**Stop and Think before Running Away**

**ANTHONY GUESS**

IS IT REALLY SMART TO CHOOSE TO RUN AWAY or just deal with what seems to be nothing but painful nights? As a teenager it sometimes feels unbearable to live at home with people telling you what to do, but the alternatives are a lot worse.

I ran away at the age of twelve. Now that I’m seventeen years old, I wish I had never made that choice. I had to accept it and try the best that I could so that it wouldn’t get the best of me. I was placed in three group homes before being placed in a foster home. My experience in group homes was not all sugar and spice; as a matter of fact it was the total opposite. The staff switch shifts, so you have different people telling you what to do, instead of just your mom and dad. Teenagers have to attend drug and alcohol classes and/or participate in other types of counseling session, and also have to deal with case workers who seem to only care about getting their job done. They don’t really pay attention to what you would like or want unless it makes their job easier.

The thing I hated the most was the court appearances. There was a lot of time wasted: the attorneys might have the teenagers come in at nine o’clock in the morning, but they wouldn’t be seen or talked to until ten thirty, sometimes even later than that.

**Before Running Away...**

STOP
- Take a breather.
- Ask yourself if running away is something you want to do.
- Try to make it work (if you’re being abused, tell an adult immediately).
- See if your school counselor can help.

THINK
- Educate yourself about the foster care system and homeless system.
- Talk to some one who has been in the system.
- See if you can visit a couple of homes.
- Think about what you have (freedom, clothes, money friends, etc.).
- Is there a family member who can care for you?

ACT
- Make a decision.
- Call the Runaway Switchboard (before running away).
- Deal with your choice.

Basically, my life changed drastically upon entering the system. I was no longer a teenager—it felt like I was a prisoner. There are things that teens no longer can do once entering the system. For instance, I couldn’t use the phone whenever I wanted to. If I wanted to go somewhere; like to the movies, mall, or even to my friend’s house I needed to have what they called a pass. A pass is only good for a couple of hours depending on what your case worker says.

I strongly suggest for teens who are feeling so down and depressed at home that they want to leave, talk to someone before doing so. For example, talk to your school counselor or someone you know who’s been in the system. Or if you don’t want people to know that’s how you feel call the Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-621-4000. They are open 24 hours a day and are free and confidential. But please, if you’re being abused let someone know immediately. No child should have to put up with physical, sexual or verbal/mental abuse. Teens, you only have one life and to me the part that means the most is the part that the foster care system takes away: your teenage years.

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Letter From the Editor

I am both pleased and proud to present this special edition of The Mockingbird Times; a cause for celebration for a number of reasons. The Mockingbird Times is three years old and this is the first time that we have produced two issues in the same month. We are on our way to implementing part of our strategic plan regarding the Mockingbird Times, hoping to regularly produce two issues a month.

This edition is sponsored by the Marguerite Casey Foundation, and we are very appreciative for their support. Another reason this edition is cause for celebration has to do with the remarkable young people who produced it. Several months ago, Shannon and I visited Cleveland High School to present the Mockingbird Times and see if any students currently involved in foster/kinship care had interest in working with us. We had a brief meeting with a small handful of students and left some copies of past issues with our contact information for them to review. The very next day all of the students who had attended the meeting as well as a young woman from Rainer Beach High School were at our office ready to start work!

The motivation, energy and thoughtfulness these young people have displayed in working on this project has been exceptional. In fact, I am amazed at the similarity between the articles and concerns expressed by these young reporters and the issues and concerns discussed in the child welfare field by the “experts”. I want to express my appreciation to Anthony Guess, Jamica Henderson, Rico Evans, Ashley Grant and Princess Hollins for their great work in producing this issue of the Mockingbird Times. Additionally, I want to thank Mary Ann Herrick, Bob Partlow, Darrell Dawgs and Kikora Dorsey for their contributions to this issue and for the work they do every day on behalf of kids. Finally, a very special thank you to Shannon Barello, who each month seems to produce a newspaper even stronger than the month before.

Thanks for supporting the Mockingbird Times!

