The Mockingbird Society Celebrates Seven Great Years

By Samuel Martin

The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is celebrating its seventh year anniversary. Today I want to talk a little bit about legacy. There is a legacy that we are creating at this organization. As a former football player, I made mistakes about everything in my life relate to football. I feel honored to write this article because previous and former articles were written by hall of fame youth. I look back at those youth and the work they have put into this organization. Youth like Jamica Henderson, Misty Lou Cook, and Princess Hollins, who have led by experience, who have taught me everything, and have molded me to become who I am. The youth who came through this organization in the past have worked hard. They paved the way for what is next to come. They set records, made standards and played with extreme heart. It warms my heart and makes me so proud to be where they were trying, to raise the bar one more time. Also, knowing that one day there is going to be a youth who sits in this same seat as me and reads my articles makes me so happy. So if you need to work here and still read the Mockingbird Times, thank you. The newspaper has covered just about everything we have done. I am here to let you know what comes next.

Executive Director Jim Theofelis has been a pioneer in the non-profit world. He has done something very creative and innovative and as I start off this article I want to thank him from a professional sense, as well as a personal sense. Jim is one of the most compassionate people I know and has been an awesome support. Thanks again Jim. Jim has helped revitalize the entire foster care system with the Mockingbird Family Model (MBFM) which is in the process of expansion. He had a vision and part of it was “building a world class foster care system.” The rest of the mission was “serving our neighborhood youth.” We have begun creating what is called The

Financial Protection for Youth in Care

By Georgina Ramirez

Would you give your social security number to a stranger? This is a day to day reality for many youth in care because, with every placement, a new person may have access to your identification. In an age where an estimated 9 million Americans are victims of identity theft, one must ask what can be done to decrease the financial vulnerability of youth in care. The state of California took a legislative approach to this situation and implement AB 2985, a bill that protects youth in care from identity theft by requiring county welfare departments to request credit checks for foster youth who are 16 or older and provide referrals to credit counseling organizations if the credit check discloses any negative information. I, personally, think this bill is great, but, unless you have good communication skills, which is not enough education or housing skills, which is not enough education or housing skills. You need to talk a little about legacy. The easiest way to find out if someone has stolen your identity is to get a copy of your credit report. You can get a free copy of your credit report at annualcreditreport.com. This is the only Web site that will provide you with a report and score for free. If you get your report and you see charges that you did not make or accounts that you know you did not open then you may need to go to an agency that has certified credit counselors. A credit counselor can teach you how to read your report and assist you with the removal of inaccurate information. There are multiple organizations that have credit counselors. I recommend that if you see a credit counselor, you go to a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit credit counselors will assist you without bias and should not charge for their services, although they may ask for a very small donation to offset their costs.

Seattle has multiple nonprofit agencies that provide credit counseling such as Clearpoint Financial Solutions (www.clearpointfinancialsolutions.org),Solid Ground (www.solid-ground.org), El Centro de la Raza (www.electrodelazara.org), and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle (www.urbanleague.org), just to name a few. Check out their Web sites for more information on their credit services. If you want more information on identity theft, go to the U.S. Department of Justice’s website www.ftc.gov. It’s your future: take a proactive approach and look out for yourself; you’ll be glad you did.
Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

It is with great pride that we at The Mockingbird Society (MBS) celebrate our seventh anniversary. It was August 2001 that three youth created the first issue of the Mockingbird Times and we distributed approximately 6,000 copies mainly throughout Seattle. This current issue has a circulation of nearly 60,000 copies distributed to every state in the nation, still celebrating and elevating the voice of our most vulnerable youth.

Over these past seven years, The Mockingbird Society has grown to become a leader in training, employing and empowering young people to be leaders in the social justice movement to build a world class child welfare system. Youth from across Washington, joining with The Mockingbird Society and our many community partners, have taken the lead in advocating for and succeeding in the passage of critical legislation that has dramatically improved the resources and programs available to youth exiting foster care.

