

# Mockingbird Times



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

March 2008

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume IX, Issue 3

Visit us online at [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org) or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

## In This Issue

**Letter from the Editor**  
Jim Theofelis  
Page 2

**Living Inside Your Head**  
Ryan Castellano  
Page 2

**Welcome, Tiffany Washington, New Youth LEAD Director**  
Mockingbird Times Staff  
Page 3

**Photo Gallery**  
Page 3

**Away At Job Corps**  
Jessica Martin  
Page 3

**Creative Corner: Beautiful Crane**  
T. S. Berry  
Page 4

**Creative Corner: Why Why Why**  
John Hemmingway  
Page 4

**Creative Corner: Heartbreak**  
T. S. Berry  
Page 4

**Creative Corner: There is Love**  
Emma M Cummings  
Page 4

**Creative Corner: The Hero?**  
John Hemmingway  
Page 4

**Creative Corner: Letter to My Uncle**  
Dominic  
Page 4

**Reconnecting With Family After Foster Care**  
Rhonda Smith  
Page 4



Friday, February 5th, was the fifth annual Youth Advocacy Day. I was part of it this year and had a lot of fun. The bill that we were trying to pass was House Bill 3048. HB 3048, for people who don't know, is to establish a pilot program in a small county for every child in foster care, aged 12 and older, to have an attorney represent them in a court of law. Sponsoring this bill are **Representatives Lantz, Goodman, Pettigrew, Roberts, Darnelle, Appleton, Hasegawa, and Kenney**. Once I read the bill fully, I realized how much this could potentially help foster children state-wide. Even personally, I could see it helping me if I were still in foster care.

The most amazing part of Youth Advocacy Day was, without a doubt, the fact that there were so many people to advocate for foster children. If children in foster care saw how many people there are that are advocating for

## Youth Advocacy Day by Kenneth Larson-Rettinger

them, they wouldn't feel so alone. There are many people out there that are working on foster care rights. One of the things that was really cool was the fact that I got to speak to the people there and it was so nice to see people listening to me and taking in all of what I was. All I did was tell them my foster care story and just that little bit of information really made people feel determined to advocate for foster children across the state.

Another great thing about Youth Advocacy Day was that we got to meet a whole bunch of people such as representatives and senators. It was so cool because those are people that are really important in Washington; it was sort of like meeting a famous person. I believe that we will get this bill passed eventually, even if not in this legislative session, because there were so many people advocating for it. We had a great turnout and we did a lot of convincing and

even picketed with signs. You could hear the people marching from all around the capital.

Everyone worked really hard to get our voices heard and I think that it really paid off.

The speakers at Youth Advocacy Day were really inspirational such as **Samuel Martin** and **Jim Theofelis**. I especially liked Sam's comparison of children in foster care to elephants in a circus. He talked about how the trainers start by restraining the elephants by their legs with heavy chains when they are young and working their way up to just fishing line and the elephants won't even



The Mockingbird Society Executive Director Jim Theofelis rallies up the crowd during the Youth Advocacy Day morning session before meeting with state representatives.

try to get free because they gave up fighting when they had the chains. This really moved me because I thought that it was really true for children in the foster care system. I am happy that people got to hear my story and were really moved by it. I look forward to talking in the future and can't wait to see people from the last Youth Advocacy Day there.



Marchers energetically head down front steps of Washington State Capitol Building with their message supporting legal representation and better housing for foster and homeless youth.

## More Youth Advocacy Day photos on page 3!



*"It is time for us to stand and cheer for the doer, the achiever, the one who recognizes the challenge and does something about it."*  
- Vince Lombardi

The doer is something that many of us strive to be but so few become successful at being. I bring to all of you great news: The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program is going state-wide in 2008.

During the summer of 2007, The Mockingbird Society took a trip to California and visited the **Stuart Foundation**. We went down in hopes of possibly receiving a grant to expand our youth programs, but, at that time, it was only a dream. While down there, we visited **California Youth Connection** which is California's state-wide youth advocacy group. What was unique about it was they had established chapters state-wide and each chapter picked an issue or something they felt should be changed in their county. I think it was a great idea. We also had an opportunity to visit **Youth Offering Unique and Tangible Help (YOUTH)**. YOUTH consisted of youth being paid to give training to social workers on how to step up in certain situations that may arise in their profession. It was a wonderful experience.