Sincerely,

Princess Hollins
Satellite Reporter

Meet Our Staff

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Seattle Post Intelligence, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Bob Partlow, Darrell Dawgs, Kikora Dorsey, Cleveland High School Principal Rick Harwood.

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A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox:

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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents in foster care. 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 Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 26,000 copies being distributed across Washington and the U.S.A. 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. All donations to The Mockingbird Society are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society.

Continued from front page: anything. The kids who are scared have it the worst of them all. They probably think about what the consequence will be if they tell about their abuse? What will the parents say or worse–what will they do?

According to an article in the Seattle Times in 2003, there was a case in Washington in 1990 where three kids were left in a foster home for four months after the abuse was reported. The report was made in August and the kids were not removed until October, and reportedly only because the foster parent, Pauline Hortman, did not pass her alcohol assessment. The kids did not say anything about the abuse until they were told they were not going back to her home.

One situation leading to their removal from Hortman’s home happened allegedly when one of the boys said that he was not going to eat dinner. Hortman set his T-shirt on fire. His brother then said something to her and she punched him so hard he passed out at the dinner table. The little boy who had his T-shirt set on fire was only five at the time. When Hortman and the boy went to the doctor for the burns the doctor made a report but nothing happened. The kids were also forced to have oral sex with someone in the home.

After the kids were removed there were reports that they were acting up in their new placements. The girl was sent to 30 different homes, also were then placed in a psychiatric ward. Despite all of this Hortman still wanted the kids to come back to the home, denying that any abuse happened in her home. Hortman was never convicted of the abuse.

After hearing this story, do those kids you saw playing in the street seem a little different? Do you wonder about what going to happen to them when they go home? Everyone should feel that way about kids and not just expect that their life is perfect.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
WA State: 1-800-562-5624
Nationwide: 1-866-endharm (1-866-363-4276)
Check out web for info about reporting at www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca
For a crime, physical or sexual abuse or life-threatening situation, call 911

One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one can be born with potential. Without courage we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.

-Maya Angelou

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org
The Importance of Siblings Staying Together

ASHLEY GRANT

CHILDREN LOVE TO KICK BACK AND BE COMFORTABLE in the homes they reside in with their families. Home being the root word of the sentence. The meaning of the word itself has a lot of definitions including: a residence, a household, a place of origin, a comfortable and relaxed environment. All these definitions mean something more than just the physical place. Home ties a person on an emotional and mental level. It is who a person is and where they came from.

That's why it's so vital for children who are being pulled out their usual environment to stay with their siblings. In my opinion, siblings should always be placed in the same home unless there are viable reasons why they should not be kept together, like abuse. Siblings who have been brought up in the same household should continue to be together because that is what each child has adapted to.

Sibling relationships can be the most lasting relationships there are— their bonds are usually stronger than oak. "When a child has not grown up with their other siblings, it feels as if a wonder has left their heart," stated, "Sally* a 17-year-old girl (currently living in a kinship care situation).

In my experience, siblings who are separated can also have emotional and behavioral problems because of the separation. Some may lose even the desire to get to know their other family as a result.

LEAVING FAMILY/LOVED ONES CAN BE A VERY DIFFICULT TIME in a child's life, regardless of the circumstance. Although the government and community have provided kinship and foster care to reduce the stress, and provide a safe and productive temporary home for the child, it still can be mind-boggling for the family and child: the mental distractions, emotional upsets and long stressful entry process into the system.

We usually don't pay much attention to things that aren't directly affecting our lives, but it's time to work as a community have provided kinship and foster care to reduce stress and provide a safe and productive temporary home for the child, still it can be mind-boggling for the family and child: the mental distractions, emotional upsets and long stressful entry process into the system.

For those who don't know what kinship care is, it is similar to traditional foster care (licensed by the state to adopt or give temporary care to a non-relative), except it is care provided by a licensed relative, who still receives all the same benefits for the child as a foster care child, and provide for their family member.

