

Mockingbird Times



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

March 2006

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

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Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

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Washington Supports Foster Youth



JAMICA
HENDERSON

Thanks to the literally hundreds of supporters and advocates from across Washington State, the Foster Youth Achievement Act House Bill 2002 has made it through all its numerous legislative steps and is now waiting for Governor Gregoire's signature. House Bill 2002 allows young adults in foster care to still have a home with their foster parents until the age of 21 if they enroll in higher education. This bill will help support those who are not ready to be on their own yet, while preparing for their future goals.

Although many youth who had aged out of foster care wished HB 2002 could have taken effect a little sooner, they still worked hard and helped support the efforts by providing testimony, attending Advocacy Day, and talking to their legislators. With the help of these young adults and their willingness to share their stories of aging out, HB 2002 has

been passed 97-1 in the House and 45-0 in the Senate and now is in the Governor's hands.

House Bill 2002 gives Washington state the authority to allow up to fifty youth reaching age eighteen to continue in foster care or group care (as needed) to participate in or complete a post-high school academic or vocational program, and to receive necessary support and transition services. In 2008 and 2009, the state has the authority to allow up to fifty additional youth per year reaching age eighteen to remain in foster care. In order to stay eligible the young adult must remain in school with a 2.0 GPA or higher.

We are all very excited about the passing of the bill and know that things will change for the better from this point on for kids in care. On behalf of Mockingbird Society we would like to give thanks to: Representative's Dickerson, Roberts, Kagi, Kenney, Santos, Chopp. Also, Senators Regala, Hargrove, Prentice, Stevens, Brandland, Thibaudeau, Kohl-Welles and so many others. We also want to thank all those who volunteered their time, and those who just never gave up. For more information on House Bill 2002 you can visit: www.leg.wa.gov or www.mockingbirdsociety.org.



Cassandra, Anthony, Misty, Courtney, and Najja in front of the State Capitol on MLK Day to testify on behalf of HB 2002

The Braam Settlement



MISTY
LOU COOK

A lot of young people in the foster care system live a life of constant change, always moving, always searching for their place, their community, a sense of family and belonging. Many of these young people have been moved from foster "home" to foster "home", experiencing neglect, abuse and sometimes even worse. I have friends, here at the *Mockingbird Times* and elsewhere, that have been through over 10, 15 and even 20 different foster "home" placements. What these children and young people need is community, support and a home fostered from love and guidance. What these young people get is insufficient and underpaid case workers, a negligent State parent and policies that cut young people off from medical insurance, housing and food money as soon as they turn 18 years old(1). The Braam Settlement is supposed to change this.

I had heard a lot of conversations about this very large Class Action Lawsuit called the "Braam Settlement". A Class Action Lawsuit is an "action where an individual represents a group in a court claim. The judgment from the suit is for all the members of the group (class)." (2) In this case, the main named plaintiff representing the group is an individual by the name of Jessica Braam. Braam had lived through 34 different foster care placements by the time a lawsuit was filed on behalf of her, at age 12, in 1998. Because *the class consisted of all foster children who had been in or were at risk of being in three or more placements*, Braam and the other named plaintiffs came to represent

all of the children in the WA State foster care system. **In other words, they came to represent at least 8,000 foster care youth here in WA State (3).** Braam sued the State of Washington, because she believed that she was harmed by WA State's foster care system, and she won. After six years of courts, lawyers and emotional testimonies, the State of WA is finally promising justice for foster care youth! Not only are they promising to reform the foster care system here in WA State, they are morally and legally obligated to improve the child welfare system because of the Braam Settlement.

