ON FEBRUARY 9th I dragged myself out of bed at 7:30 in the morning. For me that is the equivalent of waking up at the crack of dawn. In a half-dead state, I walked down to the nearest bus stop and got on a bus headed in the direction of the University District Youth Center in Seattle. I wasn’t the only kid doing this. Over 100 youth across the Puget Sound area in Washington State, on their own free time, were loading themselves into vans with their peers from group homes, shelters and local youth centers. We were all heading down to Olympia (Washington state capitol) to participate in Youth Advocacy Day.

Youth Advocacy Day (formerly known as Homeless Youth Lobby Day) is an annual event whose purpose is to bring youth and youth advocates from across the state together to collectively advocate for young people with legislators in Olympia. The focus of Youth Advocacy Day is improving the lives of our community’s most vulnerable youth, which include young people involved in various systems including: homeless, foster care and juvenile justice.

The topic of focus this year was the sealing of juvenile records. Youth advocates from across the state are proposing a change to the current law. The proposed bill (House Bill 3078 and Senate Bill 6609) will cut the time in half that someone will have to wait in order to have their records sealed. Participants met and shared their stories with Senators Thibadeau, Franklin and Hargrove and Representatives Dickerson, Pettigrew and Speaker of the House Frank Chopp. One young woman, who lives in a Seattle transitional housing program, shared her story with Representative Chopp. She spoke of how she had a past run-in with the law but managed to break her old habits and started making choices that had more positive results. She stated that “people change, the law should too.”

How To Be An Advocate

- Get involved. You can visit your local government’s web site and read about things that are happening right at this very moment in your state capitol. If you find a bill that you want to support, you can be an advocate by educating your community about the facts.
- Write an email or a letter to whomever it may concern, such as a legislator or your governor.
- Visit your state capitol and request a meeting with a local legislator. You don’t have to be old enough to vote to speak with your legislators.

What is Advocacy?

Advocate n-One who argues for a cause; a supporter or defender.

The right to advocate is a privilege given to everyone who lives in America. If that is so, then why do most people not even know what it means?

Most people think of advocacy as a difficult and overwhelming thing to get involved with. True, there are people who do it for a living; meeting with legislators all the time and constantly fighting for important issues. What most people don’t know, however, is that advocacy can be as easy as sending an email or letter to your local state legislators, educating your friends, teachers, and parents about an issue that is important to you, or even creating an after school advocacy club where you can practice fighting for your cause.

If you have a cause that you believe in, I strongly urge you to study up on your issue to see what you can do to help change it. It all really depends on what you are advocating for. There are millions of different ways to advocate.

Recently, I had the chance to interview an advocate named Nancy Amidei, Director of a program called the Civic Engagement Project.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Alumni Corner

When I was an eight-year-old boy I was removed from my mother’s home and unwillingly started on an odyssey that would not end until I was well into adulthood.

After the court took us away from our mother, I never saw my sister Maria again. Jimmy and I were sent by the court to live in the Receiving Home—this big gray, smelly, ramshackle building in inner city Cleveland [that] housed kids nobody wanted. The first night away from our equally filthy apartment, I was angry and terrified and unsure of what was going to happen next. Kneeling beside the rusty, metal-framed bed with the urine-stained mattress, I prayed to ease my pain. My cries for help resounded like wails into an empty universe.

My memories of my first foster home are faint and few; I only stayed there a week. I then ran away. It was the first of many times that I would run from a foster home—it was after all a foster home, and I did not belong there. It turned out that I belonged nowhere. Here is an excerpt from a social work report written on me all those many years ago:

“Most high school graduates go away to college with a sense of excitement and a yearning for independence. Of course, while they make plans to fully enjoy the freedom that college life will afford them, they completely take for granted the security system that is backing them up.”

John Seta

Letter from the Editor
by Jim Theofelis

Poetry Corner
My Motherhood
by Kathy

Music Review
Hieroglyphics Makes Your Head Bounce
by Darius Reynolds

What is Love?
by Bridgett Strowton

Foster Care Summit
by Darius Reynolds

Movie Review
Kill Bill: Vol. I

Mockingbird Times
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth
March 2004
Volume IV, Issue 3
Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation
Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org
Letter From the Editor

In my experience, employment and education are two vehicles that help marginalized communities improve their current and future lives. Along those lines, I encourage you to review the following opportunities for scholarships available to the young people we serve.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** Youth in foster care and homeless youth are eligible to file their FAFSA as an independent student (“orphan/ward of the court”), and can receive up to $4650 per year in Federal Pell Grant aid and between $1500-$4000 per year in Washington State Need Grant aid to attend an eligible Washington college. You may also qualify for private or institutional scholarships and grants. www.fafsa.ed.gov Deadline: Apply asap after January 1st during the year prior to enrollment.

