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Through Family Court, Poughkeepsie parents defeat drugs, reunite family

Larry Hertz

William and Heather Geiger thanked a judge the other day for taking their kids away from them.

"I guess we had to lose absolutely everything before we could begin to get everything back," William Geiger said last week as he and Heather spoke in the kitchen of their City of Poughkeepsie apartment about their journey from drug and alcohol abuse back to parenthood.

Geiger, 42, said anyone who might have described him a couple of years ago as a bad parent might have been underestimating the case just a tad.

"Know what I did one time?" he asked a visitor. "I bought my son a bike for his birthday. Then, before his birthday came, I returned it to the store and used the money to buy crack.

"Sitting here now, I can't believe I did that, but I did," he said.

Heather Geiger, 28, said she had plenty of horror stories about herself, ranging from infidelity to a drug-induced failure to provide enough food for her kids.

The Geigers' lifestyle came crashing down on them for good on Aug. 24, 2008, when William Geiger was arrested for failing to appear in court on an old DWI charge.

Blood tests ordered by a Dutchess County Family Court judge confirmed William was drunk and Heather was high on cocaine.

"This was way before noon," William said.

The alcohol found in William's bloodstream that day was the last to course through his veins. He got sober during a 90-day stint in jail and has been clean ever since.

Heather had a few bumps along the way, but after the two of them were reunited in a specialty court called Family Treatment Court about 18 months ago, they tackled every task a judge gave them to earn their children back.

As Treatment Court Coordinator Donna Powell, Judge Peter M. Forman and others applauded, the Geigers officially "graduated" in ceremonies in Family Court June 23. They had been reunited with 5-year-old Skyler and 4-year-old Sarah Geiger about a month earlier.

Powell said she had never seen a couple work harder to regain custody of their kids.

"They were truly grateful for the opportunity they had been given. It was an amazing and heartwarming turnaround," she said.

Forman, who has watched more than 20 parents graduate from the special court since its inception in 2003, said it was gratifying to see William and Heather help each other through the program.

"Once Bill joined the court, he supported Heather, and vice versa," the judge said. "I don't think either of them would have made it without the other."

William said the past two years had been as challenging and as rewarding as anything he and Heather had ever done.

"We have done our best, and now we're a family again," he said. "It doesn't get better than that."
