

Mockingbird Times

Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth



September 2004

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

Volume IV, Issue 9

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

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Check out Our Exciting Bonus Articles Section Online at mockingbirdsociety.org

Nation's Youth Are Rockin' The Vote

HOLLIS RIGGINS



THINK TEENAGERS ARE TOO SELF-ABSORBED TO CARE ABOUT POLITICS? Think again. According to *Newsweek Magazine*, a group of eager, politically-aware Berkeley teens recently organized a campaign to lower the legal voting age to 16. These high school students claim they are just as informed about politics as adults, that state politicians and policy decisions directly impact them and that their opinions are no less important than the opinions of 18-year-olds. While California senators debate an amendment proposal to count votes cast by 16 and 17-year-olds as half a vote, the teens' determined efforts reflect the increasing importance of young people as a voting constituency.

After Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently announced that he hopes to reduce education spending by \$2 billion, in part by raising community college fees by 44 percent, high-school and college students all over Berkeley have become more aware of how politicians can affect their lives directly.

Now more than ever students understand the importance of being able to voice their opinions on both statewide and national budget and political issues. As local school districts have begun closing a handful of public schools because of large funding cuts, young people are witnessing firsthand how political agendas can directly affect lives. Recently I conducted a survey of what people under 25 across Seattle think about voting. I discovered that many students value their right to vote and are eager to cast their ballots for measures and politicians who support their values and are attentive to their concerns.



Students are also beginning to see how their numbers can affect the outcome of important elections. Lately, students have begun to hold forums on campuses across the United States. They are also holding numerous campus demonstrations and teach-ins to keep other young people informed about the issues as well as to help classmates register and convince other students to vote (www.msnbc.com).

In this year's presidential election, the "under 25" population can have as much of an impact on the national election as students in California have had in recent elections. According to 2000 Census numbers however, only 32 percent of 18 to 25-year-olds voted in the last presidential race.

If young people were historically a more active voting constituency, Kerry and Bush would spend more time explaining what they plan to do with education spending, an issue that is more important to young people than to the older segment of the population. The candidates would also be spending more time actively campaigning to young people, interacting with them on their turf and gaining more exposure to their lives and concerns.

Young voters should do their own homework, too. They can spend more time learning about how health care, national security, voting and the economy may affect their own lives. Some websites to check out include www.rockthevote.com, www.bigvote.org, www.youthvote.com, and www.stateofthevote.org.

Young people are taking themselves seriously as full-fledged voters and understanding the significance of exercising their right to vote. Many recognize that those who came before protested and marched to be heard. Now, when asked why they vote, many will answer, "If I don't vote, then who will?"

Caseworker Training Crucial to Prevent Tragedy

DARIUS REYNOLDS



CASEWORKERS PLAY A VERY INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM and family services. If things aren't going well in the family, the caseworker can be there to give advice and try to keep things from getting worse. Most importantly, they can make sure the child's needs are being met, especially babies and toddlers who can't speak for themselves.

If caseworkers check in with youth regularly, it can prevent a little incident from turning into something big, like avoiding a new placement. The problem could be solved just by the caseworker, the youth and the parent sitting down and talking. While there are a lot of great, well-trained caseworkers, there are many caseworkers who are overloaded with cases and have little to no training.

Some caseworkers are hired and put to work with hardly any training at all. This can have a devastating effect. The 2003 Rafael Gomez tragedy is a good example of what could have been avoided if there had been effective caseworker involvement. Two-year-old Rafael Gomez was a victim of a negligent system. On September 9, 2003, Rafael was admitted into Columbia Basin Hospital for head trauma. He died the next day. Mrs. Gomez claimed that Rafael had hit his head on a tile floor multiple times.

Rafael's foster mother Denise Griffith had filed numerous reports of abuse when Rafael was returned to her with bruises after visiting his

biological parents. According to Rafael's Fatality Review, Rafael's caseworker did not document or report visible signs of abuse. The caseworker allowed him to be returned to his parents despite these signs, and despite knowing that the parents had a history of drug abuse and Mrs. Gomez had a history of mental illness. According to the Fatality Review, "the department failed to enforce and ensure that policies were followed, that social workers were trained on best practice, which was then properly resourced and applied and that child safety was the priority."

