Foster Parents Gather Together with Hope

DARIUS REYNOLDS

“No group in the United States is more predictably headed for an unhappy outcome than young people who spend their adolescence in foster care.”
— DOUGLAS W. NELSON

HOWEVER, for the last few years, the Foster Parent Association of Washington State (FPAWS), more than a hundred foster parents and even a few foster kids have come together to try to rectify this situation.

The 2003 foster care conference was held in Wenatchee, Washington. I’d have to say it was a very educational experience to be there as a former foster kid, because I had the chance to see how new parents are being trained to deal with their kids. I attended a couple of the workshops and found them pretty informative.

The first workshop I went to was called “Managing Escalated Behavior in Foster Care.” The presenter was Scott Hanauer, MA, from Children’s Home Society in Seattle. Hanauer talked about ways to stay out of power struggles with children and appropriate ways to discipline them.

I thought Hanauer made some good points on dealing with inappropriate behavior. Like never stoop to the level that the child is on when they’re angry — just stay calm and deal with the situation the way you see is fit. I wish foster parents were given this kind of advice when I was in foster care because all I experienced was yelling battles between myself and my parents. The other workshop I attended was “Say It Straight.” The presenter, Bob Wickline, was quite the character; very funny and energetic. In his workshop we played a communication game and had to sing. He sang a song about communication for us, and we played some role-playing games to help us understand how other people feel when we use the wrong kind of communication.

Some new communication skills we learned included: sitting down when you talk to your child so you don’t seem like a giant as well as making eye contact and trying not to lecture. He also talked about being sensitive to each other’s feelings and really listening to what your foster children have to say so they will listen to you.

I wish I could have had more time to go to other workshops, because there were some other topics that looked really informative. In addition to the workshops they had information booths set up with info about other beneficial programs.

The conference was a great experience, I was able to talk to some of the new parents and many of them were very excited and looked forward to the challenges of being a foster parent. The only thing I would change about the conference is that I would like to see more foster kids involved.

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Hello from Alumna Allyson, (my name is Allyson). I have been in foster care for 12 years, I have been through many ups and downs. My favorite part of foster care is that I have learned to love. I developed the courage and perseverance to keep going when life gives me hard times.

By surviving and thriving in foster care, I developed courage and perseverance to keep going when life gives me hard times.

Alumna Allyson

Founded in Seattle, Washington, 2001

ALUMNI CORNER: Ending the cycle

MY DADDY FIRST TRIED CHOKEING MY MOMMA when I was six or seven. I woke up in the middle of the night frightened. For years, the violence would occur without warning, like the tornadoes that hit Alabama in the spring and fall. It was the courage I mustered to go next door to ask for help a few years after the first attack that ended the cycle of violence, hunger, and desperation. Ironically, my mother is alive today while the man who would twist and turn in his rage, taking it out on my brother and sisters, died after I graduated from high school.

Foster care was the first time in my life that I could eat regularly. I ate so much that the first year in foster care I gained 20 pounds. I suddenly started doing better in school because I could sleep through the night and not be frightened. I worried the other kids in school knew that I was in foster care. Being poor and abused was one thing, but I thought being a ward of the state seemed so much worse. It wasn’t; I was just mad at the world.
Letter from the Editor

THIS MONTH MY LETTER BEGINS WITH TRAGEDY and concludes with hope.

Rafael Gomez: August 7, 2001–September 10, 2003. The news hits you like an unexpected blow to the stomach. Two-year-old Rafael Gomez died at Spokane’s Sacred Heart hospital six months after being returned to his biological parents.

Six months after foster mom Denise Griffin pleaded with state officials, a judge and apparently anyone else who might listen to protect Rafael. Born drug-addicted, Rafael suffered more injuries and pain than any child should experience, including two broken legs, burns, bruises, and skull fractures. When Mockingbird Times had gone to press, no charges have been filed and local police were waiting for an autopsy report. The Office of Child and Family Ombudsman has already initiated the ground work for an investigation as by the state Department of Social and Health Services. This is critical. Decisions about family reunification are some of the most difficult for caseworkers.