The ultimate goal of this Class Action Lawsuit was to improve WA State's foster care system, and the Settlement, approved by the court, ordered the State of WA to improve its foster care system, focusing on six essential "areas" agreed upon during the Settlement. The six areas of necessary improvement are: "Stable Placements, Mental Health Services, Foster Parent Training and Support, Unsafe or inappropriate placements, Separation of siblings when placed in out-of-home care and Services for adolescents (4). The Settlement created a Braam Oversight Panel, which is important and necessary for the Braam Settlement to be effective, and which is working with WA State, WA State's DSHS, the plaintiffs and stakeholders on reforming WA State's Foster Care System.

The Braam Oversight Panel consists of five members, each a specialist that was mutually agreed upon by the State of WA and the plaintiffs. The Braam Oversight Panel has deadlines for foster care reform here in WA State, and they will be responsible for ensuring that the necessary improvements are made, in the six essential areas mentioned previously, over the next seven years (started in 2004).

The panel will issue Monitor Reports every six months until the Settlement is over June 31st, 2011. If you would like to be updated

about the progress of the panel, join the list-serve or recommend a foster care reform solution, such as implementing the Mockingbird Family Model, the Braam Oversight Panel "actively solicits comments from the public and organizations regarding its recommendations and reports" (5). You can join the Braam Oversight Panel listserve by going to <http://listserv.wa.gov/archives/braam-panel.html> or call for copies of the reports at (360) 586-2768. You can check out updates about the Braam Settlement at www.mockingbirdsociety.org, www.braamkids.org or go to www.braampanel.org for more information. Advocate your ideas on how to improve the foster care system.

It is important to remember that these young people are counting on us to improve this system. They need good homes and families, and we are responsible for creating a healthy, loving environment for them to grow and thrive in. These young people did not ask to become part of the foster care system, they did not ask for hardships, and many of them are dealing with issues of abuse and neglect. We need to help them heal, not punish them for being hurt. We need to fix the child welfare and foster care system, for the health, well-being and future of all of our children.

"For these are all our children. We will all profit by - or pay for - whatever they become."
~ James Baldwin

- (1) <http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/pdf/jan06.pdf>
- (2) <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=class%20action>
- (3) <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/2004perfm.asp>
- (4) <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/braampanel/>
- (5) <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/braampanel/publiccomment.asp>

Letter from the Editor

JIM
THEOFELIS



"Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth" is the mission statement that drives our work at Mockingbird Society. We strive to integrate our direct services work with youth into our advocacy and system reform efforts. As we look forward to celebrating Mockingbird Society's 5th Anniversary at our Annual Event on March 30th, we are joining so many others from across Washington in also celebrating the passage of HB 2002 - The Foster Youth Achievement Act. HB 2002 was passed by the 2006 Washington State Legislature, and needs only Governor Gregoire's signature to become law. Then Washington State will join a small number of states across this country that extend foster care services to youth beyond age 18. Prior to HB 2002, youth who earned a high school diploma or GED and turned 18 became immediately ineligible for foster care. This frequently resulted in homelessness, early parenting, incarceration and the loss of young dreams and lives. Because of the great work of so many youth, foster parents, social service advocates, private citizens, and of course, legislative champions, youth in Washington will now have the option

of voluntarily remaining in foster care and retaining their housing and health insurance while pursuing education after age 18. An evaluation will be conducted to measure the outcomes for youth who remain in foster care through HB 2002. I believe this evaluation will demonstrate what the national data has shown: those youth who continue to receive emotional and tangible supports such as housing and healthcare have outcomes that are significantly more positive for them personally and society as a whole. I would like to thank all of the legislators across Washington who, in a truly bipartisan style, supported HB 2002 and the foster children and youth this landmark legislation will serve. **Representative Mary Lou Dickerson** deserves special acknowledgement for her willingness to lead this effort, starting work on this bill during the 2005 legislative session. **Senator Debbie Regala** also deserves special recognition for leading the support of HB 2002 in the Senate. Finally, I also want to express my appreciation to all the members of the **ASK-Y** (Advocates for System Kids and Youth) Coalition for their dedication and perseverance during this amazing campaign. **Because of all of you, Washington truly is one step closer to building a world class foster care system and our most vulnerable children and youth deserve no less!**

