**Judicial Conference Highlights Foster Care Experience**

**DARIUS REYNOLDS**

THE 47TH ANNUAL JUDICIAL CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN SPOKANE, WASHINGTON THIS YEAR. Echo Speed and I were invited to be part of a workshop called Foster Care: The Good, The Bad and the Ugly, facilitated by Judge Patricia Clark and Judge LeRoy McCullough. This workshop was put together to educate judges about foster care and give them an opportunity to hear from people who have been involved in the system, as well as share their ideas on what judges can do to make more positive decisions for youth in foster care.

I enjoyed being on the panel because it gave me a chance to tell the judges a little about what I went through in foster care and gave me a chance to make some recommendations about what I think works. Each panel member shared their personal story and thoughts about how to make the court experience more effective for foster kids. Panelist Estakio Beltran reported that a stable education is important for foster children, stating that it is important to “stabilize children through a stable education.” Other panelist recommendations included foster parents being encouraged to treat foster kids like their own kids, giving foster kids a chance to voice what they want to happen with their lives and judges taking the time to talk to foster kids one-on-one. After everyone on the panel spoke, the judges in the audience were given a chance to ask the panel questions, like how race is important when deciding where to place a child. The workshop also included a discussion about the juvenile dependency case process, racial disproportionality, as well as a panel who discussed the Braam lawsuit.

At this conference I learned that a lot of the things the state was supposed to do when I went into foster care never happened. Hopefully by telling the judges my story they will make sure the same thing doesn’t happen to another youth. I really enjoyed the question and answer part of the workshop because for the first time in my life, a judge was asking me for advice and listening to what I had to say.

They should have conferences like this all across the country because it is important that the judges hear from the people who are involved in foster care, especially the youth.

The youth can honestly tell what is working, and if we invite youth to speak at more of these forums and conventions they will know that there are people out here who will listen.

Make sure to check out our photo gallery from this event online at www.mockingbirdociety.org. For more information about the Braam lawsuit check out the Attorney General’s website at www.atg.wa.gov/broram/releases.shtml

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**Alumni Corner: Where Do I Go Now?**

The Challenges of Life After Foster Care

**CASEY BATSON**

IF PEOPLE ASK YOU WHO YOUR PARENTS ARE AND YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, if you feel awkward talking about your childhood, or if you want to cry when people mention memories of their childhood, then you might be a foster child. If you are a former foster youth, someone who has left your state’s care system, then you may be experiencing a world many people could never understand.

For young adults who left their natural families as children, the challenges of real life can seem even more overwhelming than they are already. Foster children are considered adults at the age of 18. Thankfully in most states they are currently allowed to finish their senior year with the foster home they are in before being expected to fend for themselves. This has not always been the case; many had to move out before graduation. Adulthood for these youth is an entirely different experience and offers many more opportunities for failure and hopelessness.

When children from middle-income or wealthier families graduate from high school, they usually have a network of support encouraging them and offering financial help. If the child goes to college, many often only pay half of their own tuition or none at all. During Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer breaks these students usually return home while out of school thus postponing the need to find their own apartment until graduated from college. Parents and grandparents of children not removed from their homes send care packages, notes, and little checks to help them through. They often help them move into a dorm or campus housing. Even if a child does not go to college, often parents allow them to stay up to five more years at home with no rent, all bills paid, food and laundry free. None of this happens for foster youth—without some intervention.
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 youth. 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. Monthly circulation of 60,000 copies being distributed across Washington and the USA. We are distributed through several venues, including as an insert inside Real Change, The Seattle Star and The Seattle Sun, our own mailing list and being available online. 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 2004 The Mockingbird Society.

Letter from the Editor

I recently had the opportunity to provide some clinical consultation to a team of professionals and foster parents regarding a 12-year-old girl who is having extreme difficulty during the bedtime routine. This is not unusual—I frequently provide consultation and training to this age group who know the nightmare of sexual abuse and frequently have difficulty with bedtime and sleep.

If you think of it for a moment, we typically become less and less able to defend ourselves the deeper into the bedtime routine we go. In fact one of the issues these particular foster parents were having is that the little girl did not want to wear pajamas and nightgowns but instead wanted to wear her regular clothing to bed. For this child, her jeans, sweatshirt and day clothing served as comfortable armor in her daily quest to experience a sense of safety and control. Not only were the night clothes presented a clear signal that bedtime was near, this child’s behavior during the bedtime routine as one of the most important and reassuring assistance is the presence of an adult the child trusts. To their credit and a testimony of their concern and skill, the foster parents shifted from viewing this child’s behavior during the bedtime routine as one of pathology needing to be fixed. Instead, they adapted the perspective that this child experienced a severe and repetitive trauma that has resulted in her having extra difficulty allowing herself to transition to a place of increased dependency and vulnerability: sleep.

