

EXCLUSIVE

by **Antonia Hoyle**

WITH her beloved grandchildren being carted off into care and her daughter a drug addict - Wendy Graham faced one hell of a fight.

Heroin was ravaging her family but she was determined to save Joshua, five, Maizie, three, and one-year-old Mason, who had been born addicted.

The toughest part was helping her daughter Emma Cox quit drugs, then to nurse her back to health.

There was no way Wendy, 49, could do it while going out to work so she said she had to leave her job and make do on benefits.

The eldest children were with foster carers so Wendy looked after Mason while fighting for Joshua and Maizie to be handed back to their mum.

Today Wendy's superhuman efforts appear to have paid off.

Emma, 23, has been clean for 19 months and has regained custody. Next month Wendy will return to work as a carer.

It looks like the end of a nightmare that began six years ago when Emma became hooked on heroin under the devastating influence of a druggie boyfriend.

Dreamed

Recalling her darkest days, Wendy said: "Emma's addiction ripped me apart. "I felt guilty and powerless. The more I tried to look after her the more she pushed me away. But I wasn't prepared to let drugs ruin her life - or my grandkids' lives. I'm so proud of her now."

Emma, whose mum and dad separated when she was a baby, was doing fine at 16 with a job as a shop assistant and her own place in a flat.

Then she met the young man who would father her children.

She soon became pregnant. Four months after Joshua was born in 2006 she said she tried heroin. In no time she was a regular user.

Emma hid her habit from her mum. Wendy said: "I knew nothing about heroin and never dreamed Emma would be taking it."

The teenager stayed off heroin while she was pregnant with Maizie but said she was using it again within a month of the birth. Bit by bit, regular heroin use began to eat away at loving family feelings.

Wendy said: "Emma used to be bubbly and outgoing but became withdrawn.

"She looked tired and lost weight. There were strange men outside her flat but the idea they were supplying Emma with drugs didn't occur to me. And she always insisted there was nothing wrong."

Smuggle

Wendy finally found out in January 2008. She saw Joshua had found a wrap of heroin and put it in his mouth.

"I was shocked, upset and furious," said Wendy. "She'd let everyone down and put the kids in danger. She promised she'd stop but I felt I barely knew her any more.

"I was ashamed and felt so naive for not realising before. The Emma I knew loved dollies and baking cakes. It tore me apart that this had happened to her."

There was worse to come when Emma was caught trying to smuggle heroin into prison for a convicted user in May 2009.

She was charged with possession of Class A drugs and intent to supply.

Joshua and Maizie were taken away to live with a foster carer. Distraught Wendy found it hard to sleep or eat and said she ended up on anti-depressants.

She said: "It broke my heart. I was terrified Emma would die and I'd never see my grandchildren again."

Emma was still with the children's father and heroin addiction gripped her tighter.

HEROIN



SAVED: Wendy with her daughter Emma

I love having my chatty and affectionate Emma back



She said of that time: "I didn't care if I lived or died. I just didn't think I'd see my kids again. I lost four stone."

In December 2009, at the age of 21, Emma stood in the dock and heard a crown court judge tell her she could spend years in prison. The maximum for intent to supply a Class A drug is **LIFE**.

The young mum said: "I was suddenly terrified and vowed to quit."

She was spared jail but there were conditions. Emma had to agree to live with her mum, who has three other children.

Wendy said: "I had to harden myself to her behaviour. Whatever I did she shouted

at me. She was aggressive and rude. When I told her she wasn't allowed to go out she'd call me a f***ing cow.

"She looked at me as if she hated me. She would shiver, sweat and feel nauseous. She'd fall asleep in mid conversation.

Betrayal

"If I tried to cuddle her she'd push me away. I tried to be patient but inside I'd be angry and hurt. Yet I couldn't give up on Emma. She needed me."

Two months into her withdrawal from heroin on a methadone programme, Emma found she was four months'

pregnant. There was a fear the authorities would take the baby away. Emma said she started taking drugs again.

Wendy recalled: "She moved back into her old flat. She said that as she was going to have this baby taken away from her too, there was no point in stopping. After everything I'd done for her it felt like a betrayal."

Mason was born in June last year and at last Emma decided she wanted a decent life. She said: "I was suddenly disgusted by my past behaviour.

"Holding him in my arms I knew for sure that I would never touch drugs again. I could never risk his safety. The kids'

HEROINE

THEY'RE WORTH IT
Wendy and her grandchildren Joshua, Maizie and Mason

Grandma Wendy battled to keep her daughter off the killer drug and fought for the future of her grandkids



FIRST BORN: Emma cuddles Joshua, now five

Pictures: NEWSPICS

father said he didn't want anything to do with them but Mum stuck by my side."

Even though Emma had turned a corner, what followed was still hard work for Wendy at her home in Oxford.

She became Mason's guardian and said she was not allowed to leave Emma alone with the child. He was withdrawing from the drugs his tiny body ingested while he was still in Emma's womb.

Social workers were under orders to visit regularly to check the family.

Wendy said: "I changed nappies, bathed Mason and read him stories. I got up in the middle of the night when he needed

feeding and Emma would sit on my bed and give him his bottle."

Wendy barely had time to see her partner of two years, Ian, 45, a conservatory builder who was looking for work.

Sorry

And Wendy said she had to give up her job: "But when the baby smiled for the first time at seven weeks it all seemed worthwhile," she recalled.

"Emma was infatuated with Mason and determined to get the others back.

"Even when she was ill from heroin withdrawal I took her to see Joshua and

Maizie at their foster home twice a week. She made them cakes for their birthday. Our relationship grew much better. I made Emma shepherd's pies and taught her how to cook my cheese sauce."

Drug tests in October 2010 proved Emma had broken her addiction.

She moved into a flat - and in March she got Joshua and Maizie back.

Emma said: "I'm so sorry for what I put my family through. I'm happy again and it's all thanks to my wonderful Mum."

Next week Wendy will start a new job as a carer for a woman with MS. She found it through the public service provider

Action for Employment, which supported Wendy through her difficulties and helped her change her life for the better.

She said: "I can't wait. I've worked since I was 16 and hated living on handouts."

The beaming gran added: "I still see the kids every week. Maizie is headstrong, Joshua is more laid back and Mason just puts his sticky fingers all over my sofa. I love having them all in my life.

"And I love having my chatty and affectionate Emma back too."

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■ Wendy was helped back to work by www.mya4e.com.