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Mockingbird Society invites you to join us for our 5th Annual Fundraiser and Premier of the documentary, A Place to Sing, a film about Mockingbird Society's innovative approaches to youth development, public education and foster care reform on behalf of our nation's most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Thursday, March 30

6-7:30 Silent Auction, Wine, Hors d'oeuvres
7:40-8:30 Film Premier and Program
8:30-9 Dessert and Coffee

At the Broadway Performance Hall

1625 Broadway (and Pine)
Seattle, Washington 98122

Tickets \$35, may be purchased in advance and at the door.

Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, 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.

The Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas presents **Which Way Seattle? Series** **African-Americans & Foster Care**

Featuring **Maleka Taylor of Mockingbird Society**

Thursday, March 16, 2006 at 7pm
Ethnic Cultural Theatre (University of Washington)
3940 Brooklyn Ave. NE (Near 40th Ave. NE)

Ticket prices are \$7 for adults and \$5 for CD Forum members/students/seniors. Tickets can be purchased through Brown Paper Tickets at www.cdforum.org or call 1-800-838-3006.

For more information, contact Denee McCloud or Rahwa Habte at 206-323-4032 or info@cdforum.org

This program was made possible by a grant from the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative. Special Thanks: The Seattle Channel and University of Washington School of Social Work. The 2005-2006 Season is generously sponsored by the Fales Foundation Trust, Boeing and Microsoft.

David Eiffert' Lisa Taylor; Roberta L. Blayney; Margaret-Ann and Mark LeRoy; Nancy Nelp and Douglas Steers; John Reinke; Shawn and Elizabeth Ungar Mintek; Leila Anasazi; Richard and Anne Dodd Beishline; Anne McBride; Lewis and Gloria Garling; Carol Collins; Elizabeth Farmer and Thomas Phillips; Nancy LeVine; John and Janet Morse; Susan Connolly; Laurie K. Lemay

Thanks to everyone who helped with the food for Youth Advocacy Day! Sarah Benton and Friends of Youth, Jessie Forsythe, Marlon Hamilton, and Victoria Curry.

Thank You's

MEET OUR STAFF

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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 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 \$7.63 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 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A, 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 2006 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and 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: \$ _____

Suggested Donations:

\$ 1,000+..... Protector \$500-999..... Caretaker \$250-500..... Organizations \$50+..... Supporter \$25..... Foster Parent

NAME _____ EMAIL _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 240, Seattle WA 98144, or donate online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

- Please bill me for the amount indicated.
- My employer will match my gift; enclosed is my matching gift form.
- I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.
- Please do not include my name on published donor lists.

Gay Civil Rights Bill

JAXX

It all started for Ed Murray (D) Seattle, after he lost a close friend and co-worker in 1995 due to complications to AIDS. Before Cal Anderson passed, he asked Murray to take control over the Gay Civil Rights Bill, which states that gays and lesbians are added to the protection of the state discrimination laws, covering housing, employment, and insurance. The state's Human Rights Commission will enforce the measure, and it responds to complaints involving age, race, gender, and disability.

As ten years times pass, Murray has still been the "openly gay" legislator, fighting for gay rights. As a GLBTQ activist myself, I whole-heartedly support his decisions and actions to make it so GLBTQ people are seen as humans and individuals in the public eye. It's been a hard and long fight, but the battle can be put to rest, because of a long awaited decision has been made. Governor Christine Gregoire signed the Gay Civil-Rights Bill into law Tuesday, January 31st, 2006.

Many changes have been made since this year has begun and now GLBTQ people of Greater Seattle, and across the nation are what they always have been (but nobody seemed to notice) -humans. We can thank Ed Murray and team members for making this- what seemed an impossible reality, possible.

As members of the GLBTQ community now go and seek jobs, housing, financial aid, no company or individual of a company has the right to turn them away because of their sexual orientation.