This new perspective has brought change to the role during the bedtime routine allowing them to participate with the child rather than the child withdrawing and power struggles escalating. To the frightened child at bedtime the most important and reassuring assistance is the presence of an adult the child trusts. To their credit and the child’s benefit these caring foster parents are now able to be that adult for this child.

In admiration,

Bijj

Quote of the Month: It may be long before the law of love will be recognized in international affairs. The machineries of government stand between and hide the hearts of one people from those of another.

-Gandhi

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox:

I want to support The Mockingbird Society

Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 350, Seattle WA 98144

ALUMNI CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

When a foster youth graduates high school they must have a place to go immediately. They must be going to a college dorm or to their own apartment. If they were allowed to remain in their foster home until school started, they can go straight to the dorm. Otherwise, the student has to save during their senior year for their first place. If they are the fortunate one who does go to school and has scholarships and financial aid, then they still have the two big breaks to think about: Winter and Summer. For a former foster youth there are not too many choices of where to go during these times and this can be very depressing for the young adult. Since the young person left home many years earlier, staying with natural family is not comfortable or would get them in trouble. Even the best foster parents often can’t take in their former youth because someone new is already sleeping in their old bed. That’s one more thing...no place to call home. But just wait—there are more challenges.

For example, if the youth did not save up for an apartment or go to college, they may end up in a group home or a city shelter. Sadly, many individuals reside in these situations inevitably due to personal limitations or lack of support. A successful young person may make it through school with the proper support. Along the way though they need people to help them get their first apartment (co-signer needed since they have no credit history), turn on utilities (plan for all the deposits), and open and manage a checking account (understanding the financial responsibilities). Parents or guardians and other relatives usually do these things for young adults, but the youth out of care is often out of luck.

If you know a foster youth or work with foster children, help them network all they can; offer practical advice for independent living; get them a mentor—a person who will talk through solutions when problems arise. If you are a foster youth, there are people out there who care, and a church group or foster care advocacy group can be located to help you. You are not alone and you can make a wonderful life for yourself. Let people know who you are, what you need and what they can do to help. May God bless your path.

If you would like your story heard, we are looking for submissions for our Alumni Corner right now! Send your story to: newspapers@mockingbirdsocity.org

Meet Our Staff

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Thank you for your support!
ON THEIR OWN, WHAT HAPPENS TO KIDS WHEN THEY AGE OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

BY MARTHA SHIRK AND GARY STANGLER IS AN EMOTIONALLY MOVING NON-FICTION ACCOUNT of the lives of eight youth who went through the foster care system and the struggles they face as they try to ‘make it’ in the adult world. There is a foreword by former President Jimmy Carter and an introduction by authors Shirk and Stangler. President Carter remarks, “The reality is that young people who leave foster care at age eighteen are no more ready to become independent than our own children. In fact, most are probably less ready.”

On Their Own evoked various emotions, sometimes not very happy emotions, like in the case of Holly Moffett’s story when she describes what child-abuse investigators saw when they visited her home. Moffett recalls that “There was no working shower, and the bathtub was clogged up with puke. The refrigerator wasn’t working, and all the food in it was bad. There were maggots in the sink, and dirty clothes everywhere…”

A great feature about On Their Own is that there is a conclusion section that includes things you can do to help foster youth. Stangler and Shirk propose specific strategies in the areas of: education, employment, housing, health care, and personal and community engagement. Here are some highlights:

**Education:** provide educational liaisons or advocates, help them engage in school life programs, and educate youth about money.

**Employment:** expose youth in care to the world of work, help youth in care to get jobs, expose youth to career options, connect youth with proven programs, and educate youth about money.

**Housing:** helping young people meet start-up needs (furniture and the like for their first place) and helping them maintain their housing.