Rafael was three-days-old when first placed in his foster home. He lived with the Griffins’ for approximately 16 of his 25 months of life. Several failed attempts to reunify Rafael with his biological family resulted in emergency telephone calls to the Griffin family by DSHS, asking them to take an injured Rafael back into their home. According to reports, Denise Griffin warned all involved including writing a letter to the judge that Rafael was at high risk for further injury or worse if returned home. Through her continual demonstration of unconditional love and commitment to Rafael, Foster Mom Griffin earned her place at the decision-making table alongside the “experts.” After the devastating end to young Rafael’s life, we are left wondering whose concerns were raised by the foster mom were seemingly ignored or dismissed.

ASK-Y: The Mockingbird Society is proud to announce the sponsorship of a new advocacy coalition. Advocates for System Kids and Youth will be a broad-based coalition that focuses on the needs of the children, adolescents and families involved in the Washington State child welfare system. ASK-Y will focus on the children and youth who are eligible for foster/kinship care and are also involved in other systems such as juvenile justice, mental health, chemical dependency as well as homeless and/or street-involved. This coalition will educate elected officials and other decision makers regarding the needs of our most vulnerable young people, while advocating for policies and services that genuinely meet the needs of those in care.

Please consider this an invitation to join ASK-Y. Our first meeting will be Friday, November 7 at 10:00 A.M. at 2100-24th Ave South in Seattle. I would especially like to encourage our friends from around the state of Washington. Even if you aren’t able to attend every meeting, you can certainly participate in many important ways. Join us!

“[If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart.” — Buddha

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THANK YOU
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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 that is 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 $200 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 2000 copies being distributed across Washington and the U.S.A. Youth involvement is 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 maybe reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2003 The Mockingbird Society.

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ALUMNI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

I became the first foster child to attend college from Montgomery County, Alabama. When I left for college, all I owned fit into a brown paper bag. I was finally free to do what I wanted without any interference. College was a happy time in my life because for the first time I became just like the other students, no difference. No one knew my past, and I carved out my own future.

I learned in college that the only difference was being responsible for the consequences of my actions. My fellow students had parents to save them from their mistakes. I felt alone at times, but mostly I felt independent and proud to be on my own. I made my choices knowing that any mistakes I made, I would have to pay my own way. I worked through college and it was a struggle financially, but well worth it.

After college, it was the “sky’s the limit.” I worked on rocket payloads until I was given my own experiment to fly on the Space Shuttle. All those years of making my own choices prepared me to lead a group of engineers and scientists. The self-confidence I gained from making it on my own helped me keep my cool when training the astronauts. The most exciting time of my life was being a part of the Oprah show on three different occasions.

For me, there was so much more to foster care than the feelings I had growing up of being scared and angry at everyone. By surviving and thriving in foster care, I developed courage and perseverance to keep going when life gives me hard times. By learning not to care what others thought, I learned to listen to my own voice. When a girl in high school who had lots of clothes made fun of my only nice outfit, I learned to hold my anger to not let her see how she hurt my feelings. Living in foster care gave me so many lessons that have continued to serve me in life. Many people have helped me along the way in life including my foster parents. The greatest lesson I learned was my childhood was a result of my parents’ bad choices. I was free to choose a better path for my life and I did.

— Chris Watson

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— Buddha

2003

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ONE MORE THING: ANXIETY AND ITS EFFECTS ON EVERYDAY LIFE

Anxiety is a common emotion that affects many people at some point in their lives. It is a feeling of unease, apprehension, or nervousness. Anxiety can be caused by many things, such as stress, trauma, or physical illness. It can also be a symptom of a mental health disorder, such as anxiety disorder or depression. Anxiety can affect people in different ways, and some people may experience it more frequently or strongly than others.

Hi, my name is Courtney and I enjoy putting holes in my body. I currently have seven non-infected piercings but that wasn’t always the case. I strongly suggest not doing it yourself because the risk of infection is high, it hurts worse, and you make your body suffer. I was twelve when I jammed one of my mother’s earrings through my nose. I wanted it badly, enough to deal with the pain but I wouldn’t do it again because it took for ever and a piercing needle meant for puncturing through your nose. I wanted it badly, enough to deal with the pain but I wouldn’t do it again because it took forever and a piercing needle meant for puncturing through your nose. I wanted it badly, enough to deal with the pain but I wouldn’t do it again because it took forever and a piercing needle meant for puncturing through your nose.

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Madonna Equals Anarchy!

Bridgett Siroston

**Madonna** is a true chameleon. She has endured since she bust out on the scene with the singles “Holiday” and “Borderline” in 1983. She is smart, sexy, provocative and political at the same time! Madonna is back on the scene to change fashion, music, and the world again, in case you weren’t ready to change. With her tenth studio album, *American Life*, Madonna makes a statement about the way Americans live and what we hold important — guns, bombs, and television. Pretty intense for a pop/ electronica (music that incorporates techno and pop music) album, huh?

