

# Mockingbird Times



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

May 2008

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume IX, Issue 5

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## May is National Foster Care Month

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The following is an excerpt from an interview with Misty Stenslie of Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA). FCAA brings together the community of alumni of the foster care system and their allies in order to support youth currently in foster care and enact change.

#### MB: How many youth are involved with FCAA?

MS: FCAA's membership is actually made up of adults—all of our members are people 18 years and older. We have members from every generation through 84 years old! We currently have 1200 members and we are growing at a rate of about 100 each month. [We] expect to get around 200 each month by fall. We have members in every single state in the US, and a handful of members from other countries. We have members of all different races and ethnicities, all different occupations and educational backgrounds, all different foster care experiences.

#### MB: What are the differences between Alumni Relations and Foster Care Alumni of America?

MS: Alumni Relations (now called Constituency Engagement) was an internal department at Casey Family Programs. The original idea of Casey's Alumni Relations program was that the department would work with those alumni who actually lived in foster care placements through Casey Family Programs. We found right away that when groups of us alumni had the chance to get together, we felt so connected to each other. I remember the first alumni convening where a 19 year old, Mookie, said, "I never knew anybody before who was an adult that lived in foster care. You make me have hope. You make it possible for me to look into the future to when I'm in my 40s and know that I can be like YOU!"

As a result, the group of alumni made the recommendation that we actually form our own organization, independent of any child welfare organization, where all of the priorities and all of the activities are alumni led. Casey generously agreed to support the founding of our independent organization.



A close friend of mine always told me that once you get to the top turn right around and lift someone else behind you right up. One of the definitions of support is, "A person or thing that gives aid or assistance."<sup>1</sup> It is about giving and assisting others who need it. That is the beauty and the magic of the non-profit sector. It is about exerting the muscle that lifts others up instead of pushing them down. It takes a special type of person to make it and then come back and help others. I just think it is amazing and I appreciate it.

This is the beauty of support groups and programs. The key to success is doing what you can to the best of your ability while getting help in the right places. Support groups are what have helped me get through middle school, high school, and, soon to be, college. Today, I am going to explain four of my own biggest ones and take the time to show appreciation to the programs that have done the most for me.

The first one I would like to talk about is

### Foster Care Alumni of America BY LEONA BILL

#### MB: When was FCAA started? Who is funding FCAA?

MS: FCAA was legally established in late 2005. Alumni and our allies (people who didn't live in foster care but who share our mission), as well as organizations like The Mockingbird Society, have officially joined together to build the national alumni community and to use our experiences to improve foster care. Our members are actually one of our funding streams now. Not only are people paying membership dues but we've also received donations from our members to cover dues for members who can't afford to pay. We've made the commitment that no one will ever be excluded from the alumni community because of inability to pay dues. Casey Family Programs continues to provide generous support to FCAA. We also have a number of grants.

#### MB: Who are the Alumni Leaders, and how can a youth become one?

MS: Our Alumni Leadership Institute was kicked off last year and continues to grow. We are bringing alumni together to build skills and knowledge about how to influence policy and practice in foster care. The best way for someone who wants to get involved in our Alumni Leadership Institute to be invited to these important opportunities would be to join FCAA and then take action. When we see someone who is very committed, who follows through with their commitments, and who represents themselves and the alumni community well, they are invited to be part of more opportunities—including our Alumni Leadership Institute trainings.

#### MB: Are any of the very first Alumni Leaders of FCAA still involved with or in FCAA?

MS: Many of the members of the national Board of Directors [and national] chapters are from that first group. Across the country, the original founders of the national alumni movement are working as social workers, are foster and adoptive parents, volunteer in their own communities, participate in our Alumni Leadership Institute and stay involved. We take seriously the idea that because we all share the same parents—the government—

we are brothers and sisters to each other. This isn't just about 'work'—it is also very much about family.

