

Mockingbird Times



Recipient of 2005 Congressional Angels in Adoption Award
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

April 2008

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

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YouthCare's TREC Program by Leona Bill

The Therapeutic Recreation Education Community (TREC) Program was a YouthCare/Orion Center initiative designed to do outdoor activities that were both therapeutic and recreational. The program helped build leadership skills and community among the youth of the Orion Center. It was an opportunity for the youth to get hands-on experiences that most homeless youth didn't.

The (TREC) Program was one of YouthCare's programs through the Orion Center. YouthCare has housing programs for both underage youth and youth aged eighteen and older. The Orion Center is YouthCare's drop-in center for youth ages 13 to 21. The Orion Center also has an interagency school inside the drop-in building. YouthCare also has some job training opportunities for youth such as the Tile Project. One of Orion Center's best programs was the TREC Program. Staff at the Orion Center strongly believe that the TREC Program had great outcomes for youth.

The TREC Program received funding from two different funders. YouthCare had a grant through the Gates Foundation however that grant has come to an end. YouthCare was also receiving funding through the City of Seattle but now the City of Seattle's priority for local funding has changed. Those two priorities are now employment and education. YouthCare cannot go through the Gates Foundation

again for funding because Gates has a policy that allows a program to only receive funding once. Since YouthCare had ran out of money on that grant, the TREC Program had no more money.

Orion Center has been able to keep some activities that were part of the TREC Program going. They are trying to rebuild the TREC Program and the only barrier that they see is the funding. To get the TREC Program going again, YouthCare would need two full time staff and funding for liability insurance which is about \$10-15,000 a year, so it would take close to \$100,000 to get the TREC Program started again.

The Orion Center has a Recreational Specialist from AmeriCorps named Molly Thompson. Molly still takes youth on activities such as the Adventuress, river rafting, rock climbing, sailing, hiking and camping. Even though these activities are still continuing, it is not even close to the many activities that the TREC Program had. YouthCare is actively seeking funding to get this program running again. They have recently applied for funding through a foundation called No Child Left Inside. YouthCare is hoping to hear from this foundation about funding in about two to three months. If the funding does go through, it would take YouthCare about six weeks to get the program fully started and running again.

YouthCare and the Orion Center support the TREC Program 100% but the only thing that holds them back from keeping this program alive and ongoing is funding. YouthCare believes that the TREC Program will help make a difference in the long run and they see the program as a really structured and important option for youth.

When Orion Center was located on Virginia Street and the TREC Program was running, I was one of the many youth that would participate in the many different activities with TREC. Those were the days I used to get into trouble, but the TREC Program activities helped me keep myself out of trouble. When I found out that the TREC Program was no longer running, I couldn't believe it because the TREC Program was a program that a lot of youth enjoyed. There were even times when there were so many youth who wanted to go on a particular outing that not all could go and some actually had to wait until the next time that TREC went on that outing. That was how popular the TREC Program was. I'm hoping that the TREC Program will be running again soon because I know that the program did a lot for youth and still could.

Thanks to **Melinda Giovengo**, (executive director for YouthCare), and **Ruth Blow** for answering any questions that I had and for providing me the information I needed to write my article.



Barack Obama: Speaking Out BY JESSICA GARCIA

Barack Obama didn't grow up with one big happy family. When his parents divorced, he moved with his mother to Jakarta, Indonesia. When he was ten, he moved back to Hawaii, where he was born, to live with his grandparents. He later moved to New York City where he graduated from Columbia University in 1983. Obama started at the bottom and worked his way to the top. He put very hard work into his goals, being true to the value of empathy which his mother had instilled in him.

Barack put law school on hold to go to Chicago where he became a community organizer with a church-based group helping to improve living conditions for the impoverished lower class. He wanted to make changes to improve lives for people who live in impoverished neighborhoods and struggle to make ends meet. After a while, he realized that in order to truly make greater change, he needed to study law and politics. In 1991, Obama earned his law degree from Harvard University and became the first African American president of the Harvard Law Review.

