January 2008

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

Staying on Top of New Years Resolutions by Andrea Roldan

When I turned eighteen, I aged out of foster care. One of the only reasons that I actually survived out here on these streets is because of the resources that are available to me, like Youth Care. Youth Care has a number of programs which are very helpful to me. Any resource that is a part of Youth Care is a non-profit organization such as Orion Center, which is a drop-in center for homeless youth. They supply needs like clothing, food, bus tickets, and case management. They also allow youth to access their mail at the drop in address. They have an interagency school and a job training program which is called “The Tile Project.” Both of these are in the same building as the Orion Center.

Orion Center also has what they call an outreach team that goes out to the streets three nights a week handing out basic needs like socks, gloves, blankets, food, hygiene products, dog food, etc. But, when the van goes out, they have to limit what they hand out because they are a non-profit and they can only provide what people donated to them. The donations are a big help, especially when the youth or even adults on the street need food such as a nice hot cup of soup or some hot cocoa.

When thinking about what your resolutions should be, think about it like you would a goal because that’s what resolutions and personal goals of self achievement. The basics are to be realistic and specific. A goal should not be too broad because then the outcome is harder to determine. Be independent with your resolution. This is your resolution, your pursuit of goals can’t depend on others to keep you focused on your goal. Correct yourself when you don’t stick to your plan because that’s someone else’s responsibility. Personalize your goals: If time management is your goal, your pursuit of goals can’t depend on others to keep you focused on your goal. Don’t compare your resolutions to those of other people. Analyze your adjustments: If you find yourself saying “I’ve worked out all week, I can take a few days off and then I’ll start again,” ask yourself, will you really get back to it or are you just getting yourself back out? Do not be afraid to discipline yourself. You will achieve more by correcting yourself rather than by letting yourself fall out of the habit. After you fall out of the habit, it’s hard to get back into it; you don’t want to have to have the same resolution next year. Growth progression should be year after year.

When we progress in our goals, it is mandatory to treat ourselves; this keeps our momentum up and working toward the incentive. Your reward should not reverse your progress, though. If you’re dieting and exercising, a reward shouldn’t be a cake. A reward should be balanced and disconnected to your used to do. It can be related to your achievement, though. Try a new pair of pants that fit your new shape. Go out to the movie theatre for the full experience instead of renting and watching a movie at home. Create a habit that treat as a new you.

Lastly, keep in mind that the point of your New Year’s resolution is to improve your life and yourself; don’t choose a goal if you know you’re not fond of just because others think you should. If you and your doctor think you need to be a healthy weight for your body, don’t go on a diet just because magazines are full of stick-thin celebrities and your Aunt Agatha called you “plump.” You will only make yourself miserable. Use the New Year as an opportunity for growth and positive change. Make it a truly happy one by being yourself and focusing on the positive. The only one who can control you is you. Use that to be the best you can be.

When we progress in our goals, it is mandatory to treat ourselves.

Using Your Resources by Leona Bill

Youth Care also has independent living homes for youth ages eighteen to twenty-two. I have aged out of these programs but I won’t age out of the Orion Center completely until next birthday. For now, I’m allowed there for case management, clothing and hygiene. I’m only allowed to get dinner there once a week.

A few other major non-profit organizations that have helped me are University Presbyterian Church, located about a block away from the University of Washington; New Horizons Ministries, another nonprofit located in downtown Seattle; and Seattle Youth Ministries (SYM) located in the University District. SYM also offers stuff like case management, socks, sweaters, bus tickets, etc. I’m also thankful for University District Youth Center (UDYC), another drop-in center which is not part of Youth Care. This is another place that has helped me out both while I was in foster care and after I aged out. I was attending the school there for a little bit but then I allowed myself to be distracted by the street life and just ended up quitting school altogether.