#### MB: What kind of projects is FCAA currently concentrated on and or have going on currently?

MS: All of [our] projects are connected to one or both parts of our mission of connecting the alumni community into a giant extended-family network and transforming foster care practice and policy through the collective voice of alumni. Activities we are working on right now on the connecting side include a major re-design of our website ([www.foster-carealumni.org](http://www.foster-carealumni.org)) and our overall presence on the Internet—making places for people who share the foster care experience to talk, to know each other, to provide support and encouragement for each other—to really stand in the places where most peoples' families stand. There are holiday dinners, summer 'family reunions,' recreational opportunities. [We also] have been focused on improving federal policy around the way child welfare is funded by the government. We want to make sure there is flexibility in the system so that families who could safely stay together get the support they need to do that.

Our transforming efforts have been focused in the last year on improving federal policy around the way child welfare is funded. We want to make sure there is flexibility in the system so that families who could safely stay together get the support they need to do that. We want flexibility so that there is funding available to help families who can safely be reunified receive the support they need. We want flexibility so that children who can safely live with relatives are able to. We want flexibility so that more young people will find forever families when they can't go back to their biological families. We want to make sure that all young people in and from foster care have all of the privileges that most people get from their families. Our transforming efforts have also included a great deal of training and education for social workers, policy makers, foster parents, and the general public about how they can make foster care better.

### Support Groups BY SAMUEL MARTIN

Treehouse whose Executive Director is **Janis Avery**. The people I have direct day-to-day contact with are **Amy Lange**, my tutor, and **Frank Nam**, my Coaching To College coach. Treehouse is a multi-resource program for foster youth. I began working with Treehouse as a sixth-grader in their tutoring program. As I got older, I was able to make use of many more resources. Treehouse is one of the biggest support providers of foster youth in the King County area and are beginning to expand statewide. I have had a ton of support from Treehouse, and every day I walk in I hear "Hey Sam, how are you?" It is nothing but love.

The next organization I want to mention is Community For Youth, a mentoring program that is designated for high school freshmen. The Executive Director is **Margy Bresslour** and the Rainier Beach Program Manager is **Sashya**

**Clark**, someone I consistently have daily interactions with. This program is present at three schools, all of which typically have lower test scores: Cleveland, Rainier Beach, and Chief Sealth High School. In this program, called Steps Ahead, you are matched with a mentor your freshman year, which is committed to follow you throughout your first year of high school. Your sophomore through senior years you participate in a program called Steps Beyond, which is where you really get the community feeling. In this program, you are put in what is called a family group which consists of about four mentors and eight students on average. After Steps Beyond is a program called Steps Up, which is a leadership opportunity for selected Steps Beyond students to be junior mentors to the Steps Ahead students. This program

"There are two ways to exert one's strength: one is pushing down, the other is pulling up."

~Booker T. Washington

SUPPORT, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



**Letter From the Editor** BY JIM THEOFELIS

May is National Foster Care month so I would like to begin by thanking all of the foster parents, as well as kinship caregivers, for your amazing work, service, and love that you give to children in your care each and every day. I frequently have the opportunity to meet and talk with foster parents, as well as the grandparents and other relatives caring for their children, and I am continually inspired by their dedication and commitment. In particular, I want to say a very special "thank you" to the families involved with the Mockingbird Family Model for all of their tireless ongoing efforts.

May is also a special month for The Mockingbird Society in that we begin the month with our new employees and teammates. The Mockingbird Society began in 2008 with eight full time employees and as of May 1 we have thirteen full time employees! The new employees are mostly administrative professionals which will result in our program staff having the support and resources to strengthen our capacity and expand our reach.

We are very excited about the growth and expansion of both the Mockingbird Family Model and our Youth LEAD program. The Mockingbird Family Model is being replicated in Washington and other states and is being spotlighted nationally

as one of five promising respite care practices. This recognition by the National Foster Parent Association in partnership with the North American Council on Adoptable Children and AdoptUsKids will be in a Respite Care Manual scheduled for publication in Summer 2008. Additionally, Mockingbird staff will be in Louisville, Kentucky in May training staff from Maryhurst, a private child placement agency, which provides foster care and other services to their community.