Obama was dedicated to reducing poverty and determined to make better changes for minorities who are treated differently because of their race or upbringing and he wasn't going to give up. He returned to Chicago where he practiced civil rights law and taught constitutional law. Obama's advocacy led him to be in the Illinois State Senate serving 8 years as Chairman for the Welfare Committee and Public Health in 1996. He was then elected to the U.S. Senate. In 2004, after only four months in his new office, Time Magazine named him one of the world's most influential people. On February 10, 2007, Barack announced he was running for President of the United States.

Obama has done a lot and taken his talents to the fullest, not settling for less. He has shown people that you can take all your talents to the top wherever you are and that working hard, and having patience for your goals and plans in life pay off. He has written several books including the New York Times best-seller *The Audacity of Hope*, which was published October 2006. That same year, he earned a Grammy Award for best spoken word album.

Obama has two daughters and is happily married to Michelle, whom he met in 1988 and married in 1992. His family support his plans for a better world by addressing things that aren't being seen or taken care of, such as those who struggle in poverty barely making ends meet day to day. He also wants to address global warming and improve our environment for a healthier future for our children and their descendants.

On February 08, 2008, Obama came to the Seattle Key Arena to speak about these issues and to explain why people should vote for him. I was there and I understand why people say he is a good speaker and has an effect on people. He said that he could change what Bush did not in areas such as global warming, poverty and bringing the troops back from Iraq. Obama didn't let us feel left out. He had a sense of humor and said that we need to unite as one because he cannot do this alone being just one person. To make better changes for our future, he needs our support.

There were over 3,000 people at the Key Arena to hear Obama and it was so packed that people had to stand outside. It was nice to hear people cheer him on and appreciate what he had to say about change for the better within our country. I was delighted to go because I felt very confident that Barack Obama

is the real deal and means what he says. I believe he is sincere and willing to listen to what us Americans have to say to change the U.S. for the better. I was also excited to see this wonderful person speak and act very confident and concerned with Americans needs, and refer to us as one, not just him. I believe that Barack Obama is going to make it. He has dealt with racism in this country and has felt the way a lot of us mixed-race folks feel: mistreated, disrespected, and treated differently because of our skin color.

I hope he becomes president because I believe he will change a lot of things for the better, for example, seeing that people of color are treated with dignity and not forced by poverty to live in what Americans call ghetto neighborhoods. He wants to change these neighborhoods to communities where people are treated with respect. He does not want people to live in poverty, particularly not because of color. People of color are humans, too.

I left the Key Arena with a smile and a good sense of belonging and being more knowledgeable from Obama's speech. His words were uplifting. I felt like I was actually being heard, even though I didn't speak, and I enjoyed this feeling. When I left, people were so intrigued with his speech and his appearance that I heard a lot of good things about him. It's nice to know that people accept him even though he's African American. It wasn't his skin color but the knowledge and sincerity from his heart that made me look beyond what most people in this world see. Some people believe that people of color aren't meant to run this world, that it should be left to white men to control. But Obama is

OBAMA, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS


Happy Spring! Although these are some difficult times in so many ways, it is reassuring to be surrounded by the magic and beauty of the spring season. There is something so profound about coming from a period of darkness and cold, to waking up to singing birds, feeling the warmth of the afternoon sun and, of course, having the added hours of light.

As a therapist, this is also the time of year that I receive multiple referrals regarding youth who are in trouble at school. Quite often, what I learn during the assessment process is very interesting. The issues and behaviors that are a focus of concern are often many of the same issues and behaviors that have been occurring the entire school year. What is different is the level of fatigue and often exhaustion of the teachers, (foster) parents and others who are dealing with these issues and behaviors. It is often true that the youngster is also experiencing fatigue and exhaustion from the expectations of school. I have found this to be a great opportunity to talk with kids about the critical skill of "finishing strong."