Now, looking back and coming into March of 2008, we are beginning to see our dream of expanding coming to life. We ended up getting the grant from the Stuart Foundation as well as additional funding from the **Casey Family Programs of Washington**. We are of-

## The Mockingbird Network by SAMUEL MARTIN

ficially establishing what is being called **The Mockingbird Network**, which will hopefully consist of 9-15 chapters state-wide, as well as a State Advisory Council consisting of one youth from each chapter serving as a representative. That youth will bring the issue most prevalent to their chapter and push it to get addressed in the legislature and, hopefully, adopted, which is, in essence, where we want to go with our **ASK-Y** program. Each chapter will be youth driven and adult supported, as well as existing in all six regions of the state. Executive Director **Jim Theofelis** summed it up as, "The Network is about leadership development and civic engagement for youth [in foster care] and alumni."

This program has impacted me substantially coming up on my second year with The Mockingbird Society. I was here as we took off the ground. It has been one of the best plane rides of my life. I have had a chance to be a young leader and affect change in many ways. Now, to be able to say that we are going state-wide is an honor. I have had the opportunity to emcee two Youth Advocacy Days. We are getting our youth designed Life Advocacy 101 training off the ground and the Speakers Panel is booming. The Mockingbird Society is going to be hitting its non-profit Golden Age soon. I don't want to speak too soon but, the way things are looking, everything is going to be all right.

I would like to answer a few questions many of you may have, like how the chapters will be established, what the time table is, and

how the program will be implemented. First of all, a few of the chapters are already established; there are nine chapters state-wide that were created at the 2007 Foster Youth and Alumni Summit. It is a matter of getting these chapters more structured and giving them the proper resources to function properly and efficiently. The time table is a little uncertain but we hope to have everything up and running by the end of October, in time for the 2008 Foster Youth and Alumni Summit.

Lastly, The Mockingbird Society is going to hire community staff members to support the entire process for each chapter. These people aren't going to run the show, their job will be to support the chapters. For these positions, we hope to get alumni of foster care to really help this come alive. The positions will also be hired from each geographical area. That way, it is convenient for everybody and youth can find this person when they need them.

This is all coming to life and is amazing to see that people at The Mockingbird Society and in this world really care about doing things like this. I really and honestly love being a part of this program. What I really like about The Mockingbird Network is that it gives youth state-wide an opportunity to get support and consistency. Too often, we go to workshops or conferences for two or three days and end up leaving the relationships we have had. I also like the fact that youth are going to have a lot more voice. This is a wonderful opportunity for many people. It will be great to see what happens.



**Letter From the Editor** BY JIM THEOFELIS

This month's issue of the *Mockingbird Times* is a great metaphor for all that is going on in and around The Mockingbird Society. We are in the final weeks of the 2008 legislative session and recently conducted our annual Youth Advocacy Day. What a great day for all involved! Once again the youth were amazing in so many ways. A special "thank-you" to the all the youth and alumni that participated, the legislators who took time from their busy schedules to meet with our group, the Planning Committee who has been working on this for months and, of course, all of the foster parents, professionals and private citizens who joined us for a truly inspiring day.

Also, in this issue is the announcement that The Mockingbird Society has received funding to expand our youth engagement program state-wide and we are thrilled to announce that Tiffany Washington has been hired for the Director position of our current Youth LEAD program which includes the expansion project which we are calling The Mockingbird Network. Addi-

tionally, we are in the middle of a hiring process for a Development Director which is a new position for us. And, if that is not enough, we are expanding our office space by 1,200 square feet. Gratefully, we will remain in the 2100 Building, although we will have offices on both the second and third floors.

Additionally, Dr. Wanda and Marie have been working across the state and beyond helping organizations develop their plans to replicate the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM). We remain committed to our belief that the MFM is a practical, viable, service delivery model that will keep kids safe, reduce multiple placements, ensure siblings can remain together or in close proximity and serve as a retention and recruitment tool for caregivers.

On top of all this we are conducting the work necessary to prepare for our annual luncheon in October. What better way to welcome in the magical season of Spring!