The report also states that this case had little to do with workload, that the incident was caused by lack of proper procedure and training. Rafael's social worker had no prior experience with this kind of case and was given inadequate supervision and no training. The report goes on to say that the caseworker withheld important information from the review board.

This is a strong example of why it is so important to have trained caseworkers involved in system kids' lives and for the people in charge of the caseworkers to be more involved in what the caseworkers are doing. There are a lot of caseworkers who really care about their job and the youth, but they are overloaded with cases in addition to not getting the training they need to do their job efficiently.

In order to prevent tragedies like what happened to Rafael Gomez we need more caseworkers and more money for training. Caseworkers are part of a system. In order for a system to work, everybody has to do their part.

Check out Rafael Gomez' Fatality Review and Washington State's proposal to improve our foster care system online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS



I would like to thank everyone who helped make our **Third Anniversary Open House Event** a success! Those of you who attended have given us wonderful feedback on the young people who spoke at the event and what a tremendous job they did. **Mockingbird Times Reporter Princess Hollins** and I moderated the program. Reporters **Darius Reynolds, Echo Speed and Hollis Riggins** spoke about their experience with Mockingbird for the audience. Many of our reporters also helped out behind the scenes. We have a great group of young people—thanks for helping to make this event so meaningful!

A special thank you to **Aleta Kennedy** and **Denise Redinger** who did a superb job co-chairing the event. Volunteer **Anna Trombley** created an excellent PowerPoint presentation that enhanced our program—thanks Anna! I also want to thank **Stephen Glover** from Starbucks on MLK Way and **Jim Wire** from the **Bellevue Village QFC** for their donations of coffee and cake. A very special thank-you goes out to **Marilyn and Peter Limberopoulos** of the **Rusty Pelican** who donated food and desserts for 100 people. Many thanks to **Lisa Revelle**

who provided much needed support and guidance for the event.

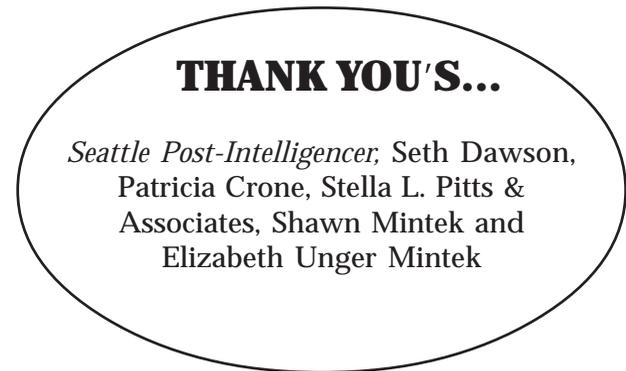
I also want to take this opportunity to thank guest speakers **Supreme Court Justice Bobbe Bridge, Dr. Margaret McKenna** from the Northwest Institute for Children and Families, **Degale Cooper**, licensed foster parent, **Clif Jackson**, kinship parent and Executive Director of Children Services Northwest—all of whom spoke to the success of the **Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project (M-FFCP)**.

You may recall that the M-FFCP is a pilot project demonstrating an innovative foster/kinship care service delivery model designed to stabilize children and reduce multiple placements, allow siblings to remain together, provide urgent and planned respite care to participating families and be culturally relevant to families and kids. I'm pleased to report that since the M-FFCP began, there have been no placement disruptions, families have received 1,071 hours of respite care and several children have improved their academic performance. What is truly rewarding and exciting is hearing the foster parents, Grandmas, Aunties and Uncles report their response to the model which seems to be unanimously positive. We have indeed developed a "micro-community" among the participating families and it continues to grow, as do the children—which is the true bottom line!

I also want to close by thanking a couple other young people who have had a very positive impact on Mockingbird. **Hollis Riggins** and **Shakura Felder** came to Mockingbird at the beginning of the summer through the **Seattle Youth Employment Program**. During their

time here they have added so much to our efforts and I want to thank them both as well as offer an open invitation to stay involved. I also want to thank **Kirsten Hansen**, our #1 volunteer here at Mockingbird! Kirsten spent a fair amount of her summer vacation assisting us at Mockingbird with a number of projects, including organizing a resource library for youth reporters. Finally, this issue is very exciting because it marks the first issue that *Mockingbird Times* will be an insert in the *Seattle Star*. Next month we will also be an insert in the *Seattle Sun*. This gives the *Mockingbird Times* a monthly circulation of over 60,000 copies distributed throughout Seattle/King County, across Washington and to every state in the nation. I want to thank the good folks at the *Seattle Star* for their willingness to try this partnership. I also want to invite the readers of the *Seattle Star* to read the *Mockingbird Times* and let us know what you think!

