A Very Special Holiday

Happy holidays to all of you. The time is here again, but this time it’s more special for me. I now have custody of my two younger siblings and am making plans to get my foster care license. This will be our first holiday season together again since the last one we had as a family more than six years ago. It feels really good to spend the Holidays with my family. I love it! I have a special time of fifteen years when everyone gets to be comfortable, love one another, play games, relax and just have the time of our lives.

I can’t tell you how excited I am to have my brothers under my wings. I have had to plan so much for them in such a short amount of time, but long enough to put some good love in their heart. My siblings are 15 and 16 years old. To me, these years are very important. When I was this age, I don’t know what I would have done if I didn’t have the two foster parents who loved me and helped me when I needed them most. They never gave up, regardless of the situation, because they loved me. I want my brothers to have the same support I had and if that means I have to be the one to give it to them, I will. I want them to have all they need before they reach 18.

My Super Sweet-Sixteen

Schools. This constant moving and changing was very detrimental to my academics. As a result, I was extremely behind in my credits when I finally did enroll in a stable high school. At that point my motivation was shot and I was looking at being in High School until 2011!!! In order to bypass that time consumption, I’ve been taking GED preparation classes so that when my birthday does come around, I’ll be ready to pass it with flying colors! I took the practice tests and aced every section except for math, which is my arch nemesis. When I get that certification proclaiming I have all the credentials of a high school graduate, I will then be eligible to apply for full time jobs. That will be my first and most important achievement, as well as my first step towards maturity.

After I receive that accreditation, I intend to immerse myself in the workforce, slaving away 8 to 5, 5 days a week. I want money and be fun!! To be honest, I’m terrified. I feel alone sometimes because I don’t have enough years stacked up to know what to expect. I feel alone sometimes because I don’t have enough years stacked up to know what to expect. I feel alone sometimes because I don’t have enough years stacked up to know what to expect. I feel alone sometimes because I don’t have enough years stacked up to know what to expect. I feel alone sometimes because I don’t have enough years stacked up to know what to expect.

I bet you’re wondering, well what about school? Do you think I would leave it high and dry? Of course not. It’s on my list, but unfortunately, it will have to be postponed at least until next fall. My plan is to work full time until I’m able to leave the nest, and then at that point, focus on getting my Associates degree. I haven’t thought far enough ahead to know which field I want to work in. But I know I want a job that would best showcase my talents as well as pay a high amount of money and be fun! To be honest, I’m terrified. I’m scared about the big world because I don’t want to face the realities of life without my mother’s love and whatever else it is that they need. I have completed that goal, I am going to put 100% into taking care of them and fulfilling all of their needs. Stay tuned for more.
I am pleased to report that Washington State Representative Mary Helen Roberts will sponsor legislation during the 2007 Washington Legislature that will allow youth exiting foster care to retain their Medicaid until age 21, which will give them access to health care. This issue will be the primary item on the Mockingbird Society Legislative Advocacy Agenda for 2007 and I invite each of you to assist us getting this legislation passed.

I want to take a moment to thank all of you who have donated to Mockingbird Society and, in particular, I want to give a very hearty “Thank You” to all of the wonderful soccer players, coaches and teams that have sent Mockingbird Society Team Donations. Of particular note are the Holy Names Cougars (of which I’m a proud member of the coaching staff).

Finally, I want to wish each of you a very Happy Holiday season. During the hustle and bustle I hope you have an opportunity to express your appreciation and love to the children and teens in your life. They make our lives special and for that I thank each one of them.

ABOUT US:
Mockingbird Times, 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 2006 The Mockingbird Society.

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Mockingbird Gives Thanks

Meet the Staff: Melissa Stringer

My name is Melissa Lashelle Stringer and I am 19 years old. I was born in Renton, Washington at Valley Medical Center on January 19, 1987. I attended Summit K-12 until I graduated. I enjoy taking pictures which I have been doing for four years. When I was in 10th grade, I played volleyball until I injured myself and I couldn’t play sports any more. When I have free time, I like to hang out with my friends and go places as much as I possibly can. I was in foster care most of my life and aged out at 18. I then moved out of the foster care system into a group home called Ruth Dykeman Children’s Center.