 Jim Theofelis  
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

**Living Inside Your Head** BY RYAN CASTELLANO

At a weird time in my life, I ran into this dude who was a real character. When I met him, he introduced himself as Ryan. He was a cool, calm, normal, guy and, at the same time, very outspoken. He loved to be in the spotlight if not the spotlight itself. We would talk and laugh. He was a huge fan of music and loved every genre, even country and classical so he got along with almost everyone.

When we hung out, he would take me to places I always knew about but never appreciated the way he did. He had an eye for finding the beautiful pieces in something or someone that others thought was ugly. He loved to take pictures of the sky, the sunset and sunrise, and had a weird love for the water. I honestly thought he was weird myself.

But even weirder than that, I started noticing there were like two to three days a week he would disappear. The more I noticed this happening, I started realizing he was around, but just with other people and being a totally different person. He would act like he never saw me or knew who I was until the next day when he would not even acknowledge the others he knew.

I didn't bother asking him about it at first until one day I finally did. He said to me "Oh yeah, those guys. That's Peter Rico, Kory and Twist." Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean?" He said, "Those are all the people living inside of me, you know alter egos, split personalities."

He explained to me that it all started with Ryan. Ryan was left alone and felt abandoned a lot when he was younger. He was raised by a woman who also left him alone a lot and was often left heartbroken by girlfriends who played with his feelings; that's where Peter Rico came from. He made up that person in himself to be a ladies man or a Mac of all thangs and used

a lot of what his godfather (a former pimp) taught him. Peter Rico would always be talking to multiple females so that way he had many girlfriends around doing a lot for him and he would never feel alone again.

He said Kory came about because, when Ryan was younger, he didn't like who he was or the color of his skin. All of his brothers were white and he was dark and thought his dad hated him for it. He would notice most of the white kids he went to school with had a better life then he did and had two parents to pick them up after school and come to all the school events. So, he made up Kory, a guy to live inside of him that could lie and be anyone or anything he wanted to be, around anybody he felt uncomfortable in front of.

Twist was just a name given by his b-dogs. He said, "Twist is still Ryan but that's the part of Ryan that always wanted to feel like he was a part of something, feel power and have a family behind him in whatever he did. A family of thugs, blood-brothers." He said, "Twist only comes out every once in a while, when the dogs call him out to play," and gave me a weird smile. I told him, "That's really crazy," and asked him why he came up with the idea to be all these people. To this day, he has never really answered me and every time I ask him he says, "Learn to live inside your head and nobody or anything will ever be able to keep you down."

**Interesting in Volunteering With Us?**

Please join us on Thursday, April 3rd for our Volunteer Orientation. Learn about upcoming opportunities and meet The Mockingbird Society Board of Directors and staff.

Our success depends on individuals like you that so generously give your time!

**Date:** Thursday, April 3, 2008  
**Time:** 4:30-6:00 PM  
**Location:** 2100 24th Ave. S, Community Room A, Seattle, WA 98144

Please RSVP to Darcie Gray, darcie@mockingbirdsociety.org, or (206) 323-KIDS (5437).

**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 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, 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!**

ANONYMOUS; JULIE BELL; ANNETTE BLAYNEY; PATSY AND MICHAEL BONINCONTRI; CELESTE Y. CAREY, MSW; KAREN COWGILL; MICHAEL DAVIDSON; TAFUTA FUNDISHA-BEY, POSITIVE ENERGY; CONSTANCE GOLD; KRISTA GOODMAN; MARGARET-ANN AND MARK LEROY; PATRICIA McDONALD; NORTHWEST CHILDREN'S FUND; SUZANNE SHAWGER; CYNTHIA STROUM; MERYL THULEAN; SUSAN WILLIS, M.D.

**Become a Member of The Mockingbird Society**

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.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITYSTATEZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to **The Mockingbird Society** in the amount of (please note amount on appropriate line):

\$1,000 +	Protector	\$
\$500 - \$900	Champion	\$
\$250 - \$500	Advocate	\$
\$50 - \$250	Supporter	\$
\$25	Contributor	\$

- My employer will match my gift; enclosed is my matching gift form.
- I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.
- Please do not include my name on published donor lists.