This is a real life theme that effects all of us, not just youth in foster care, which is exactly why is it such a powerful learning opportunity. The examples are end-

less: sporting events where the outcome changed late in the game due the winning team "letting down" or the losing team "picking it up," changing the brakes in the car or simply drawing a picture all demand that the energy and focus remain strong to the end. Talk about the times you let down near the end of a project and what you learned from that. This is a great opportunity for us as adults to validate, "how proud I am of you for continuing to work hard to the end even when you want to give up." I would encourage the adults to increase the positive reinforcements for kids (remember your attention is the reward—the ice cream is the prop for you and the youngster to be together) to "keep working hard to the end."

Finally, it's often very helpful to the teacher to hear from the parent and the youngster that a goal has been established to "finish strong" and that the teacher is appreciated for hanging in there and also "finishing strong." Letting kids know we value their efforts beyond the outcomes is a wonderful way to show them how much we value our relationship with them and to keep them engaged. Happy spring!

 Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Meet the Staff: Janisha Wright

My name is Janisha Wright and I'm 14, almost 15. I live in Seattle and go to The Center School. In my spare time I read (a lot), play solitaire on the computer, listen to music, and text on my phone to all my friends. I also like talking to friends and surfing the Internet. One of the most important things to me in the world are my friends and I will do just about anything for my best friends since when I move they are always there for me. When I "grow up" I'm not that sure what I really want to be, but my top 3 choices are being a lawyer, a teacher or a therapist. I also know that college is in my future. I want to do these things because I really like helping people get through what's going in their lives. Another important thing to me is trust and honesty. I've been lied to so I am working on not lying myself.

I've been in foster care since I was one and a half and have lived in about 17 different foster homes, almost all of them along Interstate 5. I think the hardest move

for me was the foster home before my current one. I had to leave all my friends that I had made and we were really close. My foster dad had some really big problems with me and that really hurt. It was really hard for me to deal with the fact that he basically hated me and was only nice to me when we were at church (he was the youth pastor and the worship leader). Eventually even that stopped happening. It also really hurt that he couldn't tell me that he didn't want me in the house and he had to get his wife to tell me.

I think that some important issues in today's society that really need to be changed are how the school system and the foster care system work, since they are seriously flawed overall and aren't really working for the majority of the people. An example is how the people who are in charge of the kids in these systems are overworked.

If I could change one thing about the foster care system it would be how the kids are taken away from stable homes and put in places they don't know anything about. I know from experience that it's really scary to be moved from a comfortable place to a new place that you don't know anything about or moving to a place you really don't want to move to. The reason why I wanted to become part of the Youth LEAD program is I want to learn more about the foster care system and make a difference in it.

Photo Gallery



Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Marie Goines and MFM Hub Home parent Stephanie Swallow pose with Governor Christine Gregoire at the Marco Two Union Square day spa.



Senior Youth Representative Samuel Martin presents his ideas for change in the kinship care system at the Policy Change and the Future for Youth Summit.

Letter To the Editor

Dear Editor,

I would appreciate your sending me the evaluation of Youth Legislative Advocacy Day so I can pass it out to the Youth 'N Action youth!

It was truly a great day. Our youth really enjoyed themselves and felt very empowered by the experience. I thought that the open ("not") mike was a great innovation.

Thanks to you and all of the Mockingbird staff and youth for organizing this.

Dr. Charles Huffine

OBAMA, CONT. FROM FRONT PAGE

someone who cares about a better world and wants it to be a better place for us all and is capable of doing so.

My advice to people who want to know more about Obama and want to check out what he really is about is to go to Google Search or Yahoo Search and type in Barack Obama. The computer will pull up a lot of stuff on him from his lifestyle and all the hard work he does doing things not only for his benefit but also for ours. I enjoy that there is someone who cares about our well being, not money and war, but poverty and uniting as one. Barack Obama is a positive person who has worked very hard to get into the position he is in. His being a minority makes this surprising because this country is so white-centric and racist but if he's elected President then I know there is going to be much positive change for us all.

This article is the opinion of this student writer. The Mockingbird Society does not endorse any particular candidate.

THANK YOU!

