed to be a rebirth, of sorts - a first name for their family. It was a disaster, Bernie said. They gave her a doll; she bit off her hands. They took her to the beach; she screamed and didn't want to put her feet in the sand. In her new home, she tore from room to room, her swimming diaper spewing streams across the carpet. She couldn't peel the chocolate egg wrapper, so she ate glossy paper. She couldn't sit back and watch TV or watch a book. She couldn't hold the crayons. When they tried to brush her teeth or comb her hair, she kicked and punched. She wouldn't lie in bed, she wouldn't fall asleep, she'd just roll on her back for hours, side to side. She'd been popping up all night sneaking sideways on her fingers into the kitchen. She pulled out a frozen food drawer and stood on bags of vegetables so she could see into the fridge. She wouldn't take anything, Bernie said. I think she wanted to make sure the food was still there. When Bernie tried to lead her back to bed, Danielle leaned against him and bit her hands. In time, Danielle's new family learned what works and what doesn't. Her foster family gave her antipsychotics to relieve her tantrums and help her sleep. When Bernie and Diane took her off her medication, she stopped drooling and started holding her head. She let Bernie brush his teeth. ◆◆◆ Bernie and Diane already thought of Danielle as their But legally, it wasn't. Danielle's biological mother did not want to give her up, even though she was accused of child abuse and threatened with 20 years in prison. So the plaintiffs offered a deal: If she gave up her parental rights, they wouldn't send her to prison. She took the deal. She got two years of house arrest, plus probation. And 100 hours of community service. In October 2007, Bernie and Diane officially adopted Danielle. They call her Dani. ◆◆◆ (Photo 1 of 2) MELISSA LYTTLE | Other times, Dani hates combing her hair. Diane fights her every morning until the school bus arrives. (Photos 2 of 2) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Diane and Bernie enrolled Dani in public school and all kinds of therapies. He'll walk her to the bus every morning. Do you need to go back to potty? Diane asks. It's cloudy on a Monday morning in spring 2008 and Dani is late for school. Again. He's always flying around the living room, crouching behind chairs and sofas, pulling on his shorts. After a year with his new family, Dani hardly resembles the girl in the Heart Gallery photo. She grew a leg and her weight doubled. All the years she's been kept inside, she's had dark hair like the dirty room she lived in. But ever since she started going to the beach and swimming in the backyard pool, Dani's shoulder hair has turned golden blonde. He's always suing when someone's trying to clean it up. The changes in her behavior are subtle, but Bernie and Diane see progress. They give an example: When Dani feels overwhelmed, she retreats to her room, rolls on her back, pulls one sock to the end of her legs and bats. Hours. Bernie and Diane will tell her to stop. Now that Dani can hear them coming, he peels off his sock and throws it in the closet to save it. They say they learn what's right and what's wrong. And she seems upset to know that she let them down. It's like she cares how she feels. Bernie and Diane were told to keep Dani in school with deeply disabled children, but insisted on different classes because they believe they can do more. They take her to work and physical therapy, a church, a mall and a grocery store. It's in speech classes and horseback riding lessons. Once, when Dani was trying to climb a horse, the boy's mother in therapy class turned to Diane. You're so lucky, Diane remembers her wife. Happiness? Diane asked. The woman nodded. I know my son will never stand alone, he will never be able to climb a horse. You have no idea what your daughter might do. Diane will find hope in the idea. She's counting small steps to convince herself that things are slowly getting better. What if Dani steals food from other people's grand at McDonald's? At least now he can feed on chicken nuggets. What if she's been to the bathroom four times this morning? She finally ran out of diapers. It took months, but they taught her how to keep a teddy bear in the toilet, so... I wouldn't be afraid to be alone in the bathroom. It was bribed by m&ms. Dani, sit down and try to use the potty, Diane coaxes. Pull down your shorts. That's a good girl. ◆◆◆ (Photo 1 of 3)MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Dani's speech therapist, Leslie Goldenberg, has worked with Dani every day for nearly a year. She kept hoping to hear a sound. (Photos 2 of 3) MELISSA LYTTLE | The Times Goldenberg says Dani was the most challenging case she's had. (Photos 3 of 3) MELISSA LYTTLE | The Times Goldenberg says he feels