Our Youth LEAD Program is also expanding and we are developing The Mockingbird Network which will be a state-wide network of interconnected, community Chapters that select youth delegates to participate in and lead the State Advisory Council. The local Chapters and the State Advisory Council will be youth-driven and will focus on leadership development, civic engagement, educational achievement and child welfare system reform and improvement.

Again, I want to send a very special "thank you" to all of the foster parents and kinship caregivers who give so much every day and a very special "welcome" to all of our new teammates at The Mockingbird Society.

 Jim Theofelis  
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



**Meet the Staff: Diamonique Walker**

My name is Diamonique Walker and I am fifteen years old. I reside in Seattle and I attend Cleveland High School. In my spare time, I basically like to hang out with my friends and family. We go to the movies, shop, or just chill at the house. I also like to write; it's one of my greatest passions. I have a book of poetry that I would like to get published one day.

I have never actually been in regular foster care but I have been on the verge. I have been in the system though. I'm currently in kinship care and it's a unique situation. I live with my seventeen-year-old sister, who is emancipated, and her 1 year old daughter (my niece). My sister is basically my everything. She will do anything for me and she means the world to me. I can't even explain what I would do without her at this point. I have respect for her because she does it all by herself. I know I can be a lot to handle, especially on top of her own daughter, but she does it and I love her.

One of the main issues to me of today's society is the teen school drop out rate. I know that it is increasing and I feel it is preventable. I notice that the senior count is dramatically less than that of freshman, which is really a shame. Kids are not feeling the need to go to school and are losing interest. There can be many different reasons but I feel this issue should have more attention brought to it.

One thing I would want to change about the foster care system is all the moving. I hate moving myself. All my life I have barely stayed in one house or apartment for more than a year. Moving can be

hard. Having to find new friends and start over again frequently is unhealthy. Stability is important in the lives of youth. It is even harder for them, I would assume, because not only are they being bounced around but they possibly also have to live with strangers that they don't know. I can't imagine doing that so I would definitely want to change that. Stability is very necessary to me.

I wanted to be a part of The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program because, firstly, like I mentioned before, I love to write. It is one of my greatest passions and I have never actually been published and I would like to be. When I found out that I could be helping change the community at the same time, I wanted to do it even more. I actually have a friend who is in foster care and, to me, helping a friend and many more at the same time is definitely something I want to be a part of.



**Thank You and Good-bye** BY JESSICA GARCIA

I am resigning from The Mockingbird Society (MBS) because I will be moving to California to start a new life. Here in Washington State, I have had too many bad memories and I have to move to another place to be more successful. I feel I will have less stress there and therefore can do better because I will be in a new environment. I have been glad to work for the MBS for so many years and to have had the opportunity to share my story with a lot of people around the U.S.

Thank you to all who have read what hardships I have gone through and the things I have had to adapt to. I got to explore a world which I thought I would never be part of: I got to help make the foster care system a better place for children in the system now so that they won't have to go through what I have. I have also had the chance to help set up meetings which

helped non-profit organizations come together to make positive change for homeless youth.

I am happy that I have seen a lot of changes take place with MBS. I have seen it grow with us youth who have supported MBS and have made it what it is today. We the youth did that and I am glad to give someone else the opportunity to do something for MBS with what talents they have. Thank you Jim for giving me a chance to have my voice heard and share my talents with people. People got to see what an amazing person I am and that, despite all I have gone through, I still push forward with my life. What I have learned while working here is that I have a voice that is important and anyone at anytime can be heard no matter what their background is. I have done a lot and learned a lot and have met amazing youth and people who support MBS to the fullest. Thank you all.