Did you know that in the court system, when people were testifying at hearings it was "okay" to verbally bash gays and lesbians, describing them as sick and depraved? Neither did I. OR that gays and lesbians were categorized with pedophilia and child molesters? Now that is sick and depraved.

On an undetermined talk radio show, a disc jockey said that gays and lesbians score lower on SAT scores because of their sexual orientation. Murray respond-

ed with the following statement in an interview, "Well, that's what discrimination sounds like. That's what bigotry feels like. But not one of you on the other side of the aisle stood up and separated yourself from that discrimination. Not one of you opposed the stereotypes and slander against gays and lesbians in [this state] Washington." Harsh reality? No.

Why should we become scared of out fellow persons? Could we not stand up for what we believe in because of fear, pressure, and humiliation? Are we so inclined in keeping our sexuality a secret that we let people discriminate against us? If you have it in you that you don't want this kind of treatment any longer, stand up for yourself and say something. Ed Murry, I speak on the behalf of those who have not found their voices, and say, "We all congratulate you!"

We can finally make it right for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queers, to walk among society and not be discriminated against.



Jaxx gets the opportunity to meet Rep. Ed Murray at Advocacy Day 2006 in Olympia

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Mockingbird Editorial Staff and will be opened by Editorial Staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by Mockingbird Editorial Staff.

Fatherhood

ANTHONY
GUESS



One evening, I was watching Law and Order and just relaxing. I got a phone call from my girlfriend who told me that she was pregnant. My response was, "Are you sure?" She stated that she was. The following day we went to the hospital and sure enough it was so. A million thoughts and feelings rushed over me like a tsunami. The only thing that was clear to me was a conversation that my dad and I had. He told me that "a man, a real man shouldn't tell a woman to have an abortion." Knowing the choice wasn't mine, I knew that if she decided to keep the baby, my life would drastically change.

I couldn't hang out as much or have the choice of not going to work. Furthermore I had to change my attitude about life from "I don't care about anything" to "I have to do everything for my little angel." My girlfriend decided to keep it, and at the time I already had a job, but I went out and found another one and enrolled back in school. I felt like I had to create a new image for myself, one that was more suitable of new father. I simply had to transition from a boy in to a man. And in doing so, I got an apartment for my new family, and stopped talking to those who I felt weren't contributing to my new success. I want my daughter to grow up in a loving and accepting home so she can have good morals and self-respect. Unlike the home I grew up in. My mom and dad weren't there; I was raised (well watched) by the state until I "aged out."

I was blessed to see the birth of my child, and I started crying before she actu-

ally entered this complicated world. The feeling and connection that I had when I first held her is an indescribable emotion. I will never understand how a parent can ignore that one-on-one feeling that a child seeks from their mom and dad. I work for a non-profit organization whose model is, "building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth." Once being apart of the system, and now having my own child allows me to leave my job feeling like I accomplished something. Hundreds of kids enter the system every year and only half or less of them get to experience love and acceptance from a loving family. That bothers me and I'm glad that I have a chance to practice what I preach.

Although now it's nothing but crying, feeding, and changing pampers with my daughter (which is very stressful) I know it is only temporary. The long intensive wait for her first step and words

outweighs that feeling. Becoming a teen parent is in fact hard. For instance, a lot of your childhood dreams get put on hold, and your well-being is thought of last. But growing up in the foster care system is indeed a lot harder. One has no say so where he or she is placed. Instead of helping kids with problems that they have, agencies set out special accommodations and diagnose children as depressed, or other severe problems. Safety is their biggest priority, and I believe that kids in the system needs more than a pill, or a therapeutic session, they need something as simple as love. Unlike the American dream which defines wealth as, a big house or the fancy cars, or even the extensive amount of money in a bank account, I think I'm richer than most people because I can offer love and watch my family unfold beautifully like a fresh sunflower.