they've achieved something if he can keep Dani occupied for at least half an hour. Every weekday, half an hour, speech therapist Leslie Goldenberg tries to teach Dani how to talk. She sits her in front of a mirror at Bonita Springs Elementary School and shows her how to purse her lips to make puffy noises. Puh-puh-puh, says the teacher. Here, you can feel my mouth. She brings Dani's fingers to her lips so she can feel the air. Dani nods. Now he knows how to nod. Goldenberg's back to the pygs. Dani leaned over to the mirror, slammed her lips, opened them, and closed them. There's no sound coming out. She can mimic movement, but she doesn't know she has to blow air to make noise. He bends closer, frowns at his reflection. Her lips opened and closed again, then she jumped up and ran around the room. She grabs the Koosh ball and bounces it fast. She's lost in herself. Again. But in many ways, Dani has already exceeded the teacher's expectations, and not just when it comes to speech. He seems to be learning to listen and understand simple commands. She pulls on her pants to show she needs to go to the bathroom, taps the juice when she wants more. He can sit at the table for five minutes and begins to pick up the apple skein with a spoon. She only has a few tantrums left in a month. She learns to push buttons on a talking board, use symbols to show when she wants a book or when she's angry. They learn that it is ok to be angry: You can deal with these feelings without biting your hands. I'd like her to at least be able to handle the sound board so she can communicate her choices, even if she never finds her voice, Goldenberg says. I think he understands most of what we're saying. It's just that he doesn't always know how -- or wants -- to react. Dania's teacher and family could only hear her speak a few words, and they all seemed random. Once, baaa blurted out, which shed Goldenberg's tears. It was the first sound of a letter she'd ever published. She seems to speak most often when William tickled her, as if something from her subconscious had leaked when she was too distracted to turn it off. Her brother heard her say, Stop! and No! He thought he even heard her say his name. Having a brother just a year older is invaluable to Dani's development, her teacher says. He's got someone to practice his language with, someone to listen to. Even deaf children will be coo, Goldenberg said. But if no one answers, they stop. ◆◆◆ LYTTLE | Times At first, it scared me. She did weird things, she hit things. And she kept running around because she didn't know what to do. It's usually good now because I always have company. William Lierow, 10, ticks his new little sister to make her laugh. MELISSA LYTTLE | Times Dani's brother, Willie, 10, likes to drive it in his battery-operated Jeep. His friends didn't understand what was going on with her, so he told them she was autistic. William said Dani scared him first. She did weird things. But he always wanted him to play with someone. He doesn't care that he can't ride a bike or play Monopoly with him. I drive her in a jeep and she honked the horn," she says. He's learning to straighten cards and stuff. He couldn't believe she never saved up with a dog or licked an ice cream cork. He taught her how to play peek-a-boo, helped her squash Play-Doh through her fingers. He showed her that it is safe to walk on the sand and fun to blow bubbles and cry well; if you get hurt, someone comes. He taught her how to open a gift. How to pick up tater tots and soak them in a mountain of ketchup. William used to live as an only child, but since Dani moved in, he's been getting most of their parents' attention. He needs them more than I do, he says simply. He gave her his old toys. He gave her his old movies, his board books. He even moved out of his bedroom so she could sleep upstairs. His parents painted his old walls pink and filled the closet with cotton candy. They moved William to the laundry room, squeezed it between the washing machine and Dani's rocking horse. Every night, a 10-year-old boy cuddles his radio because it's scary down here, all alone. After a few minutes while his parents try to get Dani into bed, William always sneaks into the living room and folds into the love seat. He swapped the radio for a little stuffed Dalmatie and called the hallway: Good night, Mom and Dad. Good night, Dani. One day, he's sure he'll answer. ◆◆◆ (Photo 1 of 3) MELISSA LYTTLE | The Times' Bernie Lierow ticks his daughter almost every night, trying to get a reaction from her. It's the only way she can make her laugh. (Photos 2 of 3) MELISSA LYTTLE | Even after a year at the Lierow house, Dani still doesn't sleep in a normal bed. Her Glowor illuminates the darkness. (Photos 3 of 3) MELISSA LYTTLE | Times More than a year after taking Dani, Lierows left