**THANK YOU!**

NATALIE, ALEX AND KELLY ALMELEH; ALBERT ALMELEH; PHOEBE AND JEFF ANDERSON; ANONYMOUS; LINDA AND BOB BENSON; MICHAEL CAMPBELL; ORVILLE COHEN; CHAR COULBERT; KAREN COWGILL; BRUCE CROSS AND PERKINS COIE LLP; SANDI EVERLOVE; KMG CONSULTING; SPENCER NOLAND AND PATRICIA GRAY; LAURIE AND STEVE ROSEN-RIIT; CELESTE TELL AND JIM FAIR; JOHN AND JANET WALKER; MARK AND BARBARA WHITEHURST; THE WHITNEYS

**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.*

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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.

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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	\$
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**MEET OUR STAFF**

**Executive Director**  
Jim Theofelis

**Director of Operations**  
Ros Ghan

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

**Director of Youth and Alumni Programs**  
Tiffany Washington

**Director of Development**  
Madeline Thompson

**Executive Assistant**  
Lauren Frederick

**Public Relations Specialist**  
Darcie Gray

**Youth LEAD Coordinator**  
Najja Morris

**Mockingbird Family Model Coordinator**  
Marie Goines

**Administrative Coordinator**  
Diana Clark

**Administrative Assistant**  
Juan Ramirez

**Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant**  
Milissa Morgan

**Mockingbird Family Model Administrative Assistant**  
Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson

**Senior Youth Representative**  
Samuel Martin

**Youth Representatives**  
Leona Bill, Jessica Garcia, Georgina Ramirez, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker, Janisha Wright

**Contributing Writers & Artists**  
Mykal Alonzo, Emma Cummings, Thomas Darden, Sonia Gonzalez, John Hemingway

**Volunteers**  
Chrissie Jackson

**Editing and Layout**  
Kelly Hawkins

## A Mother's Addictions BY ANONYMOUS

My mom has been on drugs ever since I've been in this world. It's done a lot of damage to her and my family. It controls her and makes her do things that a mother should never do to her child. My brothers and sisters and I do love her a lot. I mean, if it weren't for her, we wouldn't be here. Her drug use has just got her isolated and doing stupid stuff and we really don't want anything to do with that. Like I said, she is our mother and we love her with all our hearts but there has got to be a point where we have to step back and that's what we are all doing. It hurts us deeply but honestly, I think it hurts me the most because I am the youngest and I have never really had a relationship with her. Deep down inside I want that mother daughter relationship. All of us want what is best for our mother but I feel if she keeps heading down this path of drugs, my brothers and sisters and I are not going to have a mother for much longer. It's sad but it's the truth and the truth hurts a lot.

My mom and I have had our problems but I will never let anything get in the way of ever losing my family again. I wish she felt the same as what I feel. Sometimes, I really think she cannot feel anything. Before I knew my mom, I blamed her for every bad thing that has happened in my life. I blamed her for the abuse I went through in my younger child years. I blamed her for me being put in the foster care system. I blamed her for all my behavior issues. Whatever went bad was always her fault. Now I realize she really can't help the things she does. It's the addiction that's got her all crazy and it's her addiction that has me sick. It makes me sick because I want and have always wanted a mother—my mother. I want her to want to be there for me, I want her to go to my graduation and things like that. Sometimes we don't get what we want in life and that's how it is with me.

Addiction can really mess up the whole family even if you are not the one on drugs. It hurts and it is a lot of stress from day to day. I am constantly worrying about my mom and what will happen to her next. It messes with my daily life, my friendships, and other things that are important to me. Sometimes I wish I did not have to worry about her, just like she doesn't worry about her kids, but it comes naturally for me. For her, though, I am honestly not sure if she cares.