Hard Lessons

MALEKA
TAYLOR



At the age of 20, I am currently obtaining my GED (I have one more test to take which is writing). I am finding that life presents you with situations that you're sometimes unprepared for. I didn't think issues in my past would prevent me from moving forward with my goals. I am now having to face consequences for some decisions I made when I hit the streets after aging out.

Growing up in a home lacking support, friendship and just down right love, I found strength early. "Fend for yourself," was the mentality I developed. I moved to Seattle in 2003 and was a typical teenager, I thought. The only thing that was different in my case was that my father had passed away and I was in kinship care with my aunt. I enrolled myself in school and got a job pretty fast. Things were going good and I had everything "under control."

When I turned 18, I officially aged out of foster care and quickly realized I had nowhere to go. I found myself homeless in a city that I had only known for a year. Not knowing who to trust or where to go for services, I fell in with the wrong crowd. After talking to people and learning their backgrounds, I found out that some where in the same situation that I was in...homeless. I figured that they had been out there longer and they could teach me a thing or two. So I started hanging out with them. Without structures and/ or guidance, I looked up to the older girls that "knew the ropes" in hopes of learning a thing or two. The only thing that I learned was how to survive through illegal means.

Nine months after I aged out of foster-care I received a felony due to following these mislead individuals and I spent a total of 4 months incarcerated for possession.

With my never give up on yourself attitude I sought to correct my mistakes. During my time of reflection I felt it was important to further my education I attended every class I could to better myself. On February 20th 2006 I got on the computer to fill out the FASFA application.

I was extremely excited, I felt on top on the world until I got to background information. I answered everything honestly and waited. The computer took me to a page that said that I was ineligible, my heart dropped. I was made aware that people who have drug related felonies are not eligible. Now I have to jump through all these hoops to put myself through school. I could either wait for a year from the day of my conviction or I could go through drug rehab and would have to undergo random drug test and the treatment facility would have to be qualified for state or federal funds as well as what ever the treatment facility requires of you. After looking on the application once more I found that it states that "A federal law suspends federal student aid eligibility for students convicted under federal or state law for possession or sale of illegal drugs and students in default on a prior loan or those who are not making satisfactory academic progress as defined by the school." I then went back the application as a different person the results are still the same. I tried to type in a different felony but there was no section for any thing else but drug related felonies.

At this point I decided to contact NELA and South Seattle Community College financial aid representatives. They confirmed that people that were convicted of a drug felony were the only felons ineligible. After asking why is it that only people convicted of possessing drugs were targeted, the answer I received was that congress wanted to prevent convicted drug offenders from receiving federal money as a way of fighting the use and distribution of illegal drugs. I can't help but think that there is a whole group of people being targeted by this law. I feel that it discriminates against people of poor backgrounds and people of color, knowing that they are disproportionately represented in this class of felonies across the country.

Although there are ways to get around, this problem it is very discouraging to me and I am sure many others many others who have been faced with this problem. With a great support system and a positive mentality I know I'll be able to overcome many of life's obstacles including this one. The one thing that I have learned from this and will never forget is that the past can be a scary place, but to never let it hinder you from the future.