Fort Myers and moved to a farm in Tennessee. Even now, Dani won't sleep in bed. Bernie bought her a new trundle so she could slip out of the bottom bunk and be floor-level. Diane found pink Hello Kitty leaves and a stuffed hot worm, so Dani will never be alone in the dark again. Do you have your young one? Are you ready to go to sleep? Bernie asks and bends over to pick up his daughter. He turns slowly circles under the window and holds his worm by the tail. Bernie lifts her up to the glass and shows her the sun, behind the neighbor's house. She hopes that one day she might call him Dad to get married, or at least live alone. But if that doesn't happen, he says, that's fine, too. For me, it's all about kisses and hugs. For now, Bernie and Diane are content to give Dani what they've never done before: comfort and stability, attention and affection. Trundle, hot worm. Now Bernie leans into Dani's bed and smoothes her golden hair over the pillow. Night night, she says, kissing her on the forehead. Good night, honey, Diane's calling from the door. Bernie's lowering the shadow. As he walks past Dani, he reaches out and grabs him by the ankles. Bernie loves to give his daughter, Dani, kisses and hugs even though he can't give back. She has high hopes for her life, even though she knows she may not be able to fix everything for her. ◆◆◆ She's out there somewhere, looming over Danielle's story like a ghost. For Bernie and Diane, Danielle's birth mother is a cipher that was almost never talked about. The less said, the better. As far as they're at it, Danielle was born the day she was found. And yet this unimaginable woman is out there, most likely still on parole, permanently unenviable by her daughter, wondering - what? What could she say? Nothing. Nothing. But none of this makes sense without her. Michelle Crockett lives in a mobile home in Plant City with her two 20-something sons, three cats and a closet full of kittens. The trailer is a short walk from the little house where she lived with Danielle. A few weeks ago, Michelle opened the door in a long T-shirt. When he sees two strangers, he crouches inside and pulls out his raincoat. It is tall and hefty, with wide shoulders and the fading skin of a smoker. She looks tired, older than her 51 years. he asks. You want to talk about my daughter? Her voice is catching on. Tears in glasses. The inside of the trailer is modest but clean: dishes drying on the counter, silk flowers on the table. Sitting in her kitchen, chain-smoking 305s, she begins at the end: the day the detective took Danielle. Part of me died that day, he says. MELISSA LYTTLE | Times after Dani was removed from her home, Michelle Crockett says no one ever asked for her side of the story. Michelle says she was studying at the University of Tampa when she met a man named Bernie at a bar. It was 1976. He was a Vietnam veteran, 10 years older. They got married and moved to Las Vegas, where he drove a taxi. They had two sons, Bernard and Grant. The younger boy wasn't trained for potty until he was four, he didn't talk until he was 5. He was a little slow, Michelle says. They put him in a special ed at school. Her sons were teenagers when her husband fell ill. Agent Orange, the doctors said. When he died in August 1997, Michelle declared bankruptcy. Six months later, she met a man at a casino. He was in Vegas on business. She went back to his hotel room. His name was Ron, he says. He shakes his head. No, it was Bob. I think it was Bob. ◆◆◆ For hours Michelle Crockett spins her story, tapping ash into a plastic ashtray. Everything he says sounds like a request, but for what? Understanding? Sympathy? She's not sorry. Far from it. She feels wronged. Danielle, he says, was born in a Hospital in Las Vegas, a healthy baby that weighed 7 pounds, 6 ounces. Her Apgar score measuring her health was 9, almost perfect. She screamed a lot, Michelle says. I just thought she was spoiled. When Danielle was 18 months old, Michelle's cell phone burned down at home, so she loaded her two sons and a young daughter on a Greyhound bus and headed to Florida to bed with her cousin. He says they lost their suitcases on the way. My cousin couldn't take the kids. After a week, Michelle moved into an apartment in Brandon with no furniture, no clothes, no dishes. She was hired as a cashier at Publix. She left Danielle at home while she was working. But it was fine: The boys were with her, she says. He says he has papers to prove it. ◆◆◆ Goes to the boys' toilet, comes back with a box full of documents and hands it over. The oldest documents are from February 11, 2002. That was when someone called her on the child abuse hotline. The caller reported that the child, about 3, had been left unattended for several days with a retarded older brother, never seen wearing anything but