Addiction runs in my family and, knowing that, I will never do the drugs that my mom and dad have done. I know you can never really say "never" because people say they never will but then they do. So I try my hardest to stay away from all that. I don't want to end up like my mom. I want to be an example to someone. I'm not going to try to sound like because of my family's addiction issues I never did a drug. I have and I do know that's not the road I want to go down. It's hard enough seeing my mom and friends going through it. It's crazy. One thing I won't turn to when things get rough is drugs.

Some day I would like to be blessed with a child. Just going through what I have been through in life and with my parents I am going to make sure my child doesn't have to deal with any of the things I have had to deal with. When I am financially and emotionally ready is when I am going to bring a child into this world. Until then, I am going to continue to do right or at least try.

For young people who constantly worry about your parents: Parents are going to do what they want. If they have not changed their lifestyle for as long as you can remember, then the chances of them changing are very slim. I know it's a lot of stress to worry about a loved one when they're doing wrong. Sometimes you just have to step back. It's hard but it's the best thing to do.

## SUPPORT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

means a great deal to me because, not only have I had one mentor, but I have had a community of mentors and students backing me all four years of high school. In this program we learn to acknowledge people and I am going to give special acknowledgements to a few mentors who stuck it out all four years: **Richard Hodgin, Melanie Roberson, Dan Pronovost, and Barbara Nelson.**

Next is Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA). This program has opportunities for students in elementary, middle, and high schools. The Center Director of the Seattle MESA is **Anna Maria de la Fuente.** Parents, I urge you to look into possible opportunities for your kids in MESA now if there is a chapter near you. I have been in the program since I was a sophomore. In the MESA classes we did all sorts of fun, unique things that get our minds thinking and actually doing engineering like making airplanes out of balsa wood and making a mousetrap race car. It was hard for me because I had a tough time with trial and effort but it opened my eyes to a another world that I didn't have experience with before. They also allowed me the opportunity to go to two National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) National Conferences.

I also had the opportunity these past two school years to participate in the first ever Junior Saturday Academy and Senior Saturday Academy. In both of these, I had the chance to build and work with robots and compete with these robots in the First Tech Challenge. That had to be one of

the best experiences of my life. I worked directly with **Sarah Sabay** and **Jarman Hauser** both of which have helped me get into college and understand engineering while also making it fun.

Last but certainly not least is The Mockingbird Society whose Executive Director is **Jim Theofolis.** This program has given me many opportunities including learning how to advocate for myself and others. I work directly with **Najja Morris** who is the Youth Lead Coordinator. It is just a wonderful opportunity to get paid to make change in the world.

Like I stated before, I wanted to give people an idea about what my support groups are and why they are important. There are many more out there so please don't limit yourselves to just these. I could easily say that I did not get where I am by myself. The struggle was mine but the people pushing me through were the people in these programs. I encourage everyone to have a support network. We all need somebody plus the more you are around positive influences the easier it is to be positive and do positive things. There are other things that you can use for support. For example, another support of mine I didn't have room for in this article was football. Support is about finding your niche and enjoying it to the best of your ability.

I would like to say thank you once again to all of the people who helped me, not just from these programs but in my whole life. I appreciate everything you have done.

1 [dictionary.reference.com/browse/support](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/support)



## Meet the Staff: Georgina Ramirez

My name is Georgina Ramirez. I am 23 years young and I am originally from Los Angeles, California. Since I am so far away from home, in my spare time I enjoy talking to my best friend on the phone. We talk about the world of fashion and every girly girl thing you can imagine. I love to stay physically active by participating in sports. My current sports hobby is snowboarding, which is going great, but I don't think you'll see me in the X Games any time soon. Unfortunately, the snow season has come to an end so I will probably revert to my previous hobby which is boxing.