Our other major program is the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) which began as one small pilot and continues to be replicated throughout Washington and in several jurisdictions across the nation. We are working with community partners to further develop the MFM as a prevention model keeping more families together and hopefully fewer children removed from their home. We are proud of our seven years of history and it’s important and fun to reflect upon the past. However, we remain steadfast in our commitment and pledge to double our efforts to achieve our mission.

Finally, I have been so blessed with regards to The Mockingbird Society that the people to thank are endless. I certainly thank our volunteers, donors, and community partners without whom we could not do what we do. But I conclude this edition by thanking my family at home and co-workers and youth at MBS. I am surrounded by the best examples of humanity, integrity and brilliance and for that I am most grateful.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Meet the Staff: Julian Barrington

My name is Julian Barrington. I am 15 years old and was born and raised in the great city of Seattle. Currently I am attending the wonderful Franklin High School where I’ll be a sophomore this upcoming year. During my free time I like to read, participate in various events, and, most favorite of all, I like writing about issues impacting youth at both national and worldwide scales.

In the past, I’ve won writing contests, participated in youth conferences, and done speeches all over the city in an effort to disseminate social awareness. I have a profound passion for speaking into the hearts of those lost and who find themselves in a state of complacency. Honestly, I didn’t even think it was possible until I was once asked to do an article on the subject. Now I fully understand what it means to be in the system since I have spent 15 years in kinship care. Health care, the economy, voting, the housing crisis, unemployment, and the war in Iraq are just a few of the many important issues affecting this world. Many of these issues, like health care, housing and unemployment, are one step close to making a world class foster care system. In my opinion, that is a true legacy. I would just like to thank the staff who have been here to see this through so well. This is truly something great. Happy Anniversary!

Thank You!

MARIJANE ASHBY, CLAIRE BARON, ANNETTE BLAYNEY, CASSY FAMILY PROGRAMS; ROCK CHICK: JUDGE PATRICK CLAIRE, LYMAN LECIERS; STELLA PETTIS JENI SEWELL, ALAYNE SULKIN, TENS IN PUBLIC SERVICE; TREESHOUSE; WOORENDON FOUNDATION, ZEKE’S PIZZA

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Youth Representatives Julian Barrington, Leonia Bill, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker
Contributing Writers & Artists Ashley Abbott, Thomas Darden, Kathrina Esco, Shakra Felder, Alissa Jackson, Stephen Phan
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We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth, children and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times. Please join us today!

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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth replicas of The Mockingbird Times are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit artwork, articles, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 60,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2008, The Mockingbird Society.
Foster Kids Get Famous by LEONA BILL

Who knew that famous actors Eddie Murphy and Tracey Morgan (Ice-T) also weren’t just an actor but a musician and movie director. Ice-T was in kinship care at four then in foster care. When Ice-T was with his relatives, they didn’t hide their feelings that he was a burden to them. Ice-T was then sent to a foster home in South Central Los Angeles. He grew up in LA where he eventually aged out of care. Ice-T became an increasingly visible public figure. He lectured in prison, spoke at high schools and colleges as a spokesman for American youth.

Both Eddie Murphy and Tracey Morgan now have families and still have a good impact on people. I feel that their story will inspire other foster youth and former foster youth to make positive choices. Eddie Murphy avoids alcohol, tobacco and drugs. This is an encouragement for me. I used to smoke cigarettes a lot and I use to drink every once in a while but ever since I was a little girl, I knew how much alcohol impact ed peoples lives and how much it impacted mine. My mistake was that I let drinking affect my life even though I knew what it could do. By the time I was of drinking age, I had noticed how much I didn’t really want alcohol in my life. I’m proud to state that I’ve been sober for quite some time and that I don’t smoke cigarettes anymore.

Finding out that Ice-T and Eddie Murphy lived in foster care and reading their stories has encouraged me to re -sober their story. The story also has encouraged me to keep pushing myself especially when I feel like giving up. Writing this article has helped me realize I can still accomplish great things if I just keep pushing myself when I need to and not give up on things in life.

One can find a list of additional famous people with who have experience living in foster care along with their stories at www.fcic.com/fullofstunts/foster_kids.)