Jim Theofelis
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Mockingbird Celebrates Third Year



Satellite Reporter Hollis Riggins and family.



Satellite Reporter Ashley Grant and young guest.



Satellite Reporter Princess Hollins' family.

All photos By Rico Evans. Check out our photo gallery online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org for more photos by Rico from our Anniversary Event.

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 involved in homelessness and 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 28,000 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. 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.

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A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox: Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth.

I want to support The Mockingbird Society

Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the *Mockingbird Times*. Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: \$ _____

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\$150 a year for 20-45 copies per month	\$200 a year for 50-100 copies per month

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Giving Back Through AmeriCorps

SHAY DENEY



WHEN I LEFT MOCKINGBIRD TO START AMERICORPS, I DIDN'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS MOVE WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE.

AmeriCorps is a national program that hires more than 40,000 people each year to do service for America. AmeriCorps volunteers work as close to home as in their own communities or as far away as across the country in many different types of programs.

My job is at the YWCA's The Working Zone in Seattle. We help homeless youth learn employment skills such as resume and cover letter completion. We also help with job applications, and teach good interview skills. We also have four different programs where youth can work for up to three months to earn money and to gain job experience. My job at The Working Zone is to be a Youth Leader. This means that I go from program to program and develop relationships with the youth. I help them with job searches, resumes, cover letters, and anything else they might need, including just talking about things. A lot of the youth that I work with know me from when I was on the streets myself. It makes me feel more comfortable when doing my job. I already have an established relationship with many of our youth so that's one less barrier I have to hurdle.

A year ago when I learned that I was accepted into the AmeriCorps program, I didn't know what to expect. Back then I couldn't imagine myself working 40 hours a week, not to mention eight hours a day! But soon I found that if you enjoy what you do, then it really doesn't feel like work at all.

The first week of AmeriCorps I went through a one week orientation, starting at 9AM all the way until 5PM Monday through Friday. Once again, I was not ready for this, but after a few days I realized that I really could do it. That was one of the first lessons I learned in AmeriCorps. The lesson was not to doubt yourself because whatever you want to do, you can do it. You just have to find your endurance and your passion.

Being in AmeriCorps is also really fun! On the very first day I made a lot of friends and my assumption that we just sat there all day long in meetings was wrong. We did fun things like making personal posters and playing "getting-to-know-each-other" games and participating in team building activities. AmeriCorps is not just all fun and games though. It can be quite hectic at times when you start doing more with your site and your AmeriCorps group.

The best part is that I am making a difference in my community. As my year is winding down with AmeriCorps, I feel that I have gained so much experience that I am ready for anything that life throws my way. I've made the decision to stay with AmeriCorps and my site another year. This, in turn, will give me even more work experience and almost \$10,000 towards college. When you successfully complete a year of service, AmeriCorps awards you with \$4,725 for college expenses. Since my goal is to get my PhD in Marine Biology, this is a good deal for me and well worth my time.

For anyone interested in working for AmeriCorps, I strongly recommend it. It truly is an experience of a lifetime.

Check out Shay's tips on how to get involved with AmeriCorps online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org and the AmeriCorps website, www.americorps.org.

Lambert House An Oasis For Queer Youth and Adults

MISTY COOK

For the queer (someone who identifies as gay, bisexual, lesbian, two-spirited, transgender and/or questioning) homeless youth, the Lambert House serves as an oasis and safe zone. For the queer adult volunteer, this homeless youth drop-in center provides inspiration, hope and insight into the lives and struggles of homeless and queer teenagers. The Lambert House has been helping both the community and the individual for over a decade.