I absolutely love to cook and eat great food; I am always trying to improve my culinary skills. Every day, I reserve some time to observe the world in motion as a way to constantly stay aware of my surroundings. During that time, I love to challenge myself by finding out how the people I'm observing connect to each other and society. Ultimately, it's a moment of reflection that helps provide me with balanced thought and an individualized perspective on human nature. It keeps me humble and grateful for everything I have. I do love to partake in "normal" things as well, like watching television. The shows I view most frequently are *The Wire*, *Sex in the City*, and *The Simpsons*. Finally, I love music. My favorite music artists are Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, The Isley Brothers, Lupe Fiasco, and Amy Winehouse. I love these artists because their music has a message, touches my soul and makes my heart smile.

An issue that's important to me is child maltreatment/abuse and the rights of foster youth and their ability to access those rights. In my experience as a foster youth, I had a guardian who I feel took on this role for monetary compensation. She and her family were extremely abusive mentally, physically, and emotionally. She would do things like restrict our access to our social worker and threaten us to make sure my siblings and I did not give away any information about her actions. During the time

I lived with her, she would try and find out ways that she could increase her compensation from DCFS. She even went as far as sending my sister and I to a psychiatric facility to see if we had any "mental problems" in hopes to increase her payment. It was such an embarrassing moment to have my sister and I picked up and have the entire neighborhood know. It turns out, though, that moment was a blessing in disguise. Once I reached the facility, I had the opportunity to inform the staff about how my guardian was treating me and my siblings. It was the first step that initiated our removal from her care.

If I could change one thing about the foster care system it would be that siblings should be kept together. I think that sibling connections provide children with a sense of strength and hope. I was fortunate enough to remain with both my brother and sister for the majority of the time I was in the system. Many days they were the only thing that kept me motivated to become a prominent member of society. They kept me focused on being a good role model and I honestly believe that if I did not have them as inspiration, I would have given up on myself.

I wanted to become a member of the Mockingbird's Youth LEAD Program because as a foster care alumnus I can use my experience to assist others that are going through the foster care system. I have seen the system's failures and been through the experience that breaks the souls of so many youth today. I want to let others know that the emotional, mental and social despair that begins the moment many kids are placed in the foster care system doesn't have to control them. These children need to know that they can have a prosperous future if that's what they truly want. They can beat the odds and do not have to become a statistic or a victim of circumstance. However, in order for this goal to become easier to obtain for many youth, changes in the system must occur. This is the primary reason why I want to be apart of the program, to hopefully create solutions that work to the youths' advantage.

## An Interview with Contract Employee Kara Sanders

The following is an interview with The Mockingbird Society's new Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit Program Coordinator.

**MT: What did you do before coming to MBS? Why did you choose this agency?**

**KS:** I ran a home for two young women who had had a hard upbringing (one of them has a 4 year old boy). I also assisted the missions and front office at Northwest Foursquare Church. This meant I organized volunteers, oversaw two local youth programs, assisted with our outreach to the homeless, oversaw our military involvement and ran our special events.

**MT: Why were you interested specifically on helping to plan this event?**

**KS:** The goal of this event, which gives youth the opportunity to learn how to utilize their voice and change laws, inspired me. Therefore, with my special events experience, I figured this would be the best way to get involved with The Mockingbird Society.

**MT: What most excites you about the Youth and Alumni Summit?**

**KS:** What most excites me is the fact that the youth have the opportunity to realize how important their voice is.

**MT: How do you feel the Summit will best support the Mockingbird Network and the statewide regional groups?**

**KS:** The promotion of the Summit has already begun to support the new

Mockingbird Network by allowing individuals to realize there is support available. This has encouraged groups to want to start up chapters in their area. During the Summit, the Resource Coordinators for each region will have opportunities to develop relationships with youth in their area and it will strengthen relationships between foster youth, alumni and allies. Each of these relationships will strengthen the future of the Network which will give more opportunities for the voice of the youth to be heard.

**MT: How can a person attend the Youth and Alumni Summit?**

**KS:** In the next week or so, you can download an application from [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org) or you can e-mail me at [leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org).

