



Carol pours coffee, above, for her big sweetheart, foster father Ralph Rossi. Above right is Mrs. Phyllis Rossi. At right, Carol strums her guitar in the backyard



"...A Place For Them To Stay"

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY LAURENCE E. KEEFE

I spent the other day with a large, pleasant family in a Greece ranch house.

The Rossis have six attractive and articulate children and a poodle named Suzette. Ralph Rossi is a group leader in the bindery of Eastman Kodak Company, and his wife keeps house.

This doesn't seem much like news. There is very little, indeed, in their daily life to set the Rossi family apart from any other suburban middle class family. The only significant difference between them and the people down the block, is that all the children who call Ralph and Phyllis Rossi "Mom" and "Dad" are foster children placed with them by Catholic Family Center.

The Rossis estimate that they have had at least 75 foster children since 1947 when they started taking them in.

Most of the children now living with them have been there for several years, and the oldest, Diane (called DeeDee at home) has lived with them since she was two. She's now 18 and a high school senior.

The Rossis are proud and glad about how long their children have stayed with them, although this type of extended foster care is not likely to last much longer.

Mary, the second oldest, is in the sixth grade, and has been with the Rossis for six months. But Donald, 11, and his natural brother Kenny, 9, have been members of the family nearly nine years. And Brian, 8, has lived with them more than seven years; his younger "sister" Carol, 7, has been reared by the Rossis since she was a year old.

A recent court decision, however, has mandated that each foster child placement be reviewed every two years by a judge. According to Diane Lenzo, Catholic Family Center's "foster-home finder," many older foster children "are not surrendered for adoption" by their natural parents although they may never be able to care for them. This leaves them in a legal "limbo." Now, she says, there is a new emphasis on getting surrender papers signed, and adoptions processed.

Phyllis Rossi, who has one married daughter of her own, and a grandson, Blair, recalls how she got involved in being a foster parent. "I didn't have any thought of doing something like this, you know. It's just that one time, we were living in this tiny one bedroom apartment, you turn around and you meet yourself . . ."

"One night, this girl I was real close to, called up and said Catholic Family Center had two children without a place to stay for the night, and did I know anybody who could take them? I said, 'I will!' I just couldn't stand the thought of them without a place to stay . . ."