**CHAFE - Education and Training Voucher (ETV) can provide up to $5000 per year for post-secondary education expenses in addition to other independent living money, for youth who age out of foster care and are between the ages of 18 and 23. Contact the Independent Living Program Manager for Washington State, Marlon Buchanan at 360-902-7976 or buma300@dshs.wa.gov for eligibility requirements.**

**Treehouse Coaching-to-College Program is for residents of King County who were in out-of-home care (in King County) at any time since the age of 16 and are currently under the age of 25. Provides assistance with career and educational planning through an Educational Coach and up to $4000 per year in scholarship assistance. Call: 206-767-7000 or visit www.treehouseforkids.org/programs/coaching/eligibility.htm**

**Orphan Foundation of America (OFA)/Casey Family Scholars provides scholarships of up to $10,000 per year to former foster youth under the age of 25, who spent at least the 12 months prior to their 18th birthday in foster care and were not subsequently adopted. Scholarships are awarded for post-secondary education, including vocational/technical training, and are renewable each year based on satisfactory progress and financial need. See www.orphan.org and click on the application link. Deadline: April 1st 2004 for the 2004-2005 academic year.**

**Hildegard Lash Merit Scholarship provides up to $5000 to sophomores, juniors, or seniors attending four-year colleges. To apply, complete the OFA/Casey Family Scholars application and write a letter that states interest in a Hildegard Lash Merit Scholarship. For more information or to apply call: 1-800-950-4673 or www.orphan.org/programs/hildegard.html Deadline: April 1st 2004 for the 2004-2005 academic year.**

**National Foster Parent Association Scholarship: Offers scholarships for foster youth who wish to further their education beyond high school, including college level courses, studies, vocational and job training, and correspondence courses, including the GED. For more information or to apply call: 1-800-557-5288 or visit www.nfpainc.org/index.cfm Deadline: March 31st 2004 for the 2004-2005 academic year.**

**ACHIEVERS Scholarship Program: This scholarship opportunity is for foster youth and other low-income students at one of the following Washington State high schools listed at http://www.waedfoundation.org/achievers/AchieversSchools.htm. Students must apply during their junior year. It can provide up to $9000 per year for four years for attendance at an eligible Washington State college. For more information call 1-877-655-4097 or visit www.waedfoundation.org/achievers/ASForms.htm. Deadline: November 15th 2005 for high school juniors who will begin college during the 2007-2008 academic year.**

**Other Private Scholarships: Visit the Washington Education Foundation/Other Scholarships website for links to free scholarship searches www.waedfoundation.org/sites.htm**

For questions contact Mary Anne Herrick at the Washington Education Foundation at 1-877-655-4097.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Mockingbird Times, March 2004

Poetry Corner

**My Motherhood**

I'll never again have the life I tried so hard to achieve that's a harsh realization To be pregnant when you're a teen To give birth to a child When I myself am still a kid But I got so much more growing up to do Well at least I thought I did But I can't go back now After all I messed up And why should my baby have to pay Because I didn't use a glove So back to reality I'm gonna be a mom At least I'll finally have a family Because I never really had one Well I guess I can't complain Because I'm not doing this alone There will be a father figure In my child's life and home Wow, this is all so new to me I can't believe this truth But the state of shock I'm in Won't change the baby in my womb I myself can no longer be a child And do what we teens do And every choice that I make Affects not one, but two No more smoking cigarettes Or partying all night Because my baby's welfare Is more important than my good times So I'll sit at home Munching on fruits 'n such Realizing how lucky I am That my youth is done I'm gonna have a baby I guess it was all just in due time Now I know what my purpose is To make this baby's life better then mine.

—KATHERINE GRAVES

Mockingbird Times, March 2004

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Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth.