### Come Work for The Mockingbird Society!

The Mockingbird Society is hiring for the following positions:

- Events Planning Assistant
- Youth Lead Coordinator
- Resource Specialist

Foster care alumni and people of color encouraged to apply. See [www.mockingbirdsociety.org/jobs](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/jobs) for details.

## Stroller's Ghost

MYKAL ALONZO

The thought alone,  
Is so solitary,  
It is a living thing,  
It feeds off my soul,  
And eats up my spirit,  
It is the feeling of loss,  
Love that is lost,  
To have others close,  
Never felt like her voice,  
The thought alone,  
It contains me  
It blankets my heart  
"Sad" is not a strong enough  
emotion,  
Sorrow is down,  
My misery is up,  
And it now belongs only to me,  
Time numbed my partner,  
Does it matter how long it took  
her,  
How long it took her to get  
over it?  
The thought alone,  
Tears have darkened my eyes,  
My smile no longer glows,  
In love in the past,  
I see nothing,  
We have died,  
Now I feel alive, the thought  
alone!

## A Violet Flower in Botany

THOMAS DARDEN

Another accomplishment on a  
terminology exam,  
In the winds of aspirations  
continuing of bloom  
To mature and graduate.

Being uprooted and replanted in an  
increasing process to  
See the violets of botany  
Such Laboring, intensities  
Escalating speeds of learning  
Monumental hopes after  
Such hard work

A violet in botany has  
Studied and shown  
As a sign that  
Growth is  
Natural  
And worth observation

## The Beating In This Heart

EMMA CUMMINGS

The beating in this heart shall stop  
Just as the blood shall cease to flow  
The mysteries of this life  
Shall be unlocked  
Yet there is only one man  
Whom I shall show  
When the rain falls  
My past shall follow  
Yet when I start  
To walk again  
It will not be behind anyone  
Yet beside this man's shadow.

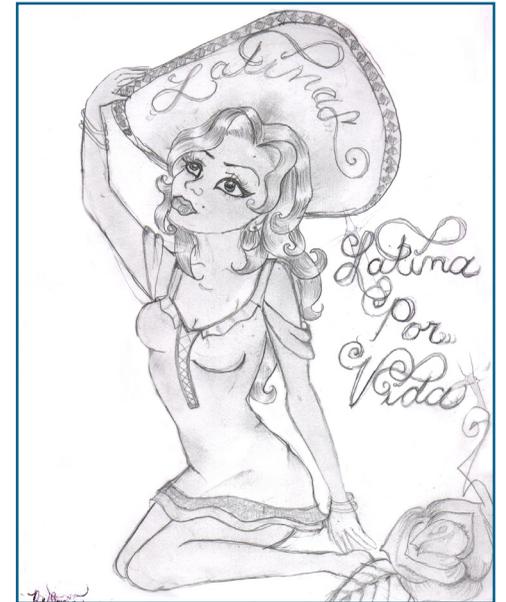
## Life

JOHN HEMINGWAY

Yes life is difficult.  
No one promised it easy,  
So why must we make life so hard?  
When life is hard enough.  
We push our self's through all kinds of hurt.  
We find our self's in jail wondering why?  
So take something valuable from the  
time spent in problems.  
As long as you have faith and trust  
help is there.  
Only then will you understand the concept of  
what the meaning of life means to you

## Latina Por Vida

SONIA GONZALEZ



*Doubts and mistrust are the mere panic of timid imagination, which the steadfast heart will conquer, and the large mind transcend."*

*~ Helen Keller*

## My Experience In The "Game" BY ALAIZA M.

It was just two years ago when I met the man who would scar my life forever. I was only 15 and in search of someone to be loved by, I guess you can say. When I met this "Mr. Pimp" I was automatically attracted to him and the way he carried himself. It was something about his swagger that just got me. Not long after we started talking he started treating me like I was his. He was really sweet to me (aren't they always?) So, after he "gamed me down," I became his whore. It was that easy.

