Mockingbird Times

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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December 2009

Volume X, Issue XII

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY

BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER

Mockingbird Network Representatives went to the Kawaiw Memorial Center, a retirement community in Seattle, to honor some of the veterans and spread some holiday cheer. We baked pies earlier that day to share with our friends. We also made certificates to honor the veterans that reside there. Just as the year before, the senior citizens shared with us their expertise in the art of origami.

As one vulnerable community of foster youth giving back to another community in need, the experience of volunteering is amazing. Building that relationship with the people at Kawaiw gives them something to look forward to as the holidays approach each year. In an effort to share time with and support members of the community, we had the opportunity to recognize and appreciate the following veterans: Robert Rosenberger, Shunji Yuasa, Michio Kimura, Ben Nakamura, Ben Sugawara, Charles Green, Ken Nishimura, and William Sumida for their work in either the Vietnam War or World War II. We told a brief history of Veterans Day and gave each veteran a certificate of recognition for their honor and sacrifice.

I also had the opportunity to interview a couple of the veterans about the importance of fighting for their country and what they thought about Veterans Day. Vietnam War veteran Robert Rosenberger said, “My grandfather was a soldier under Patton, my father was a marine in Korea, and I was just following my patriotic duty, a family thing... I was too young to understand what I was fighting for, as most young men are, so we generally follow tradition rather than have an idea of what we’re fighting for.” He also added, “You don’t really know what patriotism is until you stand shoulder to shoulder with people that feel the same way as you and who want the same things as you do and you get this brotherhood about you that teaches you what this country is all about.”

Veterans Day, a day set aside to celebrate the bravery and sacrifice of all United States veterans, is observed each year on November 11th. Unlike Memorial Day, which is to honor those who died in war, Veterans Day honors all who have served in the military whether in war or peace. Formerly known as Armistice Day (armistice meaning temporary suspension of hostilities or agreement of the warring parties or truce), the holiday was originally set as a legal U.S. holiday to honor the “armistice” of World War I, which officially ended on November 11, 1918. Since 1938, November 11th has been “dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be hereafter celebrated and known as ‘Armistice Day.’”

The holiday honored all WWI veterans. In 1938, after having been through WWI and the Korean War, the name of the holiday was changed from Armistice Day to Veterans’ Day, to honor American veterans who had served in any of the wars.

Everyone has their own reasons for why they decided to be a part of the military and fight for their country. “I just wanted to see a better world, a world with no war, a peaceful world,” says Ben Nakamura, Korean War veteran. Being a veteran is very honorable and each deserves to be celebrated and thanked.

It was an awesome experience spending time with our friends in the community and being able to celebrate Veterans Day with them. I believe they enjoy us as much as we enjoy them. We look forward to going again next month to sing Christmas carols and spread more holiday cheer. Hopefully we will be invited to share the holidays with them for many more years to come.

THE JOY OF THE HOLIDAYS

BY JERRY BOBO

In November, the holiday season starts approaching and different emotions rise to the surface of one’s memory, irre- placeable memories of how family and friends bring enjoyment to the holidays. There are many other times of the year to spend with members of these groups, but Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa are truly holidays that bring everyone together as one. The joy you get from comforting words, playful gestures, warming faces, and the natural atmosphere brought by each individual. There is always a good feeling one gets from thinking about those you care about, even if you’re not communicating with them every day or as often as you like, but the memories of good times will remain with you. I asked three youth from different backgrounds about the holidays season. Two of the youth grew up in traditional households and one youth grew up in the foster care system. No matter your situation, they agreed that family and friends are most important.

When thinking of the holidays, many things come to mind: What famous dish you’re going to make, what activities to do, who is going to be on the guest list, etc. I asked Megan Riggs, Kevin Smith, and Jas- von Middleton, what was the first thing that came to mind when they thought about the holidays and why. Each youth had a similar answer. Riggs, a young woman who grew up in a traditional home, said, “I think of family. It is the only time when my whole family gets together and that’s the best part.” I concur that is the first thing that comes to mind for me as well. The holiday would not be the same if family of some sort were not present. It makes everything enjoyable. Smith also grew up in a traditional home and his response was, “Definitely seeing my family and friends is the first thing that comes to mind.” Friends are important pieces of your life and friends are part of your family. They have their own branch on the family tree.

Middleton grew up in the foster care system and has had difficulties with the holidays, but has positive memories. “I have had many holidays that did not go the way I expected, family members arguing and relatives complaining. But that’s the joy of it. Being with my family that still have disagreements and have fun, is something that cannot be replaced.” That is the joy of the holidays. Putting all disagree- ments to side, at least for one day, to create memories.