Please mail this completed form and your check to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org).

**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 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 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and as 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*.

**MEET OUR STAFF**

**Executive Director**  
Jim Theofelis

**Operations Manager**  
Ros Ghan

**Director of Mockingbird Family Programs**  
Dr. Wanda Hackett

**Youth LEAD Director**  
Tiffany Washington

**Executive Assistant**  
Lauren Frederick

**Public Relations/Fund Development**  
Darcie Gray

**Youth LEAD Coordinator**  
Najja Morris

**Mockingbird Family Model Coordinator**  
Marie Goines

**Administrative Assistant**  
Juan Ramirez

**Senior Youth Representative**  
Samuel Martin

**Youth Representatives**  
Leona Bill,  
Jessica Garcia,  
Kenneth Larson-Rettinger,  
Rhonda Smith

**Contributing Writers**  
T. S. Berry, Emma Cummings,  
John Hemmingway

**Volunteers**  
Claire Ghan, Chrissie Jackson,  
Jami Smith

**Layout**  
Kelly Hawkins

## Welcome, Tiffany Washington, New Youth LEAD Director MOCKINGBIRD TIMES STAFF

The Mockingbird Society is pleased to announce that, after an extensive search, Tiffany Washington, M.S., has accepted the position of Youth LEAD Director. This position will provide supervision and guidance to The Mockingbird Society's award winning programs, including the *Mockingbird Times*, the Youth Speaker's Panel and our youth-driven advocacy coalition Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y).

Additionally, Ms. Washington will provide the leadership and direction for the development of our newest program, The Mockingbird Network. A network of local youth-driven chapters in communities across the state, The Mockingbird Network will provide leadership development and civic engagement opportunities to youth in foster care while ensuring their voices are heard in the reform of public policy and practice. Receiving support and mentoring from The Mockingbird Society staff, local chapters will drive a State Advisory Council comprised of youth, alumni and allies.

Tiffany Washington has worked as an advocate for children and families for more than a decade. Most recently with the Casey Family Programs, Ms. Washington was responsible for supporting their strategic consulting work in local and state jurisdictions by engaging alumni, foster

parents, birth parents, and relative caregivers as leaders whose participation and expertise was critical to the improvement of foster care policy and practice.

Ms. Washington is a strong and active advocate ensuring that youth in foster care and other macro-systems (mental health, juvenile justice, and education) receive the support necessary to be successful, self-sufficient adults. As an alumna of foster care, Ms. Washington comes with a unique insight and expertise into the needs of children as well as system reforms and improvements. Ms. Washington has earned a Master's of Science in Human Services from Capella University.

**MBT:** Why did you choose The Mockingbird Society (MBS) as the place you wanted to continue your work with and on behalf of youth in foster care?

**TW:** I chose MBS because of its dedication to elevating the voice of youth in care. I believe that doing this is a critical piece of systems change and, when done authentically, can result in great change. MBS has demonstrated its commitment to constituent involvement in various ways such as Youth Advocacy Day, the *Mockingbird Times*, etc. I also chose MBS because it is committed to collaboration and community engagement. The Mockingbird Family Model is one way

in which the organization shows its commitment to involving the community in solving the problem rather than having the "professionals" do so. MBS demonstrates the beauty of what can happen when staff, constituents, and allies come together for systems change.

**MBT:** What are your goals for your first year as the Youth LEAD Director?

**TW:** My main goal for year one is to connect with the regional groups, hear from them, and work with them to derive a plan. I think that it is very important for folks to get to know one another and develop a bond and some common goals before stepping out to impact systems. With that said, I am excited to see the

groups connect with one another this year and think big about how they want to see the system changed for their brothers and sisters in care.

**MBT:** What most excites you about The Mockingbird Network?

**TW:** What excites me most is giving youth and alumni the opportunity to connect with one another and transform the system. Powerful things happen when youth and alumni get together, bond with one another, and discuss what things work well and what things need to be changed. Coming together gives them the confidence that they are not alone and the power to speak up with a collective voice and message.

## Photo Gallery: Youth Advocacy Day 2008



Senior Youth Representative Samuel Martin addresses Youth Advocacy Day attendees during the morning session.