Meet the Staff: Milissa and Diana by LEONA BILL

As The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is expanding, we are proud to welcome Milissa Morgan and Diana Clark to the team. Milissa is the Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant and Diana is the MBS Administrative Coordinator.

MT: What attracted you to Mockingbird? MM: To be able to continue work with at-risk and underserved youth.

MT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS? MM: Over all, working with youth staff and being a part of the expansion program.

MT: What was your position before you joined MBS? MM: I was the program coordinator for the Burton Chill Program (A learn-to-snowboard Program for homeless youth and youth in care).

MT: What is your favorite hobby? MM: Anything that is outdoors! (Surfing and snow boarding are two big ones.)


MT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS? DC: I enjoy my coworkers. It is a really nice environment.

MT: What was your position before you joined MBS? DC: System Support Coordinator for Safeco Information Technology.

MT: What is your favorite hobby? DC: Riding my bike with my dog.

Welcome, Melissa and Diana!

Child Abuse on the Rise by SHAUNA FELDER

A commercial advertisement generated by the Ad Council for the nonprofit organization Childhelp is sure to leave a chilling impression. The ad begins with a woman awaiting an elevator. When it stops to pick her up, she walks on briskly to find herself accompanying a parent and child who greet her. The small boy looks up at her and she flashes a gentle smile in return. The elevator finally comes to a halt. As the doors slide open, the father says, “Have a good night.” Then, as the father and son step into the elevator he points down the darkened hallway, the words “Child Abuser” display boldly across the man’s back. She watches in complete shock as the doors begin closing in on her and the little boy glances back at her once more. A narrator then concludes, “If only child abuse were this easy to recognize...”

The numbers of children dying at the hands of their loved ones are increasing at alarming rates each year. Every day, child abuse results in the death of children and three quarters of these victims are under the age of four. Child abuse comes in all forms and is not always noticeable. “The signs weren’t there because I was around them a lot,” Shaun D., a mother of five says, as she recalls the playmates of her children. “When I see kids miming their parents, I don’t think kids are being abused. I wasn’t around them enough to know all of the details. I learned about them much later.” According to Shaun, the father of the four children Shaun’s kids were playing with was convicted when signs of abuse were reported by faculty at the children’s elementary school.

When Shaun found out about the abuse, she was in complete shock. “I didn’t fully know the father of the children... He was so particular about those kids with every little thing they did, ‘don’t do this and don’t do that.’ But I never would have thought that he was beating them. I thought he was just doing what dads do.” Shaun says that had she been around the children more frequently maybe she would have picked up on signs of abuse, but things appeared to be pretty normal whenever the children were dropped off to play at her home.

“Child Abuse is a touchy subject. There’s a lot surrounding [child abuse] but every one is affected by it regardless... Some parents get frustrated and take it out on their kids, but... child abuse is not okay. It’s dysfunctional,” says Shaun.

Having obtained certification as a parenting instructor through a program called Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities through the vision and direction of founder Dr. Marilyn L. Steele, Shaun also focused on effective black parenting. She has taught a variety of parenting courses within her community. She notes that adults ought to seek out different ways of becoming better parents. Here is her list of prevention and intervention factors for lessening large amounts of child abuse:

• Make time for you by doing something for yourself once in a while to relieve any stress that comes with the responsibilities of being a parent.

• Take a parenting course to learn the proper education of parenting.

• Understand the values of self management skills including self control, anger management, and behavioral management. Skills such as these produce non-violent, peaceful atmospheres.

At one point or another, people will find themselves in similar predicaments and are often plagued with fear. In situations like these, many will ignore their instincts. The phrase, mind your own business has been a general rule used as a code of ethics throughout various communities around the world. While maintaining silence may seem like an effective method of keeping the peace, many people fail to realize how detrimental the attitude of not wanting to get involved can be. We’re all guilty of turning a blind eye to potentially harmful situations which can jeopardize the livelihood of ourselves as well as others by failing to make a judgement call when it is most needed.

Abuse isn’t something that just happens. It’s a cycle that’s going to take the participation of absolutely EVERYONE to prevent what they can. Shaun advises more people to get involved by taking initiative and seeking information. Just a few people can still make a difference. Silence is ignoring. Take action against child abuse. Speaking up just might save a life or two.