Memories are movies that constantly re- play over and over in your brain. Just about everyone has a great holiday memory that they will never forget. I asked Middleton and Smith what one memory they will never forget and why. “I will never forget when I and my mom and brother were dancing around the coffee table in our living room while my dad watched. We would dance to my mom’s Motown Christmas album, ‘Little Drummer Boy’ by The Temptations to be exact. I didn’t tell my mom I wanted a dog and I didn’t know how to get one to come downstairs. When I opened one of my gifts, I saw the music CD and I was too young to understand what I was fighting for, as most young men are, so we generally follow tradition rather than have an idea of what we’re fighting for.” He also added, “You don’t really know what patriotism is until you stand shoulder to shoulder with people that feel the same way as you and who want the same things as you do and you get this brotherhood about you that teaches you what this country is all about.”

Middleton’s answer was, “The greatest memory I have about the holidays is when I got my dog on Christmas. When I was seven, my mom and I were on our way home when she stopped at the store and only came out with a big bone. I didn’t tell my mom I wanted a dog and I didn’t know how to get one to come downstairs. When I opened one of my gifts, I saw the music CD that I wanted so badly. I will never forget that morning because even though my aunt laughed at me for being so excited, she knew that gift meant a lot to me. I will never forget that morning because even thought my aunt laughed at me for being so excited, she knew that gift meant a lot to me.

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Happy Holidays to each of you! Although 2009 has been a difficult year in so many ways, it has also been an opportunity for those of us at The Mockingbird Society to prove we can sing and fly even under the most trying circumstances. I am so proud of the staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, and the children, youth and families we serve to have accomplished so much during this unprecedented year.

The Mockingbird Network continues to demonstrate the value and progress that can be achieved when we view the youth and adults in the foster care system as the social justice effort to build a world-class foster care system. The Mockingbird Family Model has demonstrated its efficacy as a true Practice Model that addresses Child Safety, Well-Being and Permanency outcomes in a holistic, integrated, and cost-effective manner. Additionally, as an organization and with your support, The Mockingbird Society continues to develop the capacity and infrastructure necessary to carry the voice and agenda for major foster care system reform. As we prepare for 2010 we have worked hard to identify key accomplishments of The Mockingbird Society and consider a donation to us that will allow us to continue building a world-class foster care system. Happy Holidays to you and those you love!

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbird.org

Thank You!
Anonymous (2): Stephanie Briosi; Daniel Burleigh; Carla Butts; Casey Family Programs; Cooper Levy Trust; Karen Cowgill; Crosswalk; Rev. Erickson and Diane Cooley; Peter and Patty Frewing; Maleba Greene; Jillian Katz; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Robert Herbert, in memory of June Herbert; Ann L. Hugely; Deborah Jacobs; Danielle Kettel, SETU; Sarah LaGrange; Marylou Legere; Mona Lake and Joe Jones; Sandra L. Lee; Ron and Laura Maier; Alma McClain-Williams; The Nordlife Foundation; Alex Okerman, YMCA; Laura Pierce; Pierce County Alliance Staff; Vanitha Raman; Jean Roberts; Rosie’s Place Staff; Dae Shogren, Heather Guz, and Brian Hatcher of Independent Living Services; Nancy Singleton; Reynelda Solitaire; Mary Anne Thorbeck; Alicia Tonasket; Sofie Friends; Sara Wolfgang; Treehouse; Karynne Wright; Robert Wynn

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, was 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.”

What if we created an organization, a community, inspired a world in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for his children? Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

Support The Mockingbird Society!

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times. Please join us today!

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

Email

So that we may recognize you for your gift, please write how you would like to be listed:

☐ Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box).

☐ I prefer to receive my copy of the Mockingbird Times at the email address provided above.

My gift to help children, youth and families in foster care is (check box):

☐ $1,000+ Protector

☐ $500 - $999 Champion

☐ $250 - $499 Advocate

☐ $150 - $249 Supporter

☐ $50 - $149 Contributor

☐ Other

Payment Options:

☐ Check (payable to The Mockingbird Society)

☐ Credit card: Visa MasterCard AMEX

Account Number:

Expiration Date:

☐ Credit card billing address (if different than mailing address):

Signature:

☐ Please charge my credit card:

☐ One time:

☐ Monthly:

Quarterly:

☐ My employer will match my gift. Company Name: (Please enclose your matching gift form.)

Please mail this completed form and your check to The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Avenue S, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Why I Believe in What I Do by Antonette Ambrosia

As a child, I thought my life was like everyone else’s: I had a mom, a dad, a younger brother, and two younger sisters. We had a house in the country; we went camping; we traveled all over the United States, and all sorts of fun, family things. I had no idea what foster care was or why anyone would be placed in foster care. It was a world I knew nothing about. During our brief stay, we still had no clue as to what was going on. I was not informed of my rights as an adolescent in foster care. During returning home, foster care became a part of my life. I knew this time that I would find a way to be heard, to ensure that my younger siblings and I received quality care.