Youth Advocacy Day marchers head towards the Washington State Capitol Building to advocate for foster and homeless youth.



Youth Advocacy Day participants pass out buttons supporting HB 3048 regarding adequate legal representation for youth in foster care.



The Mockingbird Society Executive Director Jim Theofelis explains to Youth Advocacy Day participants the details of HB 3048.



### Away at Job Corps BY JESSICA MARTIN

I came to Job Corps to accelerate progress in my life. I was tired of dead-end jobs and felt like I was going nowhere fast after becoming clean off drugs and getting off the streets of Seattle. I was working two jobs seven days a week and was burning myself out quickly. I filled out the pre-application for the Tongue Point Job Corps Center in Astoria, OR in May of 2007. After many months of filling out forms and waiting for the paperwork to go through, I arrived at the center on January 8th, 2008.

I have now been here for seven weeks, and boy, have they been hectic! When I arrived, I was a little nervous but not too much because I went to boarding schools in high school and thought that here would not be too different. In some ways I was right but in others things are very different. The first two weeks here was mostly spent doing paperwork and learning and understanding what is to be expected of me for the rest of my time here. I quickly made some close friends and many acquaintances as well. I got along wonderfully with my two roommates, and, when it was time to change rooms, we requested to still be roommates. We got lucky and did stay together. The three of us still hang out a lot even though our schedules are now different, which is really nice.

Before coming to Job Corps, I planned on going into business and finance as my vocational choices. Before week three, I changed my mind and was thinking more about the "hard trades" like welding or carpentry. I realized that I don't want to sit in front of a computer all day when I could be working with my mind and my hands simultaneously. My overall plan is to either open up my own BMX bike shop or create my own line of BMX bikes. During my third week, I visited three of the trades to test them out and see if I liked them. My first choice was welding, which I visited. I also visited cement/masonry and carpentry.

After my three trade visits, I absolutely loved welding the most. I was aware of my allergies to metal, but thought that it

would be okay because I would practically be covered head to toe in a cow (leather). My fifth week here, I did center support which every student does to give back to our campus. After my fifth week, I went straight into my vocation. I was lucky to get into my first choice because often students' first choices are full and they have to do something else until there is space. I was also lucky to go straight into my job from Career Prep (the first four weeks) because I had TABE'd out of academics, meaning that I got high enough scores on both the reading and math TABE tests.

So I went straight into welding. I was excited to become good enough to learn how to weld BMX bikes. Of course, however, I had to start with the most basic stuff. All was going well at first. But then my allergies to metal started to show drastically. I was coughing up black chunks of metal that I was inhaling. I also quickly learned that I don't have the patience to be a welder. I got frustrated with welding line after line after line after line. Each line I welded got worse and worse looking. It became apparent that welding was not for me.

Bummed, I came back to third week for more trade visits to find something else that I wanted to do. So far, I have visited the Facilities Maintenance and Plastering trades. I really enjoyed Facilities Maintenance, which is now my first choice trade. It is full, though, so I will visit Painting and decide what to go into until I am able to get into Facilities Maintenance.

My plan, from here on out, is to get into Facilities Maintenance and also get my certifications that go with the hard trades. I just got my flagger certification last week, so now I have to get my forklift certification. In order to do that, though, I will first get my driver's license which I am currently working on.

Once I have completed my vocation in Facilities Maintenance, I plan on staying here at Job Corps to do the college program. I want to get a business degree and Job Corps will help me start that by letting me live on campus while I go to Clatsop Community College.

### 2008 Spirit of Youth Award

The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (GJJAC) is seeking nominations for the second Annual "Spirit of Youth" award. The intent of the award is to recognize and celebrate a young adult who has made great strides following involvement with the juvenile justice system; has overcome personal obstacles; and is today making significant contributions to society. A \$1,000 scholarship to attend a Washington State College or University is available to the award winner. The award also provides the GJJAC and the public with an important opportunity to learn from a young person's direct experience about the hard work and dedication it takes to build a better life, and how juvenile justice professionals and systems can most effectively be of help.

#### Criteria

The award recipient must be:

- Under the age of 24,
- A person who was adjudicated delinquent and involved in the Washington State juvenile justice system,
- Must have completed parole and/or probation conditions
- Currently involved, directly or indirectly, in bettering the lives of youth, and
- Has no outstanding court fines or restitution owed to victim(s) OR is demonstrating consistent payments of restitution in accordance with court order.