VIRGINIA BLAYNEY; KATHRYN BROOKS; STEPHEN COHEN; CAROL COLLINS; KAREN COWGILL; CLAIRE GHAN; LOUISE MCLRAITH; ONEFAMILY FOUNDATION; JEFFREY RIED AND STEPHANIE GARLICH; SUZANNE SHAWGER

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We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you'll receive a monthly edition of the *Mockingbird Times*. Thank you for your contribution.

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Well, it has been a few months since the last time I updated you on how my senior year is going. First off, I would like to say Rest in Peace to my best friend, **Allen Joplin**. He passed away January 3rd of this year. I have made it a point to say that because I have known him since I was two years old and at the beginning of this year he got shot. One of the hardest things in the world to experience is the death of your best friend. As a result, I had a very rough time in the beginning of this year. On top of that, I began to see college deadlines pass me by. Everything seemed to just hit me by storm. I began to shut down when it came to college early in the year.

A few things did go well for me in the beginning of January. I began a new quarter and I had hoped to start it off very strong. Fortunately, it went just that way. At the same time, I ran into something that I had not accounted for that is inevitable in any high school setting: drama. It began to get the best of me. I was so used to being drama-free that I didn't account for a very real issue in the teenage world. It can be one of the hardest things to deal with if you let it take control.

By the beginning of February, things had really begun to fall apart. I hadn't turned in most of the college applications

that I had planned to. School began to get weak; I just stopped trying. It was almost a domino affect because once I fell apart in applying to colleges, I fell apart in all aspects: work, school, and athletics. All the while, I made the mistake of not telling anybody or getting any help from anyone. This proved to not be beneficial to me the entire time.

Don't misunderstand me; this entire time didn't go completely wrong. I had great opportunities in these months. For example, our Youth Advocacy Day was great. I had an awesome time. I also had the opportunity to compete in what is called the First Tech Challenge. In the Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA), we had the opportunity to build an actual robot and compete in a real competition. It was one of the most exciting of things I have ever done. We were a group of eight seniors who barely had any time for the project, and when we got there, we had the smallest robot. It turned out to work to our advantage: we ended up ranking fifth out of twenty-eight and this was the first time MESA had even participated in it.

I have also been dealing with an issue of what my legal status is as far as foster care is concerned. I am in kinship care and my grandmother had custody of me but

she passed away so what is my dependency status? This is what **Casey Trupin** and **Erin Shea** with **Columbia Legal Services** have been working on with me for the past few months. They have been great in working with me and helping me figure this out in a time that is tough already. The reason this is so vital is because I need to vouch for independent student status on

CONGRATULATIONS, SAM!

Our own Samuel Martin has been accepted to and will be attending the University of Washington in Autumn, 2008. All his hard work paid off. Congratulations, Sam, on this great accomplishment!

the Federal Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). This will give me a lot of money for school.

In March, it was too late, but I let out a distress call. I sent out an e-mail for any help I could get. It really turned out to be quite beneficial to me. I got lots of help from the people in my support network. It turned out a lot of the issues were easily solvable. I also talked to a lot of different universities that have rolling admissions. I am just extremely grateful to be able to turn to a very supportive team. Even though it

sometimes seems like I am out here alone, that is not the case.

The strange thing is that things always have a habit of turning around and getting better. I did end up passing my classes at Seattle Central and getting the credits that I need. The most exciting news of all is that I have been accepted to the University of Washington. That is more than likely where I will be next fall. So it turns out that everything did work out. My future is now beginning to look very bright. The most difficult part is over. Now all that is left is scholarship, prom, and graduation. So we are on the decline somewhat, not a time to take it easy but still a time to rejoice and be happy. I know now that after going through all this I can count my blessings because it could have been a lot worse than this, but it turned out great.

The lesson here is that it is not beneficial to wait until the last minute to get things done. My biggest issue is that once I fall behind, I let things build up and end up hurting myself even more. So, it's about being on top of the issues and dealing with stuff before it falls behind. I would just like to thank you once again for going along with me on this journey. I know that this has been somewhat of a roller coaster. I hope that you truly feel that you have gone on this journey with me.