**Healthcare:** advocating for Medicaid coverage and linking young people to free or low-cost care.

Stangler and Shirk define youth engagement as “involving young people in the creation of their own destinies.” According to Stangler and Shirk, kids who are not in foster care struggle with these same five areas but not to the same extent because they have the support of their parents in more ways then one. On Their Own gives a face to each name by placing photos with each chapter, and each chapter is devoted to one youth. You get the sense that these are lives that are just beginning and the overall feeling is not one of optimism. I agree that much needs to be done in order for the system to better prepare foster youth to transition better into adulthood. Stirk and Stangler suggest that more money be allocated for independent living services because right now youth have to fight over slim existing funds that are not adequate. Carter agrees, saying that “In 1999, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Foster Care Independence Act, also called the Chafee Act, which expanded transition services for older youth leaving foster care. Although the new government mandates and funding are welcome, they are far from sufficient. Ensuring the safe passage of these young people into adulthood will take more creativity and cooperation than has been mustered so far.”

Carter goes on to say that, “The question we should ask ourselves is this: If we willingly give our own children the benefit of our support as they struggle to become independent, productive adults, why do we tolerate the abrupt withdrawal of support for youth who are aging out of care?”

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**Mockingbird On the Fly**

Do you ever wonder what Mockingbird Reporters and staff are doing when they are not reporting the news? We thought we would let you in on a few of the events and projects that Mockingbird is involved with this fall...

- Working with Wild Geese Productions to create a documentary about the Mockingbird Society, the foster care/kinship care system, and youth homelessness, which will be created in part by our reporting staff!

- On September 20th, 2004, Reporters Echo Speed and Darius Reynolds participated in the 4th Washington Judicial Conference in Spokane, WA to discuss their experience in the foster care system.

- On September 30th, 2004, Executive Director Jim Theofelis and Reporter Darius Reynolds will be participating in a homelessness forum entitled A Denial of Human Rights, put on by the Seattle Human Rights Commission.

- On October 14th, 2004, Reporters Ashley Grant, Jamica Henderson, Darius Reynolds and Rico Evans will be giving foster parents advice, feedback and telling about their own experience in the system at the annual conference of foster parents in Washington State, put on by Foster Parents Association of Washington State (FPAWS)
Mockingbird Halloween Special: Supernatural Events—Will We Ever Know the Truth?

DARIUS REYNOLDS

Here is an amazing story for you. On June 30th, 1908, there was an explosion in a swamp area near the Tunguska River in Siberia. The Evenki, a local tribe, claims to have seen an object in the sky with a tail that was 800 kilometers long (497 miles). The Evenki claimed that it made no noise as it passed over them but when it hit the ground there were five explosions. These explosions sent a Seismic wave that was felt around the world. They also claim that a huge fire ball went several thousand feet in the air and could be seen for miles of miles.

This explosion produced so much heat that everything within 575 miles of the explosion was destroyed. Scientists were not able to explore the swamp area until thirteen years later, and there was no sign of a meteor hitting earth. What could have caused this explosion?

Are there aliens stealing statues and moving rocks in Death Valley, California really moving on their own? Many people believe the answers to these questions are yes. There are also many people who are skeptical when it comes to believing in supernatural phenomena. Scientists can clone a sheep and break down DNA, but if a man claims that a ball of lightning comes into his house and moves around like it has a mind of its own and science can’t explain it, then the man must have been crazy, right? Just because science can’t explain something doesn’t mean it’s not real or it happened, it just means we didn’t understand it. It means that no matter how extreme the reports are, we need to investigate further and can claim them as true or not. I believe that most of the videos of UFO’s and ghosts on television are probably fake. However, I also believe that ghosts are real and that we are not alone in the universe. I say that we should stop looking for proof and accept the fact that there are things in this world that we won’t ever understand.

Movie Review: Hero Enthralls the Eye

COURTNEY KONIEZKO

THE FILM YING XIONG ALSO KNOWN AS HERO WAS NOT WHAT I EXPECTED. I went to see Hero expecting an action-packed martial arts movie and what I got instead was an exquisitely beautiful ‘art film’ that enthralled the eye but leaves little to the mind. I think that to understand Hero better it would have helped to know the history of China better. Hero is based on a true story that takes place when China was divided into seven kingdoms ruled by the Emperor Qin who was trying to unite the seven kingdoms into one. The director, Zhang Yimou takes a spin on this, using it as the baseline for his story adding in three assassins: Broken Sword, Flying Snow, and Sky who are out to have Emperor Qin killed.

Hero is a story within a story as Nameless, the main character played by Jet Li, comes closer and closer to the Emperor’s throne to recount how he killed the assassins, the camera flashes back into colorful pictures of Nameless’ journeys. It returns to the tension building between Nameless and the Emperor as Nameless gets closer to the throne because the Emperor suspects Nameless of trying to kill him. There are hundreds of candles set up between Nameless and the throne and they flicker according to what is said and felt. Nameless is within ten paces of the throne when things began to get strange...