Even though I don’t use these resources, I didn’t use them as much as I could. When I did use the resources available to me it helped out a lot. Now that I’m twenty-two going on twenty-three, which is the age limit for most of the drop-in centers, I realize that I haven’t used these resources to my advantage, like, for example, finishing high school. There are many times where I look back and wish that I had not fooled around as much as I did so that I could have used these resources while they where available. This would have made things a bit easier for me and might have kept me out of trouble.

In other words, I’m ashamed because I allowed myself to get side tracked and ignored the important things I should have paid attention to. I am also a little on the down side because if I had not allowed myself to get side tracked I could be further along on the goals and dreams that I have set for myself. I also wouldn’t have gone to jail if I would still have a clean record. But even though I’m still a little behind, I still take pride in the things I’ve completed and the experiences that I have had.

So, as long as I can, I will use the resources that are available to me. I’m thankful that I have not fully aged out of some of the programs because I get to come up to me today. When I was younger, I didn’t want to accept help. I wish I would have accepted it because it would have made things a lot easier for me today.
Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

Drowning by Anonymous

I lost myself to a drug when I was nineteen. I began using every day, only occasionally spending a day or two clean. I intended, every time I stopped, to quit using alcohol. I didn’t know my life would be in foster care. We are committed to building a world class system for those kids and families in “the system” and we are committed to creating effective models that keep families together and reduce the number of kids who enter foster care. The Mockingbird Society is also very excited about expanding our Youth LEAD (Leadership, Education/Employment and Advocacy Development) program. We have received a major grant to develop a statewide coordinated network of foster youth who will receive training, support, and technical assistance in order to build their local chapter. Each local chapter (we anticipate between 9 and 15 across Washington) will have representation on the State Advisory Council that will determine the state agenda. The local Chapters and the State Advisory Council will be “youth driven.” We are naming this program The Mockingbird Network and we will be releasing more information soon about this remarkable opportunity for youth in foster care. We welcome 2008 and look forward to the progress we can make together on behalf of the kids and families we serve. I want to wish each of you the hope and blessings that come with a new start and a New Year! Let’s go to work!

Submiting Letters

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to the Mockingbird Times Editorial Staff and will be opened by editorial staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by Mockingbird Times Editorial Staff. 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.

Become a Member of The Mockingbird Society

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Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

Southern Strategy by Samuel Martin

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

This quote is from our Declaration of Independence, what our forefathers fought so hard for. In 1776, the United States of America was born, a war had been fought for our independence and we set up a federal government. Everything was great for this young country known as the land of the free. But slaver-yism ran deep through our land. After 100 years of slavery, we African Americans finally got our independence in what is known as the Emancipation Proclamation. The world became a completely different place. African Americans began to vote, run for office, and live as free people.

This all ended in the Compromise of 1877 which removed troops from southern states, and left blacks all alone to defend themselves. During this time, things were quite different. It was the Republican Party that ended slavery and actually gave African Americans rights and equality. The Democratic Party at that time focused on issues affecting whites, not social justice issues. Sometime in the 1930’s, during the Great Depression, this changed. The Democratic Party, which already had southern states, began to care more about equal rights. Shortly after the first signs of this switch, a Democrat by the name of Strom Thurmond split away from his party because of an anti-segregation speech. He created his own party called the States Right Democrat party. The south, with the southern strategy, began to return to the Republican Party. The southern strategy means essentially playing toward the southern. For example, Ronald Reagan said that he would give the states more power to run their own affairs. A lot of southern states still feel like the national government has too much power. Something that was very shocking to me was in 2004 run for the nomination for the Republican Party. George Bush claimed that his opponent, John McCain, fathered an illegitimate black child. This was all to get more votes in the South. This shows that there is still an extraordinary amount of racism in those who are supposed to be leaders of our country. Using someone’s child as a reason for not voting for them, regardless of their stance on real issues in the world, is immutable. It tells me that people still live in the past. You cannot lead a racially diverse nation when you complain about the ethnicity of another man’s child.