Dear Pam,

It's hard to believe that you have passed on, I just spoke with you about coming to see you, but when I called you gave me some bad news about you having pancreatic cancer. I didn't know what to say but I had tears. You didn't break down, you were calm and collected. You were the same person who always dealt with a situation and worked it out; whatever the outcome result was, you did your best to be positive.

I hurt inside because you meant a lot to me. I thought of you like my real mother and your family was my family. I hadn't seen you since I was twelve years old. I stayed with you for two years and the first eight months were rough for the both of us because I was such a broken child, with a lot of anger and hurt, yet you helped me get through it.

I won't forget the time we went for ice cream and you asked me what was going on with me and why did I lie about doing my homework when I had straight F's in school. You said, "I know you're smart so why the low grades?" You laid rules down for me when I came home after school. We got to talk more and you told me that I was a kid and you were the adult. I didn't need to worry about anything except school and

being a kid. I thought to myself, "Wow! I'm free!" You also said that it was ok to let my feelings out and cry. After you said that, I broke down. I cried really hard and you comforted me.

With time, my grades went up and I had better self-esteem and smiled a lot more. I glowed. I still think the glow you gave me is here once in a while. I enjoyed when we all joked at dinner time or on outings. I remember I laughed most the times that there was a positive vibe in the house. We had our moments but we had a bond. I liked that you didn't ever yell at me. I also remember a time when you were mad at me and stayed in your room and I was hurt because I assumed you didn't want me anymore; but you said you needed space and I respected that.

When I asked why you had to go, it didn't make sense: You were a wonderful person with a great heart! I always thought God let me meet you because you were such a caring, loving person who included us all in family outings and get-togethers. I only had respite care once but we were still in your house so it wasn't respite, it was home, not just someone babysitting us.

You shared a lot of your life with me and I became known as Baby Jessica to you. You coming up with a name for me showed you cared and I was your baby!

Good-bye Pam BY JESSICA GARCIA

You had your own daughter, but she accepted me as her sister and called me Baby Jessica too. She was cool and nice and didn't get jealous of our bond. I was given so much attention. Sometimes it was too much, but I opened up and I accepted your love and care.

I wish that I could see you again because I want to tell you about what I went through when I left you! I wanted to thank you for all the love you gave me and for making me part of your family. I felt like I belonged somewhere for the first time and that I had a home at your house. I was your kid no matter where I ended up and you always remembered me at Christmas and my birthday, which meant a lot. You sent wonderful letters and pictures of the house and family!

Through all the moving I've done since living with you I have lost a lot. I won't forget you and you'll always be in my heart and on my mind no matter what. I wish I could say I love you to your face because

I have always loved you and I know you loved me too. I'm mad because I lost contact with you when I turned 15 because I was running away and getting in trouble.

To my relief, I got a hold of you in December 2007! I was going to go see you but I called and I heard the bad news. I'm sad and wish I could have seen you one last time to let you see how grown up I am and to see you as I remember you, to smell the scent of your sweet perfume. I know you're in a better place, I just wish I had gotten to hug and kiss you one last time. It hurts to know you're gone because it's hard to believe that a person like you would end up with cancer. It's not fair. You were the only person I could call and know that you would be there for me no matter what. I've thought about you a lot in the last three years although I hadn't spoken to you. It hurts my heart that I didn't get to see you before you left. I love you a lot and I'm going to pay my respect to your grave and talk to you! Until we meet again!

The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program Presents

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Contact Sam at samm_mockingbird@yahoo.com or Najja at najja@mockingbirdsociety.org for more information and details.

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SAVE the DATE
May 10th, 2008
Spring Conference



PRAXIS-ECE
The Praxis Institute for
Early Childhood Education



Bridging The Divide for Children:
Access, Equity & Opportunity

Lunch Speaker: *Dr. Carolyn Brunson Day*

DATE: May 10, 2008
PLACE: The African American Academy
(8311 Beacon Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118)
TIME: 8:00AM-4:00PM

Who, If Not Us Will Be Responsible?