The music is very well matched, infusing each scene with emotion which would be lacking otherwise; moody, intense, and melodic, sometimes all at once. The biggest thing that stands out about Hero is the director’s attention to detail and color. You get to see a sword slice a drop of water in two, one calligraphy brush among hundreds shatter into splinters, the leaves on trees in a forest turn from one color to another until the whole forest and sky turns red blood mixing the red out of the two women fighting in the forest. The director bathes each landscape in subtle hues and intense colors that are extremely striking, complimenting the shades of the many brightly colored outfits the characters wear.

This is the reason to go see Hero – the visual appeal. Do not go for action, an easy to understand story line, or with many expectations because it won’t be what you expect. I am a big fan of martial arts movies and have never seen anything quite like this. At first I felt sort of cheated, “What? I paid money for this!” In retrospect, it was a good film, a beautiful film even though it didn’t give me a high expectations. Anything that has a Quentin Tarantino’s name attached to it has to be good is my logic even though Quentin was only involved in buying the rights to the film. It was a poorer film, a film that is too extreme but it lives up to my high expectations. That anything has a Quentin Tarantino’s name attached to it has to be good is my logic even though Quentin was only involved in buying the rights to the film and making sure it was shown in the United States.

There’s a stellar cast and crew in Hero of big Asian names: Jet Li stars as Nameless, a soldier with a name, Donnie Yen of Iron Monkey and Shanghai Knights fame plays one of the assassins Sky, Tony Leung Chiu Wai plays one of the three assassins Broken Sword, Maggie Cheung plays another of the assassins Flying Snow; Broken Sword and Flying Snow are lovers. Zhang Ziyi, known for her role in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon plays Moon, a servant to Broken Sword and Flying Snow, and Daoming Chen plays the King of Qin.

Hero is the biggest grossing film ever in Chinese history and was released there in 2002 as Ying xiong. Hero is rated PG-13 and runs an hour and 36 minutes. I would wait until Hero comes out on home video if you have a decent sized TV. If not, go see it in theatre if you want to see a visual masterpiece.

I recently watched a documentary called “What the f%! Do We Know,” about Quantum Physics. One of the scientists in the movie said that sometimes when we see something we’ve never seen before, our mind doesn’t register it. This means that we don’t know what we’re seeing even if it’s right in front of us. This might explain why we can’t see ghosts. For centuries people have claimed to see ghosts and UFO’s all over the world.

Novia interviewed the Astronomer Carl Sagan, a skeptic of the existence of extraterrestrials. However, Sagan is very involved in trying to find life on other planets and find proof of aliens exist. Sagan states, “There is a claim that is sobering fact about the human spirit is that there is no such thing as a worth serious sustained attention?” Sagan means that no matter how extreme the reports are, we need to investigate further and can claim them as true or not. I believe that most of the videos of UFO’s and ghosts on television are probably fake. However, I also believe that ghosts are real and that we are not alone in the universe. I say that we should stop looking for proof and accept the fact that there are things in this world that we won’t ever understand.

EuteroLOGY, 1994

BY JAKE PALADINI

Note: This poem was inspired by Kurt Cobain lyrics…I know it’s cliché but fug it.

My Misery Secretly eats at me
Beat me out of me down with me
Die with me Buy this Heat I’m a Senseless Apprentice
I’m not a Saint I’m a Brute
I'm a Brute who’s restlessness
The Stress is relentless my 357
Die with me Buy this Heat

My Obnoxious Subconscious pops thoughts an talks this
Non Stop
Propostrosous Nonsense

The Mask

KYLE P.

March 1, 2004

To you he seems like a happy guy. He has a date. He has some friends. Sure he has some problems but, doesn’t everybody? If only you could see beneath the mask to the pain and hurt he feels. If you knew who he really is you would know a weak fragile little boy caught in the pains of love and loss. He’s too scared to love again, but you would know a weak fragile little boy caught in the pains of love and loss. He’s too scared to love again, but too alone not to face. He faces memories nobody should ever have. Lately he cries himself to sleep. His losses are more than his gains. He loses his family and gains a pack of cigarettes. His world is black, yet still he laughs and smiles. When you ask him why he’s doing he forces himself not to cry. Every day he dies a little more. Next time you look at him see past the mask and into the eyes of a scared boy, don’t see the happy freshman you think you know. He doesn’t want your pity; he only wants your understanding. I know his feelings because I am him, so please, next time you see me, look beyond the mask.