To report any suspected child abuse or neglect in Washington State contact Child Protective Services at 1-866-ENDHARM.

To learn more about child abuse visit any one of these helpful Web sites: www.childhelp.org www.childmaven.org www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childabuse.html

Child Abuse is sure to leave a chilling impression. To learn more about Prevent Child Abuse America visit www.preventchildabuse.org. To learn more about the Chill Program visit www.chill.net.

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If you have any questions, email leadershipsummit@mockingbirdociety.org

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit
Mockingbird Times
August 2008

Creative Corner

Lolita
KATRINA ESTOQUE

Lolita
8 year old mestiza princess
Thick long black waves
Shapes exquisite face
With defined dimensions
She holds her head up high
See Lolita
The few who walk the streets
Of Philippines, Cuba, N.Y.C. Nicaragua
Frames the few memories
Of being born into adulthood
No time for childhood
She sits at the edge of the concrete sidewalk
As mother’s white pearls
Hang below pink
Shirt
And the illuminance of the sun
Reflects off her light brown pupils
She stares at her hands
As it gives birth to memories
Where her palms were used to cradle
The world. The universe.
Where her palms were used to cradle the world.
See Lolita was unlike any other
Her palms were used to cradle and write
As the story of her experience with WAR becomes a voice for others.
Her name is Lolita. Princess. Queen. Mestiza.

Let Live Let Me Die
JACOB JOHNSON
I could love if I hated it, but I can’t say I did
And I could hurt if you’d let me, but I don’t
think you will
So you coddle Me infection, I don’t care the
intention, you force me to love
Like I’ve forced you to sleep
But I could end it all faster than you think
And you can tell all the ridden I’m guilty
And you can tell all the hidden they can hide
Just stop telling yourself in your pride
Let live let me die!

Poetry Within A Butterfly
STEVEN PHAM

Do you know what it’s like to live in over 50 foster placements, moved to three
different counties, and being forced to leave friends and the only people
you consider family? During my time in the foster care system, I spent a lot of time
in the dependency court room. So when I was asked to speak on the panel for Casey
Family Programs about the impact of the courts on foster care and youth, I was hon-
ored to be a part of their effort to improve the system.
Casey Family Programs is an organi-
zation that specifically works to “Provide and improve and ultimately to prevent the
need for foster care”. Even though I am no longer in the system, I really want it to be
a lot better than it was when I was in it for.

Speaking at Casey Family Programs
by RHONDA SMITH

On July 16, 2008, I participated in a
panel for Casey Family Programs. My part
was to talk about my experiences with the
court system while in foster care. I really
enjoyed myself but I was a little bit shy
talking or even looking at the audience. I
shared some personal things that I really
don’t like to think about anymore. I loved it
and the other panel members were very
supportive trying to make me feel com-
fortable.
I was asked some hard questions. One
of these questions was, “What were some
of your experiences interacting with the
family court system?” My answer was
that I was put in foster care shortly after
birth and at three years old I got adopted.
I went back into foster care when I turned
eleven years old because my adopted par-
ents terminated their rights. Between the
ages of 11 and 18, I was in over 50 place-
ments. I had a ton of support from my so-
cial worker and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL).
They were always at my court hearings
and visited me monthly.
What I didn’t like about dependency
court was the three hour wait to have a
five minute conversation with the judge. I
also didn’t like the fact that over the previ-
ous six-month period they almost always
seemed to bring up all the negatives that
had happened. I had an attorney but I only
met with him about four times and I per-
sonally think he wasn’t a big help at all. I
was asked more questions that I could not
really respond to because I really couldn’t
understand them or they just really didn’t
apply to me.
My point in this article is to let you all
know that there are people out there who
are trying to make the foster care system
better. I felt honored to be on the panel be-
cause I learned a lot of new things. I also
met some wonderful people both those
who were on the panel as well as some
Casey Family staff. I personally want to
thank Casey Family Programs for all they
are doing for the foster care system and
also a special thanks to Judge Patricia
Clark and Marvin Charles.