I FIRST HEARD ABOUT LAMBERT HOUSE WHEN I WAS 15 YEARS OLD AND DESPERATE FOR A SENSE OF COMMUNITY. Like so many youth, I had traveled from my hometown to Seattle's Capitol Hill after coming out to my own community as being queer. I came to Seattle by hitchhiking and had no home, money, shelter or transportation. Like so many other queer youth before me, I was risking everything just so I wouldn't have to feel like the only queer youth on Planet Earth.

Being homeless in Seattle was scary. It wasn't until my very first Seattle Queer Pride Parade Weekend in the summer of 2000 that I was introduced to Lambert House. Lambert House provides numerous essential services to queer youth both on and off the streets, including free food, hygiene products, helpful shelter/resource information and mentoring/discussion groups, and, of course, other queer youth and queer adult volunteers who are there to listen and have a good time! These friendships are the most valuable, memorable and important resources for a queer street kid like me.

Nearly 40% of youth on the streets are queer and this is no coincidence. Some youth are fleeing from domestic violence, some are escaping from being ignored and silenced and some are kicked out into the streets for being queer. Even youth who are living in "nice" homes feel like they need other queer youth friends, and/or queer adults to teach them their history and give them advice. Older queer people have experienced a lot of what queer youth are going through today. When you're a youth and just finally coming out as who you truly are, finding a mentor to relate to is like finding an oasis in a desert.

Regardless of age, race, gender or background, youth at Lambert House experience an incredible sense of community and acceptance. Unfortunately, queer and homeless youth may not have this oasis and safe zone for much longer due to budget cuts to essential homeless youth services here in Seattle. Thanks to Bush's tax cuts to the rich at the expense of social, health and educational services to the poor, the queer youth of this city may be having a draught in essential human services that they haven't experienced in years.

I went to the Lambert House on a Monday afternoon awhile back and talked with some of the youth and volunteers who occupy the big house on the corner of 15th Avenue East and East Denny on Capitol Hill. I asked them what the Lambert House meant to them and their community. Below are some of the responses, quotes and conversations that followed my questioning.

Shelby, a 16 year old queer youth, comes to the Lambert House often and I asked her how the Lambert House is different from other drop-in centers. She said, "It's a lot friendlier. It's like a family and there's always someone to hang out with or talk to." I asked her why she became homeless and she said "because I couldn't deal with living with my dad."

Mary D. has been volunteering at the Lambert House for over 10 years now and many of the youth know her from her dinners that she cooks every Monday with the help of her partner, Mary Anne. Mary D. came out as queer in 1992 and recently had her 65th birthday. She had just finished cooking dinner for some youth on Monday when I asked her why she volunteers at the Lambert House. Mary said, "I had just come out in 1992 and this was the place that I found and that found me." She also said, "I love the youth. I love being with them. They give me a lot of hope and show me courage."

If you want to find out more about the Lambert House or if you want to volunteer go to www.lamberthouse.org. Be sure to look for more interviews with the Lambert House Community in next month's issue of the Mockingbird Times!

College Access Limited for Transfer Students

SHAKURA FELDER



NOT EVERY COLLEGE STUDENT HAS ENOUGH MONEY TO PAY FOR COLLEGE when they graduate from high school. In fact, many high school students plan on going to a community college for their first two years and transferring to a university to graduate with a four-year degree. Did you know that a bulk of University of Washington students are transfer students from community colleges, like Seattle Central Community College?

Picture yourself as a student from Seattle Central Community College. You expect to transfer to the University of Washington for the following fall quarter to complete your degree. You have what it takes to get in: determination, good grades, strong standards, and you work hard for success. You always dreamed of going to a big University one day. All of a sudden your world falls apart. CRASH!

You find out that the UW is limiting applications from community college students and that many applications will not be considered until the spring or summer quarters of the year 2005. This seems like a long time to wait. You can't afford other options, as most other schools are private and more expensive.

Should your dreams be put on hold at your expense? How would you feel and what would you do?

The University of Washington has less space for transfer students this year, and it looks even worse in the coming years. Because the university is not considering applications until spring or summer quarter of 2005, there will be a lot of competition for students trying to enroll in the near future. One reason is that there isn't enough space at the university. The university reports that if the state does not pay more per student, the school will not be able to increase enrollment for the upcoming 2005-2007 school years.