No Mans Land: Seattle, Washington

BRITTANY VIOLET LUCAS

So I woke up at three in the morning; my heart racing and no one but myself was around. I knew I wouldn't be able to go back to sleep and I knew there was no way I could drink away the anxiety, the bars and clubs were all closed, and I had to pass a breathalyzer at the methadone van in the morning. No, this time I would just have to endure the DT'S and "take it like a man"; you know? I was going to have to go on a little thing called a journey, but this time I would have the safety of my apartment to come back to afterwards. The apartment that I have resided in for the last year and a half is in Capitol Hill. I don't care what people say about me, I have accomplished one of my life time goals: I pay the rent on time every single month and I live in the area I have always wanted to live in. I saved up the cash to make sure my living room looked like a mini and user friendly computer lab, so I could type my heart out whenever I needed to. This time I wasn't going to be able to get right on the computer and start typing to feed my inspiration I was going to have to take a journey outside in the wet, cold, Seattle night. I wanted to remind myself of where I came from. So I put on my warm imitation leopard coat, that sort of brought the lioness out in me, and I put on a pair of comfortable high quality sneakers, the perfect kind needed in case I need to start running for my life... I wore non-descript jeans and a tee shirt underneath. This time no hat would grace my head, I needed to feel what they are feeling out there tonight. I made sure just to bring 5 dollars with me, and I wore a very special kind of a purse, the kind that hangs across your shoulders, and is very hard for a mugger to rip from you. I made sure that my ID and cell phone were in my purse but I left my bank card at home.

I opened the door and headed out into the rainy cold world. My last glance at the digital clock underneath my TV said it was 4:00; 4:00 is not the time when most people choose to conduct business even in the cultural Mecca of Capitol Hill. It is the perfect time to get a taste for how things are. I walked up towards Broadway and though this wasn't my first journey I was still in awe of how bare the streets were. Every so often I would spot a night security truck rolling down the streets, and they would pause and look at me with concerned eyes. I started seeing the children of the night I had come to observe. If they were a young man they sometimes would have a predatory nature about them. They would look at me, and say hi, but I would quickly cross the street to put distance between them and I. If they were a lone female, they would look into my eyes and say hi like they were trying to form some kind of alliance, like maybe they were hoping they weren't the only ones with no where to go at this time of night. I got to see the people who really aren't doing the homeless thing for the fun of it. I quickly started to shiver even in my warm coat as the wetness started to get at me, but still it didn't bother me that bad because I knew I had somewhere to go back to. Still, some

homeless young men weren't predatory at all, when I exited a gas station I saw an African American man with a desperate look on his face. He pleaded with me just for a little something so he could eat. I gave him a dollar and he was so grateful to me, it was like I had given him a million dollars. He probably wasn't used to getting hand ups.

I was in no mans land at 4 am in the morning in Capitol Hill. This is all I have to do to remind myself how important stability is, I guess I could call it learned stability. But it also reminds me of a social service that (even in a great city like Seattle) we cant give people; some place to go when its really cold and wet out and its between the twilight hours of 10 pm and 8 in the morning. I really like the a particular drop in center Downtown, it's the only place that stuck by me through thick and thin, but I wish it was open at 4 am in the morning. Maybe they could come up with a late hour drop in, it wouldn't like give referrals to people but it is there to protect kids and stuff. When it's really dark and there all the places that homeless youth usually hide out in especially when it's cold, are closed, people can be forced to desperate measures. Even youth shelters easily overflow, and every homeless youth has gone through at least one night like that I think. I spoke with a girl that goes by the name C (18) who receives services from the same drop in center about her opinion about how she deals when she can't get into a temporary shelter, she currently is on a very long wait list to get into a transitional living program. She stated, "One night it was like 1 am in the morning and the Kinko's that I sometimes hide out in kicked me out because I ran out of money for the internet. I was stuck downtown with no place to go. I was really scared when this guy started following me in a car, I think he knew I was homeless, and he kept on telling me he could get me some money. I ran away really fast but I was really scared because no one would be around if the guy straight up abducted [me], sometimes though even though I didn't do that, especially when its raining I do think about going down to Denny and doing tricks, but I don't think its got that bad yet. I really hope I get into some kind of housing, things are getting really bad out there." she explained with a look of sincere worry on her face.

Seattle homeless youth services and the youth services in all the cities in America really should provide some place for youth to go during the nights, even when shelters are overfilled. They probably wouldn't be able to go to sleep, but it would be at least a good place for them to stay safe, get some clothing, and something to eat. Maybe they could provide creative projects and stuff to keep everyone alert. I think it is the duty of the youth services in this city to do something about these kids that are walking around with no place to go at night. Take it from me, no mans land at 4 am in the morning is a very scary place for a vulnerable young person.