To find out more about kinship care, I interviewed Kikora Dorsey, Senior Manager at Casey Family Programs. According to their website, Casey Family Programs is the first social service agency in the country dedicated to offering planned long-term foster care (www.casey.com). Dorsey is a wonderful enlightening woman who has educated many people, myself included about the foster care system. She speaks about the positive progress and improvement needed in the system. She also has personal experience as a foster parent.

Q. What is your understanding of kinship and foster care?
R. How I would distinguish between the two is that foster care is really about children who can't live at home with their parents or relative, who need to go into what's called "Stranger Care". In Stranger Care children are placed with licensed parents, who they don't know. Within foster care there's something call "Licensed Relative Care", which is offered as kinship care.

Kinship care involves those children who can't live at home with family, who have or haven't been in contact with the welfare system, which is being cared for by a relative. A relative is not limited to an aunt or uncle, first cousin or grandma, its can be an individual who is identified by the family or child to be significant. It could be a friend of the family, relative through marriage, church member or community member.

Q. In your opinion what is better for children, foster or kinship care?
R. I think the first step should be to place children with kin, although it may require a lot of intense work to search for relatives that may be able to provide for the child. When working with the system families don't always speak out about other alternate relatives, and it should always be an option to find blood or non-blood relatives, so the child can feel emotionally secure.

Q. What is something that the system lacks? How can it improve?
R. The system lacks the ability to [promote effective systemic change, and find and keep good people who have a passion for their work. What we need is to have continuity across the system, with the expectation of the same energy and devotion, regardless of your role in the system.

We can improve by making policies that can apply to everyone and work with the community, which could help reduce caseloads, thereby giving social workers more time so they can do their job. There needs to be a financial investment in Social Workers to be trained and knowledgeable about their work. We also need to recruit youth and parents who are/ have been consumers and have personal knowledge about the system that could help improve.

For the full interview with Kikora Dorsey, see www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Placing Kids with Kin

PRINCESS HOLLINS

Poetry Corner

Who is the Boy Inside

Anthony Guess

Can someone tell me with no lies
Who is the boy inside
Is he shy does he cry
Who is the boy inside
Is he a ball of sunshine
Who is the boy inside
Is he scared and unsure why
Who is the boy inside
Is he happy all the time
Who is the boy inside
Does he wonder or just say never mind
Who is the boy inside
Is he held by greed or is his mind, heart and spirit free

Why don't I know when the boy inside is me

The poem means a lot to me, because at the time of my life I was going through a lot, my brother had just died and I wasn't doing so well in school. I was unsure who I was, or was going to be in life.

I felt as if my life was going nowhere. Slowly after reading the poem to myself over and over again, I finally found the boy inside and what he was like.

I realized that a lot of people can benefit from this poem and that as soon as we understand the boy that is inside of us, we can better understand the man or women we grow into. Even though age tells whether you're a child or adult, the child that we once where never leaves he or she has just been under the worlds greatest dream. When we grow up we forget the little things that meant so much to us, and once adulthood comes we tend not to understand why situations appear or why we handle certain circumstance differently than others.

Don't hide or let go who you once were as a child, just follow him/her so that so you will always know.

Famous People Who Were Foster Kids

Duante Culpepper, NFL Quarterback
Tommy Davidson, Comedian and Actor
John Lennon, musician
Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza
Alonzo Mourning, NBA Superstar
Eddie Murphy, Actor and Comedian
Dave Pelzer, Author
Babe Ruth, Baseball Legend
Ice T, Rap Musician, Author and Director
Victoria Rowell, Soap Opera Actress
Dr Ruth Westheimer, Psychologist and Author
Positive Power: Warning Signs Of Suicidal Youth

DOES YOUR LIFE FEEL REHEARSED--LIKE EVERYTHING YOU DO IS THE SAME? You wake up every morning at the same time and prepare yourself in the same way. You never have time to eat breakfast and you have to ride the same smelly bus, with an old cranky bus driver who always has a nasty brown on his face; and you always arrive at school 15 minutes late. To top it off, you sit next to the most popular girl in your school, 4.0 student, and class president; who has a smile that can light up the world. You despise her for her flawless manner. She always copies your homework and only talks to you when she needs something.