If you can’t accept that, than you, more likely than not, can’t accept this nation as it is with it’s great diversity. When I found out about this, it opened my eyes to another level of racism. In the movie “The Pursuit of Happiness,” Will Smith asked how Thomas jefferson knew that happiness would be a pursuit, that it would not be guaranteed. People have to work for what they want, but what if the people who are trying to get what they want are oppressed? I am not only talking about Blacks, I am talking about all people of color. We are all discriminated against. How do you think in a society that constantly looks at you as someone who is prone to failure and is naturally going to be a problem? I think that the world should think a little bit more about why they choose a leader of this nation. Is it truly because they are great or is it these little subliminal signs that nobody really notices? I strongly urge people to understand and get involved in the world around them because it will affect you, your children, and your grand children. You do it better, but you will only get what you give.

Meet Our Staff

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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 Society is a monthly newspaper, published and produced by youth who have experience in foster care for and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 40,000 copies being delivered across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and a membership in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and mission 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 ©2001, The Mockingbird Society.
I would just like to, once again, wish you a Happy New Year. A new year is a time for new beginnings. That is my favorite thing about it. There is a chance to make goals and try to accomplish them. And that is it. This new motivation found across the country only lasts for a short time. My hope is to try to stay motivated throughout the entire year.

This year is especially important for me because some big things are going to be happening this year for me. I have my first prom, which is one of my sentimental things I want to hold on to forever. I also have my high-school graduation, which is already exciting me because I can see 12 years of hard work in clear view. Also, I am looking forward to the opportunity to play college football and to college life in general, not to mention adulthood. This is the beginning of the rest of my life, and, quite frankly, it’s scary. At the same time, I feel like I’m ready. This past month has been different. It started out pretty rough but it has really gotten better since. The fire that I continue to reference hasn’t gone out. Someone once gave me the metaphor that I should keep throwing a log in the fire every once in a while in order to keep the fire going.

This past month I have struggled with a lot of different things, as most of you know, primarily motivation. Luckily, I have found someone who can really coach me and help me deal with a lot of the positives. I have had several great things happen to me in the past month. I have had several offers to play college football, which is one of the greatest things that could happen! I really love that sport and the opportunity to play in college is an honor. The problem is my fear of drowning myself by fear. We compared it to being so afraid that I never go swimming. The problem is my fear of drowning is eventually going to cause me to drown anyway. So we came to the conclusion that I would start by just putting my feet in the water and learning to go to it slowly because I am not ready to just jump in the pool. Along with my hardships have come positive things I have had several great things happen to me in the past month. I have had several offers to play college football, which is one of the greatest things that could happen! I really love that sport and the opportunity to play in college is an honor. It shows that there is potential in me. Still, at this point, I am so young that the sky is the limit for me.

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 sing their hearts out for us.”

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

Thank you!

Keith and Kimberlee Adams; The Alfred and Tillie Shimanski Testamentary Trust and Foundation; Anonymous; Linda and Steven Arau; Baby & Co.; Tom and Linda Baker for Inheritance Charitable Remainder Trust; Samuel Bel and Blinda Butter-Bell; Kerri Bradford; Julie Braybrooks and Gregory Simon; Susan Connolly; Karen Cowgill; Diane Cone for Picket Fence Real Estate; Bruce Cron; Beverly Curry and Tom Gill; Frances DeMarco; Anthony and Ann DeRoccis; Anne Fenton; Apex Foundation; Andrea Fulleton and Clara Graham; Kresta Goodman; Audrey Hossfeld and Jamie Hils; Hey’s Names Soccer Team 2007; Charles Humphre; Winky Huser; Bbi Kegley; Joanne Kipu on behalf of John Graham; Sandra Kraus; Ron and Lauren Maier; Wendy Marlowe, Ph.D.; Mark Marshall; Harvey and Hisako Nakaya; Charles Nordin; Michael Oliver and Janet Osborn; Petil and Patty Pecora; Penguins Windows; Stella L. Pits; Lisa Rivelle; Lance and Lucinda Richmond; Suzanne Sandberg in memory of Dorothy Taylor and on behalf of Rachel E. Rose Julie Shefts; Wendy, Jeff and Mari Shribra; Shirley and David Allen Foundation on behalf of Lucy Sullivan; Carriere and Maria Shradlado for B. Theriaux; Carriere; Christine Sflb and Adam Judetz; James and Ann Street; Steven Stroh on behalf of Dave Strobe; The Stuart Foundation; Joanne Suglia and William Maphis; John and Sharon Threlkel; George and Beverly Threlkel; Julie Thornton; Sarah Hufdauer; and Drew Trees; Elizabeth Upton and Rayburn Lewis; Venitia Vango; Eni and Mike Welch