For more information: Kimberly A. Early (206) 328-9335 or Beatrice A. Butler (206) 772-3773

For What?

JOHN HEMMINGWAY

For what am I doing in this dark hollow place?
Waiting my life in obedience of the people who watch me in jail.
For what did I get myself placed in here for?
Who knows except for myself.
I still don't understand why a negative life has such a positive pull on me.
Maybe with time I can come to an understanding with myself and be thankful that I am still alive and living the life I have dreamed of living since that dark beginning so many years ago.

Land of the Lost

TAIRRIE ATKINSON

Wow, I heard there was land out there
A land of no tomorrow, a land without care
Hold on, this place sounds kind of familiar
I remember seeing it when I looked in the mirror
Man, I almost fell for it, it almost took me in
But I reminded myself the beginning was just the end
There is a place for me nowhere near the land of the lost
Because I turned towards my faith, a railroad I've already crossed!

The Colors

NYAJUK CHUOL

The colors of my country's flag mean something.
The black is our skin color the sun reflects on.
The green is the grass on the ground we walk on.
Also, the beauty of our crops grows beyond our understanding.
The red is the blood that has bled through many years of the past history.
I wish I knew what the white color means.
I know that one of these colors represent the soil that we fight to protect. The battles between the north and the south bring out the blood we shed.
I have no support to say something or to make a point.
A deal is a deal, for people will always fight over their disagreements.
Coming to think of it, the white is the peace and respect for the people.
The deal is making a decision on a better government.
Why can't there be souls to stand up on their rights?
These are what I believe the colors of my homeland flag represent.
The colors.

Growin' Up

TAIRRIE ATKINSON

Rise out of sun to the new day of hope
Just taking your first breath of life
Screaming out at the first cut of rope
Fighting to stay alive
One step, two step, down on three
Change me, feed me, life is care free
Until I grow up they'll all be watching me
I wish I could stay a child that's all I want to be

Forgive Me!!

JOHN HEMMINGWAY

Forgive me my love, for I know for sure I have hurt you horribly.
Forgive me my family, for have done you wrong.
Forgive me God, and those I have hurt.
I know I should not be forgiven but yet all of you, my family, friends, and my closest love, are still there waiting to see me through my tough times.
When I thought I would be given up on, you all pushed past the limits to help me in my worst time of need.

Come Work for The Mockingbird Society!

The Mockingbird Society is hiring for the following positions:

- Administrative Coordinator
- Events Planning Assistant
- Mockingbird Family Model Administrative Assistant
- Youth and Alumni Programs Administrative Assistant

Foster care alumni and people of color encouraged to apply. See www.mockingbirdsociety.org/jobs for details.

Don't be afraid if things seem difficult in the beginning. That's only the initial impression. The important thing is not to retreat; you have to master yourself.

~ Olga Korbut



Reconnecting With My Dad BY RHONDA SMITH

When I first met my dad I was shocked to see how much we looked alike. My mom always used to tell me how much I looked like him. I always used to think to myself, "Yeah, I don't look like nobody but myself." But sure enough, when I saw my dad I saw we look almost alike. The only difference is that he has gray hair and I am a female. He is dark skinned and short like me. When I first talked to him in person, I felt kind of shy and then I had this feeling like I had already known him. It was a weird feeling but, then again, not a bad feeling.

My dad is a great guy! Sometimes I think he is trying too hard though. He is stuck on the thought that I am a kid still. I love him to death because he is my dad and if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here today. He is always talking to me about moving in with him. I really do not like hurting people's feelings especially if I do not know them. So, when he asks me that, I always just say, "I don't know." Then he replies, "Just think about it." He says he is going to get me everything I need and want so I would never have to leave the house. That comment kind of scares me because I am young and I like to hang out with my friends and party and go to the club. One of these days it's going to hit him that he missed 19 years of my life. Just because he wasn't there doesn't slow time down any.