That was now my label and my job. This choice changed my life forever. I was to work for this guy every night and day and was expected to come in with nothing less than \$500. Well, that's what my quota started out with. Then, when, I started doing it for long enough to know how to really get inside these tricks head, I had to make \$1000 a day. I was so fooled. I thought it was okay at first. I mean, I was with this guy who I loved and I thought he loved me too. That's what he said. We had all this stuff: new clothes, shoes, jewelry, whatever we wanted. When reality

finally hit, I started to feel all the pain this brought. I was stuck, I was scared.

Within a year, I'd already experienced being robbed, nearly raped, being in jail, and, worst of all, being abused physically, mentally, and emotionally by this guy I thought I loved. With all these deadly situations in my corner, I still couldn't just stop. I asked myself the same question: Why not? Was it love or fear? I was getting tired of all the lies and pain this guy put me through.

In March 2007, I went to jail. I got another prostitution charge to add to the many I had already had before. While locked up that time, I made the decision to leave him. When I got out I told him I was done. He didn't take it too lightly but, eventually, he got tired of me running from him so, after a year, it was the end of me and him.

Prostitution didn't stop there, though. I started to do it for myself. It didn't take long for another "Mr. Pimp" to come along. For some reason, I thought that this time would be different because we seemed to have a clear understanding. It was the

same story but with a different ending. It lasted about half a year this time. We both eventually got locked up. I had the choice of either getting sent to prison for a year or going to a six to nine month inpatient treatment center in Bellingham, WA. I chose to go to the treatment center. I was there for six months and I must say that by going there and learning about myself and the causes and effects of my issues helped me a lot. Today I have hope and refuse to go back to that lifestyle ever again. There is help out there so if you think you are truly ready to change, let someone help because change is possible.

### Some People Ask Me Why?

Some people ask me why and still, to this day, I can't give an exact reason. I know why I think I got involved in "The Game" but my reasons don't make much sense. I grew up with a hard childhood. One of my favorite people, my dad, left me at the age of nine. My dad use to give me anything I wanted. No, he wasn't the best dad. My memories of him are the weekly visits with him and his women, a different one every week.

I remember talking to one pimp and he told me that a lot of the reasons why young girls that grew up without fathers go out and mess with pimps are because they're in search of male figure, someone to fill that void, that empty spot. I could

say that is my reason and in a lot of ways it could be. I could say that it's because I wanted to feel loved. It could very much be that but, although I did not have a father I did have a family that loved me. We didn't have a lot growing up. I could say it's because we were poor. The truth is that I don't know exactly why I got involved in such a horrible activity. All I can say is: I did it, I lived it, and now I'm done.

### The Game Owes Me!

Getting out of The Game is so hard, no doubt. I must say I'm one of the lucky ones. I got out of The Game pretty quickly, while a lot of my girlfriends are still out there. What people don't understand is this is not a game, it's not for fun; it's "The Game": a way of living. It's something like a nightmare that you can't wake up from. They say there's no way to escape The Game. I just recently got out and a lot of my fears and worries are about going back. Its easy to slip back into believing that and I know the hardest part is getting out. These pimps make you believe the only thing you'll ever be good at is selling your body, but we're worth so much more. The only way to get out of The Game is to be true to your self, stop believing what that pimp tells you (you know its not true) and get some help. My sister always use to tell me, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't force it to drink." Choose or lose!

## 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.



**King County Kinship  
Collaboration  
Gathering**

**October 18, 2008  
9:00 TO 5:00 PM**

African American Academy  
8311 Beacon Avenue South  
Seattle, WA 98118

# Save the Date

The King County Kinship Care Gathering is an opportunity for kinship caregivers, families, service providers, community advocates and policy makers to share information and ideas, find resources and support and celebrate families caring for families.

For more information contact Barb Wiley, 206-268-6785  
barbaraw@seniorservices.org