I never really got to experience a childhood. There was too much abuse and other things for me to truly understand what my life was really made of. I was six years old when I first went into foster care because my mother and her new husband would constantly beat me (among other things). I bounced around from home to home my entire life. I really never got the chance to call any place home for a long period of time until now. I recently moved into a transitional living program called Passages (Youth Care). It is the best place for me because it teaches me how to live on my own and how to take care of myself (which I am still working on). I know that you are probably wondering why you should care about me. Well, I am not asking you to care about me. I am asking you to care about all the people that have to go through the same exact stuff every day. In this world, there are kids that have to figure out where they are going to sleep and what they are going to eat. I think that is a problem and if it wasn’t for Passages, that would be me right now.

If I could change one thing about homelessness, it would be the way people treat the homeless. People look at them as if they were just plain dirt. It is rude, because sometimes people cannot help what they do and how they are. Everyday, when I go down to the "Ave" (University District), I look at the way people treat the homeless kids. It hurts just to watch, because half the people down there are my friends and they are sick and hungry and people ignore them. I really wish I could change the way many people treat the homeless.

If I could change one thing about the foster/homeless system I would change everything. It feels like people expect foster and homeless youth to be able to fend for themselves. That makes the whole system just ridiculous.

When I found out about what Mockingbird Society does, I was intrigued because I have always wanted to share about my life and what I have been through. Now I get to share my life with the outside world with no hesitation at all. Now I get to do what I love the most writing!

Life Without Medical Care
by Amelia Lee Logen

When you are sick, run out of medication or are due for a check up you go to the doctor. I mean, that is what you have done your whole life when you were in foster care. You get a runny nose and off to the doctor you go. But, what happens when you age out of foster care and aren’t able to find a job that provides full medical, dental and vision benefits by the time you turn 19 (which is the age that you lose your medical coupons)?

Once you lose your medical coupons, you only have a few options: 1) You can go to the emergency room every time that you have a cough or don’t feel good. 2) You could find a sliding scale clinic to go to (which you still may not be able to afford even if you qualify for the lowest sliding scale fee that they have). 3) You can rack up doctors bills that you will never be able to pay. Which, if you think about it, really isn’t fair because if it comes down to then you are getting punished just for being sick?

Then, you still have to think about paying for medication. What are you supposed to do for your medications when you no longer have medical coupons and are just making ends meet as it is? A simple chronic illness, like allergies, can cost you a lot just for one month. Now, add a cold or flu on top of that and there is more money in just medications to get better.

The fact of the matter is that when kids coming out of foster care lose their medical coupons, it’s not a small matter. It is something that will impact our lives in a huge way. In most cases, this is something that we aren’t prepared for. Even just adding another year to the amount of time we get to keep our medical can make a huge difference, because another year can mean the difference between having enough experience to get a job with benefits and being stuck with a ton of medical bills that will never get paid and a handful of needed prescriptions that will never get filled. And that is a huge deal for everyone.
**My Daughter**

**TOSHA QUIRRLES**

I had my daughter when I was 16 years old. I am a single parent. Annoying, but I can still stand it. Her father is signing his rights away. I want her to know her father’s eyes. He is not ready for a life with me and my child. Her father is disinfecting. Now I feel so low. Sad that her father lets her go. If I'll be just fine because she has a mother that loves her. Care about her. Takes care of her. And gives her what she needs. My child’s father is a failure. No love for my child. No more love for me. I don’t care because now I’m free. I do want to be there to take care of all her fears. My baby girl. The one that I brought into this world.

**Hear Me...**

**ANONYMOUS**

I am a music note
I'm heard all over the world
And understood in all languages
My soul is like the pages of a good book
Once you start reading me you can’t stop
My contemplations are like a jigsaw puzzle
You can put me together
But there’s always one missing
My heart is like the beach
Beautiful and deep
Because I feel things
With all my heart
And that is deep.

- Jonelle M.

**Creative Corner**

**See Beyond the Outward Me**

**JONELLE M.**

See beyond the outward me
The clothes I wear
The shoes on my feet
The beautiful me, the inward me
My heart my mind my thoughts towards you.
Good and not evil friends till the end
An outspoken person
Creative wise sensible sensitive loving and kind
But when you see me
you don’t smile you don’t say, “Hi.”
Be impressed with the inward me.
Don’t judge me because it’s not about what I’m wearing that’s unique but under all the garments.
So see beyond the outward me.
I’m impressed by you so be impressed by me.