Creative Corner

Note to Self

ANONYMOUS

Hand me some thread and a needle
So I can sew all my wounds shut
Make sure its strong enough
That even the strongest scissors cant cut

Give me the best glue around
So I can piece of myself together again
Make sure it dries real fast
That even the strongest hands cant bend
Let me put some eyes in these hollow holes
So that I can see that it okay to make mistakes
Make sure they don't roll our of their sockets
To one day create salty-teared lakes

Shove some conscience down my throat
So I can take blame for my guilt
Make sure it gets a kick start everyday
To remind me of this world I've built
Push my way a bucket labeled "note to self"
So I can decide who I want me to be
Make sure it gets oiled once in a while
And let it have a personality

The most important part Im forgetting
Is a beating, emotion-filled, fragile heart
Make sure its used properly
Breath in life and let it start

Cold Dark Night

SAMUEL D. MARTIN

Sitting here cold as the ocean water.
Swoosh the wind goes by while the tree
branches sway
Tragedy, taunting, tempting and lurking.
The night is swift like a ninja's blade.
Creeping as the cats that lay astray
Wondering when the sun will show his face
again.
Whoo-whooh, whooh-whooh
Big Beading Brown Eyes staring through the
trees
I run with the speed of a gazelle
Finally I see a light I was my friend
Trying to find me on this cold dark night

I Am Here

EMMA M. CUMMINGS

I am here,
Can you hear me calling?
Notice me
The one many pretend not see
Please listen, I beg of you
Please help, before its too late
I have asked, You to look
I have cried, Get some help,
No one cared, They looked away
I ask one more thing, before I go....
Remember me,
I could have been your daughter,
I could have been your niece,
Remember
Help those in need,
Don't let another go like me
Remember
Me because I was here.

Reflection

SHERRELL DORSEY

My hair is twisted in big, brown, beautiful strands of Africa and I stand pretty watching my reflection in the mirror. It took me time and struggle before I was able to stare in to my own eyes and see myself instead of my circumstances. Even though my friends often object to my "back to the Motherland" hairstyle, my inner goal is to emulate my birth mother; one of the strongest women I know. It was not until I reunited with her that I was able to find my identity.

Born the daughter of a crack addict at the low birth weight of five pounds twelve ounces, I was able to fit inside a shoebox. My older brother and I were led in and out of hotel rooms and foster homes where mother would abandon us for days at a time. When I was two and a half years old, my mother's parental rights were terminated and my brother and I were put in to foster homes and eventually separated from our mother and each other.

I was adopted by a post-Revolutionary, Black Panther-inspired woman who made sure I played with brown skinned Barbie dolls and read books about women leaders. Addressing her as "New Mommy," my adoptive mother and her family did their best to make me feel welcome. Despite their attempts, I never was. During holiday gatherings it hurt that I could never participate in

discussions concerning who resembled great-grandmother. Did I look like my grandmother? Would I grow to be as tall as my aunt?

With pictures of my birth mother on my windowsill, at night I would awake in tears wondering if she still loved me and If I would grow up to look like her. As I slid into my teen years, feeling insecure about being adopted, it became harder for me to define who I was without having any knowledge of the woman who bore me. I searched and found my birth mother's address on the Internet and wrote her a letter. Six months later she responded with the eagerness of wanting to reconnect. She had stopped using drugs and moved out of a past that had held her captive from her family for years.

My initial hope in reconnecting was that my void would be filled with my birth mother back in my life. Instead, our reunion helped me to identify and build on my strengths and enjoy my individuality. Now, as I look at myself in the mirror, I see strength, courage and maturity; all of the things that I have developed in the process of reconnecting with my birth mother. This journey is teaching me that neither my adoption nor the circumstances surrounding it define who I am as an individual.

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