#### Nomination and selection process

The members of the GJJAC will promote the Spirit of Youth Award by distributing nomination forms to state and community organizations and media, and will be posted on the GJJAC Web site at [www.dshs.wa.gov/ojj](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ojj). The GJJAC will maintain strict confidentiality when handling award nomination forms.

#### Following is the 2008 nomination and selection process time line

- Nomination process announced and distributed ..... January 2008
- Nominations due to GJJAC ..... April 15, 2008
- GJJAC selects award recipient ..... May
- Award presented by Governor Gregoire ..... Summer

The Washington State award recipient's name and nominations will be submitted to the National Coalition for Juvenile Justice "Spirit of Youth Award."

**Beautiful Crane**

T. S. BERRY

See all the pain he hides  
Keep it on the inside  
He doesn't want to let it out  
So many things to count  
You can see the pain in his eyes  
Especially the night when he cries  
Not knowing what to do  
Not telling me or you  
He finally sees a light  
Coming out of this darkest night  
He finally has a way out  
Of this unrelenting doubt  
The skies are becoming clear  
As to the light he draws near  
He sees the world in a whole new way  
Which is something new he can say  
Everything is singing a happier song  
He starts to sing along  
He used to tread on the ground full of pain  
Now he soars through the air as a beautiful crane

**Why Why Why**

JOHN HEMMINGWAY

Why why why.  
Why must I do what I do  
why must I go out and steal and lie,  
why must I lose the one I love most to my own  
stupidity.  
I just want to know why!!!  
Why am I stuck in jail with nothing to look  
forward to except for a court date and a phone  
call.....  
Why! Why! Why!

**Heartbreak**

T. S. BERRY

When I saw you  
And you saw me  
I thought we would be  
Together for eternity  
I didn't think in a  
moment's delay  
Everything would turn  
this way  
Every time I think of you  
My heart and love starts  
to ache  
So from now and forever  
You will always be  
A heartbreak

**There is Love**

EMMA M CUMMINGS

There is love  
For those who seek  
Yet are they patient enough  
To wait for a receipt?  
True love shall never be bought  
But given  
A gift that can be denied  
Yet once taken  
Never really returned  
For to love truly  
To love all  
There can never be an end  
For true love is never so small.

**Letter to My Uncle**

DOMINIC

Dear Duwayne,

I just thought you should know what I'm doing now.  
I am a good, strong, lovable person  
Who spends a lot of time thinking about you.

I just thought you should know how I'm feeling.  
I am mad because you should have watched what you were doing.  
I am angry because you are not there.

I just thought you should know what I've been through.  
Last Easter – that was the last time I got to see you.  
Since then I have grown so much.  
I am more mature, and I care more about other people.

I just thought you should know what I wish for the future.  
I hope that I will see you when I die,  
And I wish I could see your spirit while I live.  
I want to go to the same college you went to  
And become a veterinarian

I just thought you should know what I don't miss about you.  
I am glad that you won't do drugs anymore.  
I just thought you should know what I miss about you.  
I miss the way we used to play together.  
On Easter, we went to the park,  
Wrote on the ground with chalk,  
And you gave us Easter baskets.

If there was one thing I could ask you,  
It would be, "Why didn't you come visit me?"

I am real sad that you passed away,  
But I will always love you.

**The Hero?**

JOHN HEMMINGWAY

What is a hero to you?  
Someone who is wise?  
Someone who is fast?  
Or someone who is strong?  
No of course not. A hero to you  
Is the one who helped you the most  
And saved you from a fate worse than death.

**Get Published ~ Get Paid!**

We pay for articles, poetry, artwork and  
photography from youth 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  
[news@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:news@mockingbirdsociety.org).

*Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.*

~ Sir Winston Churchill

**Reconnecting With Family After Foster Care** BY RHONDA SMITH

Basically, my whole life I always used to wonder what my birth family was like. I wondered if I looked like them, if they knew I existed or if they were even thinking about me like I was thinking about them. I wondered if I had any siblings, if they were younger or older. I wondered if they were with my mom and dad or if they got taken and were adopted somewhere. I always wished they would just show up one day and come and rescue me from the hurt and pain I was going through, but nothing like that ever happened.