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Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth.
Hieroglyphics Makes Your Head Bounce

DARIUS REYNOLDS

If you are really into underground Hip-Hop, then I have an album for you. The group's name is Hieroglyphics, and the album is called Full Circle. This is the first time I have bought one of their cd's and it really blew my mind. The lyrics are great and they really did a good job of putting their beats together. My favorite member of the group is Del the Funky Homo-Sapien. Del is a really good rapper and has his own weird and unique style. If you've ever heard the Gorilla z song, “Clint Eastwood,” then you know what I’m talking about. Here is an example from that song, “I’m in them, Every sprouting tree. Every child apiece Every cloud you see. You see with your eyes I see destruction and dense corruption in disguise From this enterprise Now I’m sucking to your lies” Now if that doesn’t make you think then I don’t know what will. Expect a lot more admirable verses like that from Del on this album. There are a total of eight members in the band, including Del. The other members names are Casual, Phiento Dee, Tajii, Pep Love, A-plus, Opio and Domino. This group is lyrically on another level. They don’t rap about jewelry and cars or how much money they have like many mainstream rappers. They talk about their rap skills and their life. They also like to use a lot of metaphors.

The group puts a lot of energy into their music and it’s always flowing. The songs make you want to bounce your head and learn the songs so you can rap with them. Most of the songs on the album made me think a lot, especially “Maggie Mae.” In this song they talk about one of their friends who has mental issues.

I encourage every Hip Hop fan to listen to this album and I guarantee you will be at the nearest music store buying it. I also encourage parents to let there kids listen to it if they are into Hip Hop. There is not a lot of profanity and unlike mainstream music, Hieroglyphics sends a positive message.

Hieroglyphics

What is Love?

BRIDGETT SIROSHTON

EVEYONE HAS HEARD that cheesy early 90’s techno song, by Hadaway “What is love, baby don’t hurt me no more.” Why did this song become so popular? I’ll tell you why—because everyone wants love. So what is love about and why is it so important for us to find out? For many girls, romance and love go hand-in-hand. We dream all the time about finding “Mr. Right,”or that special someone who makes us feel wanted and loved.

According to Sarah Bodnar’s article in Cosmopolitan “there is no such thing as the one.” This is bad news for anyone who thinks there is a special soul mate, waiting for them. Bodnar has some good news as well, claiming anyone who thinks there is a special soul mate, waiting “there is no such thing as the one.” This is bad news for dream all the time about finding “Mr. Right,”or that love about and why is it so important for us to find out?

Fisher, “the male brain is equipped to put more stock in the area of the brain that promotes motivation. Fisher also claims, “Love at first sight does exist.” Fisher goes on to say that it is possible for us to fall for someone in a split second. Think of all those times that you told yourself on the first date, “I love this man.” Another point of interest is Fisher’s claim that men fall in love faster than women. I know many girls who would dispute this however, because it seems like we’re always the one waiting for the phone call. According to Miss Fisher, “the male brain is equipped to put more stock in visual cues” meaning that they are visual creatures, relying heavily on first impressions and physical traits.

Remember these thoughts before you put yourself through dating hell. There is more than one person out there, and love at first sight doesn’t necessarily mean love. Love can happen more than once. Maybe on your next date, your expectations won’t be so high that you think your date is the only one out there for you. Remember the sexiest thing is confidence. I heard somewhere that attraction is only 50% looks and 50% confidence. You can have all the beauty in the world but if you don’t believe in yourself and have confidence, there’s no point! ♥

Are you a young writer or artist? Then Mockingbird wants your poems, news articles, and artwork! We will pay you between $15-$25 for each piece we publish in the Mockingbird Times! Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsoociety.org!

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Kill Bill: Vol. 1

Courtney Konietzko

“I don’t think there’s anything to be afraid of. Failure brings great rewards – in the life of an artist.”

—Director Quentin Tarantino, on the pressure to repeat the smash success of his last film, Pulp Fiction.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 is the fourth film by Quentin Tarantino. Tarantino has been described as, “a god among directors.” He is extremely talented and all of his films are worth checking out: Pulp Fiction, Reservoir Dogs (with Steve Buscemi as Mr. Pink, he is sooo sexy in that role!), Jackie Brown, and Natural Born Killers. (Kill Bill is technically his fourth creation because Natural Born Killers was directed by Oliver Stone but Tarantino wrote the screen play.)