- Jonelle M.

**Foster Care**

**TOSHA QUIRRLES**

Foster care is rough
Foster care is tough
Kids will make fun of you
Kids will be your friend
You have it easy compared to the little girl next door getting beat up by her dad
Some kids don’t know the meaning of getting taken away
But we know it’s a real hard road to go down
You may think it’s easy
But you just haven’t tried it out
Some of us don’t sleep well at night knowing we might get moved from the left to right.
In the end we’ve learned a lesson
We can still be successful no matter what position we’re in.
There’s always someone right beside us guiding us along the way.

- Jonelle M.

**Remember Us!**

United Way is conducting their annual campaign during September through December. Please remember that you can designate that your donation to United Way be directed to the Mockingbird Society. Thanks for all your continued support.

- Jonelle M.

**December Calendar of Events**

**Holiday Stars**

When: December 14th, 6-9 PM
Where: 2100 24th Ave South (Treehouse Building), Seattle
For more information, see flyer on page 3.

**Seattle Girls’ Choir**

The ensemble performs sacred and secular Holiday music from around the world
When: 12/16: 1:30 p.m.
Ticket information: $15, student/senior discounts; (206) 526-1900

**Free Christmas Dinner for Those In Need**

When: December 25th, 12 - 2 PM
Where: Thai Siam Restaurant, 8305 15th NW, Seattle
Ticket information: $15, student/senior discounts; (206) 526-1900

**SAVE THE DATE**

All Foster Youth Advocate Healthcare
Join Mockingbird Society for Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia
Training Day: February 6th from 1-5PM @ Treehouse building, Seattle
Advocacy Day: February 9th from 9AM-3PM in Olympia
Food will be provided both days. Transportation can be arranged for travel to Olympia.
Contact: Mockingbird Society (206) 323-KIDS (5437)

**Christmas at Treehouse**

Christmas Hours
- Thursday 12/21 from 10AM - 4:30PM
- Thursday 12/14 from 10AM - 5:30PM
- Tuesdays 12/12 & 12/19 from 2-7:30PM

Contact: Mockingbird Society (206) 783-3668 or (206) 784-5465 between 2 and 5 PM Mon through Fri

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- Jonelle M.

**Where there is great love, there are always miracles.**

~ Willa Cather

**My Story**

by Alexis Bednarski

My name is Alexis. I am 12 years old. I have a brother and sister. One is 8 the other is 10. My favorite kind of music is rap, and rock. My favorite food is Mexican and seafood.

My life isn't so good right now. This is my second time in foster-care. It's really hard not living with my biological parents. I have made a lot of progress while being in foster-care. I had a bad reputation when I came to this foster home. I was doing drugs, smoking cigarettes, and I was sexually active. School was okay until I was always in trouble. I would do things like ditching school, hanging out with the wrong people, and doing all the wrong things. Then I ended up running away with my friends.

It was hell when we left. We were very scared and we got ourselves into a bad situation. Some guys wanted to kill us and we didn’t even know them. We ended up leaving alive and we were lucky, all I can say is don’t talk to strangers.

My family court date is coming up to see if I and my siblings will be a family again. I really do love my family and I hope that they have followed through so that I can go home. I feel that it is just wrong for CPS to have torn my family apart.

I go to a great school in Seattle called AS#1. It’s the best school I’ve been to. I have a lot of friends and I have been going here for two years. I get really emotional sometimes just thinking about my past. I really miss my old friends. We used to have a lot of fun together, but there comes a time when you have to forget and move on.

Life out there is scary for a girl like me. You need to be careful with who you talk to and who you hang out with. You don’t want to get yourself into a bad situation like an abusive relationship or getting pregnant at a young age.

Sometimes I wish I was reborn so I could start my life over. I think I deserve better than what I have. I get really mad when people rag on me. Because that gets me all wound up and ready to start a fighting. I have a really bad anger problem when people yell or touch me. Most of the time I don’t care if I let it go. Well that’s my story and hopefully I get lucky and go home with my family really soon.