This time around, I had matured and I knew that I was not receiving everything entitled to me while being a ward of the court. There are many youth who have met the more concerned I became for other children in my situation. Private agencies are assigned by the Department of Children and Family Services to provide foster children with services including therapy, independent living, and visitation with family. However, the services are not always provided; legal rights with their needs not met. Because there is not adequate follow up with agencies that take care of foster youth, many youth miss out on these services which ultimately prepare them for life after care. This disparity affects a large amount every day of youth in foster care throughout our nation.

So many youth are not aware that the state is funding programs to benefit their lives. Information is pivotal to success during and after time spent in care. Youth who are unaware of the opportunities that local agencies and the state are able to provide for them while in care can unfortunately become adults who do not possess the skills necessary to adequately sustain their lives as responsible, productive people. As I remained a ward of the state I continued to see disparities such as this all around me. I did not want my future to be the same. I took two years to learn about what actions would need to be taken regarding these private agencies not fulfilling their obligations. Two years could be the length of one youth’s stay in the system; this is too long to not receive services that each youth deserves. I felt that it was my duty to help inform youth around the state, and I know how I could achieve this on my own.

I soon found exactly what I needed to help with my pursuit. The Indiana Youth Advisory Board was fortunate to hear the president of this board speak about their accomplishments. A few of their accomplishments. I knew that my voice needed to be on this board. I put in my application and a month later received an invitation to the next board meeting. I have now been an active member of the IYAB for almost three years. As a member of the IYAB, I work with other youth to help improve the lives of all youth in foster care. I am a part of a board that knows first-hand the changes that need to be made in order to ensure that all youth in foster care are successful, self-sufficient lives after care. After two years in foster care, just before I would have been returned home, I finally found a way to help fix a situation so that all youth who enter care may prevail. If I hadn’t experienced this myself, I never would have dreamed that so many changes would need to be made. It is important for those who have experienced certain obstacles in life to speak out and inform those in power of what needs to be changed in order for our foster care system to be effective and successful. Because I found a way for my voice to be heard, many children across Indiana will benefit and lead more successful, self-sufficient lives after care.
The Changing Times

Beginning April 1, 2010, the Mockingbird Times will be available as only an electronic version. You can receive it via email, or view it online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Over the last year, The Mockingbird Network has developed 6 Chapters across Washington State. Our vision is to take the Mockingbird Times to the next level, building an electronic platform for voice and expression where youth and alumni of foster care across the nation can share their experiences and information about the child welfare system and have it available to a much larger readership online.

If you are currently receiving a print copy of the Mockingbird Times, you can sign up to receive it electronically at www.mockingbirdsociety.org/email-sign-up

The Holidays in Foster Care

As you know, it's the autumn season which means pretty leaves falling, exciting holidays to celebrate, and really good food. It's a time where family and friends come together as one. I think fall is the best season; we celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and a new fresh year to start off.

Thanksgiving Day is a harvest festival. Traditionally, it is a time to give thanks to loved ones. The first Thanksgiving was celebrated to give thanks to God for helping the pilgrims survive the horrible winter, but is now primarily identified as a secular holiday. Personally, Thanksgiving is my second favorite holiday. I enjoy the food and spending time with my family and friends, but I do have to admit it can be very stressful in many different situations. As a child in foster care, holidays were the very hardest thing. I think it's important for your family to really sit down and talk to you about why we really celebrate holidays and what's the true meaning of that holiday.

Then there's what I consider the best holiday year-round: New Year's Day. I love New Year's Day because it's a time to reflect on the past and to welcome the New Year. I can admit New Year's Eve can sometimes get a little out of hand but it's the best way to celebrate a new fresh start in life. Again, this is a time where we come together and spend time with family and friends. We gather around and wait until midnight to celebrate the New Year. We come together and tell one another our New Year's resolutions. Family and friends discuss accomplishments and defeats. Happy New Year!

Celebrate With A Youth In Foster Care

JOY, continued from page 1

in the house. That day will stay with me forever. I added, "Bully is still my best friend and I walk him everyday." As you see, even friendships have formed from great memories in life.

There is no comparison to what family means to someone. You cannot put a price on family. Four different people (including myself) that have four different lives share the similarity of being with family for the holiday season. Coming together as one to bring enjoyment to each other before the year comes to a close is a great way to start a new one.

Happy Holidays!

Get Published ~ Get Paid!