While the album falls in the electronic genre of music, it also combines a “cowgirl” acoustic sound that was on her last album’s hit, “Don’t Tell Me.” There is a pre-disco cool to it. I grew up listening to Madonna, and she has always surprised me. Not only has she challenged the racial lines in her video “Like a Prayer” in 1989 — where a black Jesus is weeping — but she also has a way of making us question our thoughts and authority and strive to do better. In a way, she is the only socially accepted anarchist!

Madonna’s music video for the title track was banned and another version of the song was issued and played for MTV and VH1. In the original there are bombs being dropped and explosions while she tosses a grenade to George W Bush and he lights his expensive cigar with it. Unlike many other bands, Madonna showed her sensitivity by withdrawing the music video “American Life.” She felt the video was inappropriate to air at the time and said, “Due to the volatile state of the world I do not want to risk offending anyone who might misinterpret the meaning of this video.”

because of the current war with Iraq. You can find more out from this video at www.madonna.com. Madonna’s single “Hollywood” is about image and how some people are obsessed with the “fake up as make-up” scene, especially Hollywood (movies and music stars) glamour and glitz. In the video there is a scene when she is looking at a young maid and feels her youth leaving her, but has only an empty sense of comfort with jewels and diamonds. She is on a television that keeps swiveling and she looks like Marilyn Monroe, trying to make it in the “business.”

A standout track on this album is “Mother & Father,” which is a techno rendition done superbly, because it incorporates how she has felt all these years without her mother (who died when Madonna was very young). Having her father take on the responsibilities, she sings “Yes father you I’m not so free.” She even raps, “my mother died, when I was five — and I cried and cried until the neighbors went away, they couldn’t take my loneliness, I couldn’t take their phoniness.”

Madonna has been in the spotlight for 20 years now and is possibly the world’s biggest female star. Go get *American Life* — it will not disappoint you. This album triggers goosebumps in me, it’s that good.

My Headspace

Courtney Konetzko

*I’VE BEEN CALLED* an artist, a strong woman, a disaster, a rocker, mentally ill, a poet, a ward of the state, poor, homeless, sensitive, a leader, a creative spirit, a weirdo, a liability, a runaway, a genius, a Satanist, and a confused little girl. I prefer to be called an artist.

I believe everyone is an artist in their own way. *Art* doesn’t have to be painting, drawing, or playing the violin. *Art* is anything you create. If we are all created in God’s image, it makes sense that everyone would have the power to create, to be an artist. I think of God as an artist somewhat. My mom’s an artist in the way she can look at a plain room and turn it into an interior decorator’s dream. My dad’s an artist in the way he thinks of the river and how he fishes and the many ways he chooses to cook them.

Everyone has gifts that are unique to them. Nobody should feel they have to compare their gifts or ever think they are nothing because they don’t have as much in material wealth as others. Certain thoughts and ideas when they’re applied right can be priceless.

I wanted to be a rock star when I was younger. It seemed like that was the cool thing to do. It wasn’t a very original idea; every other kid wanted to be Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Manson, or someone famous. Obsess about Kurt Cobain and buy everything Nirvana related possible — yeah, that was what I did. I don’t even like Nirvana’s music now. I guess I was a poser at that time, I didn’t feel comfortable enough thinking for myself... yet.

When I look back to that period of my life (age 12-15ish) I see that my ability to think for myself was suppressed. I was trying on different personalities and forgetting about myself. I didn’t know that things have to happen from the inside out, not the outside in. There was this huge barrier of anger that wouldn’t let anything in, including love, because it hurt too much.

Music and writing were my two main “healthy” outlets — two tools that helped me deal with the anger. Right now I’m beginning college to become a lawyer and work with kids in the system, but I still want to create art. I don’t know exactly what I want to do, but I think I’ll know when the time is right. Maybe I’ll find the right school. Or make films, or do murals.

I think art will always be involved on some level in my life. Art is important because it helps externalize emotions and express things that cannot be said in words. It gives a voice to the soul.

“Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to irrecconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning.”

— Katherine Anne Porter (1894-1980) U.S. novelist and short-story writer

Check out Courtney’s artwork online at www/mockingbirdociety.org.