According to the University of Washington's Board of Regents, the state has provided less per student nearly every year since 1991. For example, the state was paying \$9,093 per student in 1991, and by 2003, provisions had decreased to \$8,866 per student. Unfortunately, there is a prediction that the 2005 state budget will be at a deficit of about 1.1 billion dollars. The UW has a commitment to set aside 30 percent of enrollment for community college transfer students with at least a 2.75 grade point average (www.seattlepi.com).

Is it fair that transfer students with good grades, students who maybe cannot afford to pay for the first two years of college at a university, should have to wait to get in just because of overcrowding? These are qualified students who deserve an admission to the university of their choice.

The Seattle branch of the University of Washington isn't the only school limiting the admission of these hopeful students. In fact, the UW Bothell and the UW Tacoma will also be limiting applications in the fall.

Education is just as important to community college students as it is for university students. Community colleges can be less intimidating for incoming freshmen. Compared to the massive class sizes that universities offer, Community Colleges offer smaller classroom sizes that let students have more contact with professors/instructors. Community Colleges are more flexible for students with jobs and families than the standard university. You can access the same knowledge that you would at a university for less dollars. It's unfair that the school is cutting off the education of non-university students.

Medicaid Change Provokes Mental Health Crisis

COURTNEY KONIETZKO



WE ARE IN A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS. People are going to fall through the cracks of the supposed safety net because mental health services are being yanked out from underneath their feet. A federal mandate imposed by the Bush Administration for January 1, 2005 will affect many low-income people who are not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid (the state's main health insurance program), but not rich enough to afford counseling and medications.

Low-income people are losing their mental health care, not because of budget cuts to Medicaid, but because the federal government is now enforcing a rule that's been there all along but has never been seriously enforced. The rule is that Medicaid money can only be used for Medicaid patients.

Providers are now being forced to comply with stricter rules concerning who gets mental health care and who doesn't under medicaid funding. Seth Dawson, Contact Lobbyist working for mental health and homeless issues in Seattle, states, "What this means is that people with mental illness not on Medicaid who used to be treated through Medicaid dollars will no longer be treated unless the state either provides supplemental funding for this population or widens Medicaid eligibility."

COST-SHIFTING COMPARISONS BASED ON STATE AVERAGES:	
•AVERAGE PER PERSON ANNUAL COST OF OUTPATIENT COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE:	\$1,132
•AVERAGE ANNUAL COST OF INCARCERATING A MENTALLY ILL PERSON IN COUNTY JAIL:	\$21,170
•AVERAGE FIVE DAY ADMISSION AT AN INPATIENT PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL:	\$3,210

-WWW.COMPASSHEALTH.ORG

Even if these people have jobs that offer insurance, mental health care is not given the same priority as physical health care by insurance companies. Clients are forced to pay many costs out of pocket, struggle with high co-pays, and/or make the choice between paying for medications and paying for food and bills. Some people may stop taking their medications and going to counseling because it is too expensive.

This mandate could have drastic consequences. It seems much more cost effective in the long run to give people the help they need, like medications and outpatient counseling, rather than wait for things to reach a crisis point. With nowhere to turn, people can wind up homeless, living in worse poverty back on Medicaid, clogging the jails and emergency rooms, jobless, living with a diminished quality of life, and at worst suicidal or

dead. Seth Dawson confirmed these consequences when asked if there were other options for mental health treatment for the uninsured working poor. He stated that there are "little or none, at least until they become clients of the emergency rooms or criminal justice systems - which will provide treatment in more expensive, crisis modes."

President Bush has stated that the federal government is cracking down on the rule of Medicaid dollars only being spent for Medicaid patients to make sure that "the taxpayer's dollar is being well spent." In the long run this is going to cost the taxpayers more because crisis services are more expensive.

Dawson said that if you want to advocate for mental health services, "lobby your legislators to create and allocate state funding to offset the redirected Medicaid dollars."



POETRY CORNER

Alone

CHELSI DONALDSON

Sitting here alone,
I don't know what to do,
My life without you is so boring,
My life without you is so plain.
Life with you is always changing.
It's filled with hopes and dreams.
Never a day to sit alone
And ponder such ideas.
Once we sat alone,
Twice we sat together,
Thrice we looked over a beach.
Then we lost track of time.
Don't know what to do without you,
Guess I'll sit here, without you.
Guess I'll never know the truth.
Did you love me as much as I loved you?