I need to step up and let him into my life. I am just scared. I hate being judged. It

happens from day to day but when family does it, it hurts a lot. I don't like getting hurt. It has happened so much, you would think that it wouldn't even matter. But it's like the more people I let in, the more they hurt me and the more and more it hurts me inside. I don't want my dad to have to suffer from all the other people's mistakes. He shouldn't have to. I should let the past go and let him in. That's way easier said than done, though.

I guess I'm not used to all this parent stuff. I mean, I've had many foster parents but it's not the same. I don't want to say they didn't care; they just had a different way of caring then I thought natural parents would have for their kids. Maybe I'm tripping, too, because I wasn't expecting him to be all involved, being there for me and stuff. My mom has never been involved with my life the way my dad is trying to be. I feel lucky because I'm my dad's only child and he's always telling me that I'm the one that's going to turn his old life style around. He says he's glad he has responsibilities in his life now and that nothing will ever tear us apart ever again.

I really don't know him too well. We have only seen each other a couple of times. I am glad he is in my life. I just wish he would step back sometimes, give me my space, and stop being all up in my business. The whole relationship with me and my dad is going to take some time. He's got things he needs to get used to and so do I. One of these days we will be close, I know we will.



2008 NSBE Conference BY SAMUEL MARTIN

Once again I had the opportunity to attend the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) Conference. The conference was great this year. It took place in Orlando, Florida. As most of you know, the opportunity was allowed by my participation in Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA). The conference doesn't usually take students twice, but I demonstrated such leadership that I got the opportunity to go again. I had just as much fun this time as I did last time.

Ten other great students and I left Seattle on Tuesday, March 18. We all really opened up to each other and became friends those few days. We started the trip the best way possible by going to Disney World. At first, I thought that it would be juvenile. I can honestly say that is the most magical place in the world. The lines were ridiculously long but the rides were worth the wait. There is no way you could be mad or upset in Disney World. There was nothing but sparkles and singing and children playing. It really made me feel like a kid again. I had an absolute blast. I am saying this because there is nothing wrong with letting out the inner-child in you. Too often I see my peers are too afraid to let the kid out in them.

Opening session was on Wednesday night, but, unfortunately, I was unable to attend because one of my dress shoes got lost. The next day was when the conference really began, a series of workshops that we all thought were extremely great. They all helped me in different areas. I tried to do workshops that others didn't really want to do. I wanted to learn as well as get a really different experience. For example, I took a workshop on how to give a presentation. It helped to give tips in an area I am interested in as well as being something different. I also took a high school resume workshop which helped me beef up my own resume.

The next day was the career fair, which went a lot better than last year. I froze up

a bit last year and got nervous. This year I really took control and went all out. I even had a few companies keep my resume and tell me they would keep in touch. I think that having this opportunity is great. I have been to a few career fairs but having actual people who hire look at your resume and really critique you is the type of opportunity that comes few and far between. I am also glad that NSBE gave high school youth the opportunity to hand out their resumes and talk to employers. The day after that was the college fair, which also was something that benefited me enormously. Because of issues with the trouble I am having in school, I asked just about every college if they had a rolling admissions or a possibility for me to come in the spring.

Overall, this conference was great. I had a wonderful time and it was just as much fun as last year. There is nothing better than being around over 10,000 motivated black people who want something better for themselves. I also went with a really great group of people and I couldn't have asked for a better group to go with than that one. This year's conference really motivated me to go into computer science as a career path. I always wanted to but I didn't really think I had what it took. The NSBE conference inspired me to go in that direction after all.

There are also opportunities for other minorities to experience the same type of thing as I did at the NSBE conference. There is the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE). They have conferences yearly as well. I have talked to people who have gone to SHPE and they absolutely loved it. There is also the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). These are opportunities offered to all students, it is not just limited to black people, Hispanics, or Native Americans. I saw Asian Americans at NSBE, so do not think it is limited. Take advantage of the opportunities at hand. I know I will because this is the start of something good and I plan to be at plenty more NSBE conferences from here on out.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, **The Mockingbird Society**. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Miss Maudie in teaching his kids that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird because "...Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out

for us."

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