diapers. This is Michelle's proof that her sons were following Danielle. The caller continued: "The home is dirty. There's clothes everywhere. On the children's seat there are feces, and the counter is covered with garbage. It's unclear what investigators found in the house, but they left Danielle with her mother that day. Nine months later, another call to the authorities. A person who knew Michelle from Moose Lodge said she was always there to play bingo with her new boyfriend, leaving her children alone overnight. It's not appropriate to be a mother, the caller said. The hotline operator took these notes: A 4-year-old girl is still wearing diapers and drinking from a baby bottle. The ongoing situation has been worse since last August. Mom leaves Grant and Danielle at home a few days in a row while she goes to work and spends the night with a new sweetheart. Danielle... you can never see them away from home. Child abuse investigators have come out again. They offered Michelle a free preschool for Danielle. Refused. And they left Danielle behind. Why? Weren't they worried about two separate calls to the hotline, months apart, citing the same concerns? It's not automatic because the home is dirty we would remove the child, said Nick Cox, regional director of the Florida Department of Children and Families. And what they found in 2002 wasn't like the scene they walked into in 2005. The goal, he said, is to keep the child with the parent, and try to help parents get whatever services he or she might need. But Michelle refused to help. And investigators could they didn't have enough evidence to give Danielle, Cox said. However, I am afraid that no effort has been made to interview the child, he said. If you have a four-year-old who can't speak, it's going to put a red flag on me. I'm not going to tell you it was okay. I don't know how that happened. MELISSA LYTTLE | Times I think I'm guilty of being a dirty house. And not send her to school. And I never took her to the doctor because she was never sick. Michelle Crockett, 51, has two adult sons. Danielle was her youngest child. Listen to an excerpt from the interview. Michelle insists Danielle was fine. I tried to train her, she didn't want to train. I tried to get her into school, no one wanted to take her, she says in the kitchen of her trailer. The only thing she noticed was wrong, she says, was that she didn't talk much. She spoke in a quiet tone. She said, 'Let's eat.' But no one could hear her except me. She says she took Danielle to the library and the park. I took her out for pizza. Once. But can't remember which library, which park or where they went for pizza. She liked the song I sang to her, michelle says. Miss Polly had a doll, she was sick, sick, sick... Michelle's older son Bernard told the judge that he once asked his mother why she never took Danielle to the doctor. There's something wrong with her, he remembered he told her. He said she replied: If they see her, they could take her away. The day the cops came, Michelle says she didn't know what was going on. Detective found Danielle in the back asleep. The only window in the small space was broken. Michelle stuck a blanket over the broken glass, but flies, bugs and cockroaches snuck in anyway. My house was a mess, he says. I was sick, and I missed it. But I never knew a dirty house was illegal. A cop walked past her carrying Danielle. He said she was starving. I told him my sisters and I were thin until we were 13. I begged him, "Please don't take my baby! Please!" She says she gave her daughter socks before he took her to the car, but she couldn't find any shoes. ◆◆ The judge ordered Michelle to have a psychological evaluation. That's also among the documents. Danielle's IQ, the report says, is below 50, indicating severe mental retardation. Michelle is 77, borderline range of intellectual abilities. She tended to blame her troubles for the circumstances while rationalizing her own actions, wrote psychologist Richard Enrico Spana. She takes more care of herself than most other adults, and this could lead to neglect to pay enough attention to the people around her. She says she wanted to fight for her daughter, but she didn't want to go to jail and she didn't have enough money for a lawyer. I was trying to get people to help me, michelle says. They say that made her autistic. But how do you make a child autistic? They say I didn't toate her - but she just ripped them off. After Danielle was taken away, Michelle says she tripped over a box at a Wal-Mart and got a car accident and couldn't work anymore. She returned to court in February and the judge gave up community service. He is on parole until 2012. He spends his days with his sons, do crossword puzzles and watch movies. Sometimes he talks about Danielle. When Danielle was in the hospital, Michelle