Mockingbird Recommends Stories of Survival

Somebody's Someone Illuminates A Child's Need to be Loved

ANTHONY GUESS



THIS STRAIGHTFORWARD, SINCERE STORY OF A NEGLECTED CHILD who tries to fulfill her wish to be a wanted and special child, will make you cry a thousand rain drops. In her memoir, *Somebody's Someone*, Regina Louise tells the story of her complex life growing up in Texas with a vague grandmother, "Big Mama," whose house is full of other people's children. In this house, Regina is abused by her "siblings". She has an older sister named Doretha who always tells Regina that mom is nothing and that she never is coming to get them. Telling a child that, knowing that she wakes up every morning to look at the window, hoping that her mom will come lurking out from the shadows to rescue them, is disheartening.

After a brutal beating with a garden hose, Regina runs away to her well-meaning but ineffectual grandmother on her dad's side. But things don't work out as she had hoped. So Regina decides to go back home. At the age of eleven, Regina's life time dream briefly comes true, when she is sent on a bus by herself to North Carolina to live with her mother, Ruby. Her time with Ruby seems hopeful. Finally, Regina finds what she had been missing her entire life—to be special and loved.

As the story continues, Regina's sister Doretha comes to live with them. Things fall apart as Ruby's boyfriend moves in and makes sexual passes at the girls. Doretha

gets so tired of it that she tells her school counselor. The counselor comes by the house, but at the wrong time. Ruby is defensive and stubborn and hits Doretha upside the head, and then turns around to hit the counselor. After that escapade Ruby gets meaner and yells at Regina, calling her bad names and saying she was trying to be grown. One day, while Ruby is at work, her boyfriend tries to touch Regina's chest. At first she isn't going to tell her mom. When she does, she is sent to California to live with her dad. Her time with her father is unsuccessful because he is never there and she barely even knows him. During this awkward time in her life, Regina learns how to steal from stores and smoke cigarettes. When Regina is sent to a shelter because of her behavior, she finds what seems like a four leaf clover. A staff member named Ms. Claire opens her heart and love pours into Regina's insides. Every time Ms. Clair says something, she is sure to say "honey" or "dear" afterwards. Ms. Claire tells Regina that she is the cutest little girl. The need for love is finally restored in Regina's life.

"The white lady from the Church of the Nazarene told me that whenever somebody committed a cruel act against one of God's children, their guardian angel would run and tell him, and he would cry for their pain — that's where raindrops come from."
— Regina Louise

This memoir provided insight into an experience many of us are uncomfortable imagining, much less acknowledging that it exists. Sure kids are kids, but they're also human and desire the same amount of love and attention as anyone else, especially growing up without mom or dad around. I don't personally think that Regina would write a feel-good or happy ending book for readers to walk away from unaffected. I recommend this to a reader who has an open heart and mind.

Resilience in the Face of Abuse Expressed in *Falling Leaves*

J. EBOH



ADELIN YEN MAH WAS BORN INTO A WEALTHY CHINESE FAMILY in the late 1930's. Mah's family's wealth allowed her to experience many privileges that were unheard of at the time for most Chinese children, especially girls. During this time period in China, girls were viewed as worthless. It wasn't an uncommon sight to see female infants' bodies wrapped in newspaper scattered along the street sides. To the stranger's eye Mah was a very lucky girl. In reality, the wealth of her family could do nothing to protect young Mah and her five brothers and sisters from the horrific abuse they would endure at the hands of their stepmother when their father remarried. After an initial tranquil period, Mah's stepmother becomes determined to become the most powerful member of the Yen household. She uses emotional and physical abuse tactics to try to divide the children up so that they don't band together and resist her. She continues to rule over her stepchildren until the day she dies. And so follows the story of a little girl determined not to let her spirit die despite horrific odds.

Falling Leaves is a heartbreaking memoir. Mah tells her story with a courageous and confident voice. She possesses the strength to tell her story truthfully, boldly defying the cultural restraints she was taught as a child. By the time I finished this book, I felt like Mah had invited me into her wounded yet triumphant heart.

I highly recommend this book for everyone, young or old, who has survived abuse and is wondering what they can do with the rest of their life.