When I was about 16 years old, I started getting on my social worker about finding my biological family. It took awhile but it happened. When I first met my mom it

was at a Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) office with my oldest sister. My mom was not supposed to be there but she came because I planned it out like that. Seeing my mom and my sister in the lobby was just amazing, I wanted so bad to go with them but I could not. I did not know my mom but just from how she looked and stuck up for me, I just knew she was a great mom. I knew she loved me and she never wanted to lose me.

As time went on, that perception of my mom was proved wrong. I would call her every day because she is my mom and I was just so happy to have her in my life. What was happening was she would pick up the phone and say to call her back in a couple hours. So I would hang up and call back later. Each time my sister would

tell me that my mom was asleep and to call back another time.

This went on for months. I was so depressed; I felt like my mom did not want anything to do with me and it hurt my heart. I used to blame myself for her not wanting to talk with me. I thought that maybe me being in her life was just too much to handle. Maybe she did not love me, maybe all those things I heard about her and drugs were true. I just did not know what to do or how to handle what was going on. I could not talk to anybody about it because I was not supposed to have any contact with my mom. So I started acting out by fighting because I could not hold back the pain I was feeling.

What I want people to know is that the grass is not always greener on the other side. I know this from experience. I used to think that when I met my mom she would be perfect and all the bad things I'd heard about her were not true or if they were true, she'd changed. Really, I gave up all the good things I had to find out my mom is nothing like I expected her to be. I gave away stable placement, schooling, and my friends to be with someone who I thought would love me and be grateful to have me with her because the first 18 years of my life I didn't get to spend with her for whatever reason.

Some things never change and it hurts, but that's life. I have two little sisters we were adopted. They're still with my adopted parents in Louisiana. They're almost to the age were they can find their birth parents. I tell them all the time, "Just wait." Not because I don't want them to know, I just don't want them to get hurt like I was. I hear from them all the time that they

can't wait to come back to Washington so they can be with their real parents. I wish they would wait just a little longer. We all got adopted because our parents were into drugs. If our parents wouldn't stop doing drugs for their own flesh and blood then they won't do it for themselves, nothing or anything. I wish I had waited until I had a support system to help me go through it. I went into it too fast. It takes time to get to know someone and trust someone and even love them, even when they are your parents. Now I just keep my distance from my mom because of the things that have happened. I love my mom and always will but I've just learned to do it from a distance.

I'm going through this process again with my dad. I have been taking my time getting to know him. I am not going to rush into a relationship and get hurt again. I'm more mature and able to deal with whatever might happen in the future. Growing up in foster care, I had a lot of trust issues. It was hard for me to trust people but when I got in touch with my family, I trusted them with my life. That was a big mistake, though. I learned that family will stab you in the back faster than your friends will; it's just life. It is hard but it happens.

When kids are taken away from their parents there is always a reason why. I am pretty sure that the state does not just take a family and make up lies just to get a kid. I know they don't like going in and separating families. Just remember, if you are not with your family there is a reason why: it was unsafe at some point and time. Maybe things got better over the years but in my situation, they got worse. Just remember things happen for a reason.

**Seeking Innovative, Creative, and Passionate Director of Development!**

The Mockingbird Society is seeking a high-energy, seasoned development professional with a proven track record and interest in joining a successful but young organization. This position requires an innovative vision for program development, a passion for dynamic stewardship, and a commitment to giving voice to our community's most marginalized children, youth, and families. The Development Director has a key role in creating a full Development Program that supports and advances The Mockingbird Society mission. The successful candidate will provide the leadership and direction toward strengthening existing and developing new funding streams, stewarding individual giving and major gifts, developing a Strategic Development Plan, leading Special Events, and supervising and leading the staff and volunteers within the Development Program.

This is a full time position with salary DOE and benefits included. The position is open until filled. The Mockingbird Society is an Equal Opportunity Employer. People of color and alumni of foster care encouraged to apply. Resume and cover letter to [information@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:information@mockingbirdsociety.org). Full job description available at [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org).

No phone calls or email please.