Kill Bill is intense, tastefully bloody (except for the parts where someone is stabbed and blood gushes horizontally out of them like Old Faithful), graphic, and beautiful. The main character is “the bride,” played by Uma Thurman, who also played one of the main characters in Pulp Fiction. She seeks revenge on members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, a killing team composed of beautiful women who do her wrong and leave her for the dead. The Squid and the Whale and mocking boss, who seems to hold the power. You don’t see Bill’s face in Volume 1 but parts of him are shown and you get to hear his voice...I have a feeling we’ll get to see his face when “the bride” goes after him sometime in Volume 2 or 3. The bride used to be a member of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. I’m not clear on why the other villains tried to kill her but I think it has something to do with her getting married.

There’s a treat in the middle of the film where you get to see why one of the women (O-Ren Ishii) became an assassin, as the story of her childhood unfolds in Japanese Animation.

Kill Bill is heavily influenced by Japanese culture and parts of it were filmed in Tokyo. I think this adds to the film — to it’s beauty and individuality. There are many well choreographed action scenes in Vol. 1 and I expect the sequels to be just as action-packed, though it’s not what I’d call an “action” movie because there are too many other toppings on this cinematic pizza. Yuen Woo-Ping is the choreographer for Kill Bill. When I saw the name on the opening credits I thought to myself, “this movie has to be good!” Yuen is famous for his work on the action sequences in The Matrix, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, and Iron Monkey.

Some parts of Kill Bill had me squeezing the hand of the person next to me just a little too tight. Not because it was scary but because it was suspensful. The movie runs about 10 hours in length but it doesn’t seem like that when you leave the theater. The movie is broken up into chapters so when you leave it’s like putting down a good book. There is somewhat of a time warp in Kill Bill that leaves you thinking, “what?” However, your questions are answered by the time volume one ends. Whatever questions aren’t answered will probably be in the sequels. We can look forward to Kill Bill: Vol. 2 coming out in theater sometime in March or April. A pleasurable experience! Probably suitable for mature audiences due to graphic violence.

Foster Care Summit

DAKUS REYNOLDS

For the past nine years, the Families for kids partnership has been working towards finding a permanent home for every foster child in Washington State. One strategy of the FFKP is to hold an annual the Washington Permanent Summit. I attended the last summit of this kind in February.

The summit began with Casey Family programs welcoming guest speaker Uma Ahluwalia, Assistant Secretary of DSFS, who talked about strengthening Washington’s Child Welfare System. Governor Gary Locke was the keynote speaker. Locke talked about Accomplishments in Permanency for Children, a fundraising group whose goal is to raise money for children in Washington State’s Foster Care System. At this event I had the honor of meeting Governor Locke, which was one of the highlights of the day.

After the speeches, we broke into groups of about 15 and separated to different rooms to attend what was called “Action Planning.” Each group had a certain topic to discuss. My group talked about permanency planning for adolescents in foster care and how to make it easier to get adolescents adopted. I am pretty sure I was the only one in the group who didn’t work with a government agency, or the judicial system. This made me pretty uncomfortable because I thought there would be a lot more youth. The session had two different parts. First we came up with ideas that could make finding foster kids permanent homes easier, like giving youth more of a voice in the decision making part of their life. For example, asking youth what they are looking for in a home, and training youth to be more independent when they can’t get a hold of their caseworker.

During lunch there was a memorial for the late Rosie Oreskovich, former assistant secretary for DSFS. After lunch we went back to our groups and started the second part to the action planning. For the second part we had to pick three ideas that we thought were the most important and that were possible to do in two years. The three ideas that my group picked were: giving youth a voice; addressing special needs for adolescents; and defining permanence and kinship. I mentioned that there should be a program made that will sit youth down when they first get in foster care and tell them what is going on and what they can do for themselves to make things easier for them. At the end of the summit every group gave a quick description of what they worked on. Uma Ahluwalia and Robbe Synnes from Washington State’s Supreme Court made closing comments.

I really wish that I had the opportunity to go to forums and summits when I was in the system because I had a very bad experience with foster care. If people would have listened, I would have told them everything that was wrong with the system at that time. For example, out of the five case workers assigned to me, I only met and talked to one. Going to this conference restored a lot of my confidence in the foster care system because I met people who are really serious about their job and care about the kids. I am thankful for the chance to go to them now and to hear about the people that are trying to change things now hard at work.