Well, allow me to spice up your life. You wake up in the morning 10 minutes late, and you prepare yourself little differently. Today you ride a different bus, with a pretty lady who smiles and greets you properly. You get to school five minutes earlier than usual and actually have the time to eat the breakfast that you always miss. When your first period starts, the class feels awkward. Somethings wrong! Your teacher seems disturbed and the girl who sits next to you is not there.

Your stomach drops as the teacher approaches the front of the classroom; announcing the girl who sat next to you committed suicide the night before. You instantly feel sad and confused. Wondering why and how, and if you had any influence on her suicide. It’s just too weird, you feel sad and confused. Wondering why and how, and if you had any influence on her suicide. It’s just too weird, you

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Bob: Yes, you get so much back from the kids coming your way. You can tell the improvement from when they first come and when they leave. [For example you see a change in their health, attitude, self confidence, respect for themselves and others.]

Jamica: How has this changed your life?

Bob: It has changed my life a lot. Being a foster parent has helped me personally. I have a better look at life and compassion for the kids’ life in the world. Being a foster parent has helped me a lot when I am recruiting the other families to join. I can look at a lot of the kids and say that I am happy because my wife and I have helped them make a change in their lives. Watching them grow is truly amazing.

If you have been encouraged by this article to become a Foster Parent, please contact Bob Partlow at 1-888-794-1794.

See Jamica’s second interview with Darrell Dawgs online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

To Become a Foster Parent:

• You have to be 21 or older.
• Have a home for a foster child.
• Pass health/safety inspection and fire safety.
• Attend Interactive Parent Training.
• Have a good income to meet family needs with out foster care payment.
• Pass Criminal history check and CPS Check.
• Gun Safety.
• Have a First 1st Aid/CPR Certification.
• Take an HIV/AIDS Awareness class, Renew Foster Care license every three years.
• Pass TB test for family 18 and older.

These sources came from www1.dshs.wa.gov.

REPORTS JUST IN

*Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project (MFFCP) program evaluation by the University of Washington is available at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

*HHS Federal Review of Washington State’s Child Welfare System is available as a link on www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Where will you be in Ten Years?

MARY ANNE HERRICK

When I was ten years old I was placed in foster care, and the last thing on my mind was going to college. Once things settled down, I eventually did decide that I needed to pursue a college education, but I still did not know whether I would be able to afford it. I did not have parents who could help pay for college and I knew it would be expensive. I also wondered if I was capable of being successful in college.

Fortunately, I was accepted into a good school, received enough scholarships to help pay for my education, was given much emotional support from my friends, family, and community, and eventually obtained both my bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work.

Now I feel like the luckiest person in the world, because thanks to my education, I have a wonderful job with the Washington Education Foundation, and get paid to do what I love. I get to support other independent students, who are in situations like I was, to continue their education through high school and college graduation. Today I work with 135 independent students who are receiving college scholarships through the Foundation, 67 of whom are former foster youth.

If you should decide to pursue a college education, the first step is to stay in school. Generally, the harder you work in high school, the better chance you will have of being admitted to the college you want to attend and receiving scholarships to help pay for tuition and other living expenses.

Remember that each college has certain admission requirements including particular classes you must take in high school. It’s a good idea to research the schools you are interested in a few years ahead of time.

If you too are questioning whether or not you can afford a college education, you should learn about the many scholarship opportunities for foster youth.

College funding sources for foster youth in Washington State include the Foster Youth Education Scholarship Aid, the Governor’s Scholarship for Foster Youth, the Washington State Education and Training Voucher, Treehouse’s Coaching to College Program, the Casey Family Scholars Program, and the National Foster Parent Association Scholarship Program (for scholarship descriptions and contact information see the March issue of the Mockingbird Times).

Every year hundreds, maybe even thousands of former foster youth attend college on these scholarships and grants. Who knows, you may be one of the next foster youth to go to college!