When Leaving is All You Know

I remember the first time the urge to leave hit me. I stood staring at the gaping hole in the bathroom wall, left by my enraged uncle upon opening the door to find my mother on the edge of her third unsuccessful suicide attempt. I was paralyzed by the desire to be anywhere but there. I kicked the vomit stained, plaster dusted rug that masked the spot where my mom’s near lifeless body had lain moments before and contemplated what a seven-year-old should take on a journey away from there. Decision made, I wrapped yogurt, apples and a can of soup in a bandana, attached it to a stick and ran as fast as I could into the woods behind our apartment.

I sat crying in the woods for what seemed like hours to my young mind, and waited. I sat wondering why my mom wanted to leave me and my brother. I wondered what I could do to make her want to stay. I imagined my family being a family whose home wasn’t filled with violence, anger and hours spent on the porch waiting for the door to be unlocked when “mom felt better.” I recalled the now too familiar blare of ambulance sirens approaching our house, the crowd of curious neighbors lining the street outside and the sour smell of lingering vomit. I imagined what it would be like to have another mother, one that wasn’t “crazy.”

I imagined not being afraid that my mom would die or “go to the nut-hut,” the term my uncle now used to describe the place that my mom went when she tried to “leave,” the euphemism that my family collectively used to describe my mom’s repeated suicide attempts. I imagined being picked up by the same woman that took my baby sister away and shuttled off to the “better place” for a “better life” that my mom assured us she would have. I didn’t realize it then, but the place I imagined was foster care and a child welfare system that would protect me while finding me a mom who would stay.

Eventually, my mom returned, begged me out of the woods and convinced me that she would never “leave” again. Although I couldn’t understand wanting to die, I understood wanting to leave. I understood immediately that leaving meant getting away from my fears, unbearable challenges and rejection. I was running from the domestic violence in my home, my mom’s frequent fages and the CPS workers that, as my mom reminded us daily, were waiting to collect us if we weren’t good. I learned that living meant running inside my head and away from friends, family and supportive adults. I learned to run from the impending sexual, emotional and substance abuse that would characterize the remainder of my childhood.

JOIN THE MOCKINGBIRD SOCIETY AND ASK-Y (ADVOCATES for SYSTEM KIDS and YOUTH FOR HOMELESS/FOSTER YOUTH ADVOCACY TRAINING AND LEGISLATIVE DAY 2008

Training Day:
Wednesday, February 6th, 3-5:30 PM
2100 24th Ave South (Treehouse Building)

Homeless/Foster-Youth Legislative Day:
Friday, February 8th
Washington State Capitol Campus, Olympia WA

You may join us for one or both activities. You don’t have to attend Training Day in order to attend Legislative Day.

Both events are free and open to all. Food will be provided.

Transportation to Olympia can be arranged ahead of time or at Training Day.

For more information, please contact Najja or Lauren at 206-323-5473.

Photo Gallery: Mockingbird Holiday Festivities

Senior Youth Representative Jessica Martin and Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick hard at work on their gingerbread house.

Youth Representative Sam Martin shows off all his hard work.

Mockingbird Family Model Hub parents receive gifts for their Constellation families.

Mockingbird Family Model partners share smiles and a holiday meal with The Mockingbird Society Executive Director Jim Theofelis.
It’s pretty amazing that I am still alive coming into the year 2008. I have gone through so much in the year 2007 it’s, honestly, completely unreal. I have had to deal with deaths in my family and the death of friends as well. Due to their life choices, their lives were lost. It’s tragic, but it is life. Sometimes, people’s lives are not meant to last that long. It’s a hard fact for me to fully comprehend and understand. But it gets easier.