says she and her sons snuck in to see her. Michelle took a picture from the file: Danielle, who drowned in a hospital dress, collapsed into a bed, which folded into a wheelchair. That's the last picture I have," michelle says. He's going to squeeze out a cigarette in his kitchen. He goes to the living room, where Danielle looks down from the wall. He reaches out and watches his daughter's face with his finger. When I moved here, he says, that was the first thing I hung. She says she misses Danielle. Did you see her? Michelle asks. Is he all right? MELISSA LYTTLE | When Danielle was in the hospital, Michelle says she and her sons snuck in to see her. Michelle took this picture from the file. ◆◆◆ Is he okay? Danielle is better than anyone dared to hope. She learned to look at people and get held up. He can chew him. He can swim. She's tall and blonde and has a small belly. He knows his name is Dani. He's got a window in his new room to look out of. If she wants to look outside, all she has to do is raise her hands and her father is right behind her, waiting for him to pick her up. For years, Dani's only window in the world was a blurry, broken piece of glass. Now that her father is holding her tight, she likes to watch the sunset before bed. ◆◆◆ If you think a child is being neglected or abused, call the anonymous toll-free hotline at 1-800-962-2873. If you need help caring for your child, call the Tampa Bay Crisis Center at (813) 234-1234. For information about adoption in Hillsborough County, call (813) 229-2884 or go to www.heartgallerytampa.org. In Pinellas/Pasco counties call (727) 456-0637 or go to www.heartgallerykids.org. If you can't adopt but want to help foster children at Hillsborough, call (813) 651-3150 or go to www.sylviathomascenter.org. In Pinellas or Pasco, call (727) 461-2990 or go to www.eckerd.org. ◆◆ Tampa Bay Times reporter Lane DeGregory and Times photographer Melissa Lyttle met Danielle and her new family at their home in February 2008. All the scenes in their house and in speech therapy were witnessed by journalists. The opening scene and others were reconstructed from interviews with neighbors, a detective, Danielle's care manager, psychologist, teacher, legal guardian and judge on her case. More information comes from hundreds of pages of police reports, medical records and court documents. Michelle Crockett was interviewed at home in City. In June, Danielle's new parents sold their Florida home and moved out of the state. Bernie built Dani a tree house. She started summer school last week. Lane DeGregory is a Reporter from the Tampa Bay Times who has won a Pulitzer Prize and prefers to write about people in the shadows. Lane graduated from the University of Virginia, where she was editor-in-chief of the student newspaper Cavalier Daily. She later earned a master's degree in rhetoric and communication studies from the University of Virginia. She previously worked for the Daily Progress and The Virginian-Pilot and moved to Florida in 2000 to write for the Times. She has won dozens of national awards, including twice winning Scripps Howard's Ernie Pyle Award for Human Interest writing, eight National Headliner Awards and being recognized eight times by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He teaches at the University of South Florida, poynter institute and journalism conferences around the world. Contact her at or (727) 893-8825. Melissa Lyttle worked in newspapers, including the Tampa Bay Times, for 15 years and is now a freelance photographer in Los Angeles. She graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in journalism. Her work has been published by ESPN.com, CNN.com, Mother Jones, Esquire, ProPublica, Inc Magazine, Mashable, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Intercept, Rolling Stone, Sports Illustrated, among others. She has been recognized by UNICEF, Photographer of the Year International, National Press Photographers Association's Best Photojournalism, Atlanta Photojournalism Seminar, Southern Short Course, Casey Medal for Meritorative Journalism, and Alexia Foundation Student Grant. She is currently chair of the NPPA. Contact her at or (813) 215-8329. Follow her blog www.melissalyttle.com/blog. Additional credits Editor Mike Wilson Photo Editor Patty Yablonski Video production jack rowland story design Lyra Solochek, Martin Frobisher and Lauren Flannery Research Caryn Baird Her story began in solitude and unimaginable misery. Three years later, he has a home, a family and puppies to play with. No one had any expectations. But there was hope: Maybe it was found early enough. Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Lane DeGregory discusses her stories and answers your questions in a weekly podcast. Podcast.

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