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org.

Update Your Subscription

If you have recently moved, need to change the number of issues you receive, or if the address we are mailing the Mockingbird Times to needs to be corrected, please complete and mail the subscription request form on page 2 so we can update our records.

“How Can You Spare Some Change?” by Ian Grant

Yeah, you’ve heard it before. We all have. Depending on where you are, more often than not it's a young person behind the cup, behind the cardboard sign, behind the battered panhandler guitar. Youth unemployment is a huge problem. For example, the age-population of people aged 16-24 hit a staggering 33.4% in September 2009! You have to go back to the Great Depression to find worse numbers. Unfortunately, there aren't any current numbers for foster youth, but, if you scale the figures for the three years ending in 2002 (85% unemployment for foster youth in the three states studied; average national unemployment 4.83%) with today's national unemployment rate (10.2%), you end up with a projected 156% unemployment rate. Obviously, that's impossible but it gives you an idea of the struggle that youth in care are facing as they age out of care and prepare to enter the workforce.

It is an unfortunate reality of the foster care system that the vast majority of foster youth who "age out" of foster care (those who are in foster care on their 18th birthday) are largely thrown upon their own resources and need to find employment to survive. So why aren't foster youth (and indeed, youth in general) finding employment?

I talked with Christian Madruga, a career and education counselor at Treehouse (treehouse.org) about the issue. He believes that many youth don’t receive enough exposure to career opportunities, saying that youth "…go to school, get good grades, but nobody is taking a look at the youth and asking about their interests and then broadening those interests into a career…" He also feels that more service providers should take interest in finding out what kids about what’s going on… We need to do more in broadening those interests into a career path and asking about their interests and then actually doing something for youth to work to need to do that. Period.”

I'd like to close with something Mr. Fox said that I think everybody reading this article should take to heart: "We, as a society, need to be more invested in creating a better world through our youth.”

http://www.sopost.com/p/news/business/the_dead_end_kids_ArmedWNOGpXMall-GONNXIXK.action=wh&graph_name=LN_cpsbref3 SummonOutputServlet?request_achoice=ehole_graph_name=LN_gpbvbf

R chicks

Celebrate With A Youth In Foster Care by Ashlie Lanier

Mockingbird Times, December 2009
My Loving Family

Rosie Valencia

My loving family makes me comfortable, like a couch that gives you hugs and kisses when you’re down.

My loving family is like nights that keep you from getting harmed they’re the kind of family you’ll need in life.

My loving family will never give up on you, even when times are rough. I am so thankful for a family like them.

My loving family will never stop loving you. They are always gonna be there for you. That’s what I call a loving family.

I am very thankful for a loving family like them. Thanks for loving me with all your heart. This is what my family is like.

Creative Corner

Why I Run

Danielle Jones

Why I run

I run to escape those eyes
I run from pain my heart holds untold with hate beneath
I run from those hurtful lies from people who were suppose to be right
I run to make the pain from being stabbed with that knife called hate and lies
I run to make the day better told without lies
I run from reality and that pain beneath
I run

Skater Girl

Sonady Chea

Don’t look where you fell but where you slipped.

~ Taoist saying

Region 1: UNITE! CHAP tER IN SPOKANE COUNTY BY Katrina Dyer

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Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Eva Ervin

The Region 3 chapter had a great month in November. We talked about some important issues in the foster care system and focused on the importance of Legal Representation. At the Network Advisory Council, we were able to discuss this issue more, and the council voted to bring Legal Representation to the table on Advocacy Day. We also visited the Bellingham Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA’s) to do a Culture of Foster Care Training. Next month we are looking forward to making blankets for children at Skagit Valley Hospital and going caroling with Mountain Glen Retirement Home.

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Ian Grant

Region 4 had an exciting November! First, I’d like to welcome Rhonda Smith, our interim Rotating Chapter Leader. We continued to develop our message around adequate legal representation for youth in care, inviting Erin Shea of Columbia Legal Services to give a talk about exactly how being represented by an attorney empowers youth in care. On Veterans’ Day we visited the Kawabe Center in the Central District to honor the veterans that stay there (and bake and eat some absolutely delicious pie). They were kind enough to teach us some basic origami, which is a Japanese paper craft art. To learn more or get involved, come to our next chapter meeting on December 14th at the 2100 building!

Community Events

Region 1

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<td>Shirt Sale</td>
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<td>Needle</td>
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Region 3

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<td>Bike Drop In Outreach</td>
<td>Dec. 16</td>
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Region 4

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<td>Dec. 24</td>
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Region 5

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<td>Bike Drop In Outreach</td>
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<td>Pierce County Alliance, FREE</td>
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Region 6

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