I have lost housing twice this year due to my choices and impulsive way of life. I have gone through the acceleration of my addictions and results of my drug use on my body and mind. I have gone through detox once and gone to jail to take care of warrants to better my life and clear my record of warrants. I went through one treatment center and left due to a difference of beliefs about my rights as a woman. I have been in fights with friends and family and lost friends due to my addiction. Thankfully, I have not lost my family due to my choices. They chose to stay with me, even with my choices, even though they don’t fully agree with my not taking responsibility for my life. I didn’t really act like a twenty-one-year-old woman. I was just always in the moment. I always feel scared inside and sometimes I try to trick myself into believing I don’t care but I really do. I don’t get how I always without fail manage to mess everything up... You know with people you never can be sure so I can never figure out when to trust and not lie. I can’t recall ever feeling apart or all alone. It is just as bad as now—always feeling aware and feeling like I got to do something and always in the end just feeling aware and feeling like I got to do something and always in the end just being sure so I can never figure out when to trust and not lie. I can’t recall ever feeling a heart. What if heaven and hell are indeed real... I can’t live and go through hell and hell is just one big mess. I’m not even sure I know why I hurt and why I was even on this earth. It’s time to change for the better. I want to be phenomenal in every aspect and help everyone who wanted to help me be a better person. I let hustling take over my life as well. Being a drug dealer in Seattle is not fun and didn’t help me achieve anything I wanted. I lost jobs due to my drug use. I lost opportunities for housing, school, and new jobs. I lost trust with people who were trying to help me better myself for the sake of my life in the future. Eventually, I started to shut out everyone who wanted to help me be a better person. I let my friends and family down and over and over with lies of doing well even though I felt like I was dying inside. I felt as if I was never going to dig myself out of the hole of drug dealing and using. I wanted to be legit but knew I had to ask for help from mainstream. He took me to detox and from there I went to a re-habilitation center for almost two months before I left and went into another center for recovery. It’s a struggle every day for me. I have to literally take it one day at a time as they say they to.

I hope that 2008 brings me joy, success, and a better life. I want to make people proud to know me and be around me. Mostly, I want to be proud of myself. I want to be phenomenal in every aspect of my life. I don’t want to hurt anymore. I don’t want to self-sabotage myself, I am intelligent and need to start living a life like that. I am sad and tired of my life being hurried all the time. It’s time to change for the better. I want to take control of my life every day. Not just something productive. I have a chance to start something amazing in my life. I mean, hey, it’s only the 4th of January right? I have 361 days to do something right.

The truth of the matter is I just don’t get it myself- I wish I did but I don’t... I don’t know why I am so messed up... I don’t know why I have to be so mean... I can’t explain the reason or even know if there is a real reason for my attitude... I’m not sure if there is something really wrong with me or if I was just brainwashed into believing there is something wrong with me when they took me from my mom. When I cry and someone else asks me what’s wrong, a majority of the time I just make something up because I really don’t have a clue to why I am crying or where the tears came from in the first place. I don’t know why I have never been okay in my whole life not ever once... I don’t get how I know I need to talk and sometimes I want to talk but never know what about or how to even start. I don’t understand how it always feels like something’s missing... I can’t understand how everyone is fine or finds a way to be okay- except me. I don’t know how just somehow fell apart. I don’t know how to make something of myself. Sometimes when I hear my self talk I hear myself saying a lot of good things but the reality is all I’ve amounted to is just one big mess. I’m not even sure I know why I hurt and why I was even in the first place... Thought and played with death but just didn’t have the heart. What if heaven and hell are indeed real... I can’t live and go through hell and hell is just one big mess. I’m not even sure I know why I hurt and why I was ever mad in the first place... Thought and played with death but just didn’t have the heart.