

Mockingbird Times



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

December 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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A Very Special Holiday



**JAMICA
HENDERSON**

Happy holidays to all of you. The time is here again, but this time it's more special for me. I now have custody of my two younger siblings and am making plans to get my foster care license. This will be our first holiday season together again since the last one we had as a family more than six years ago. It feels really good to spend the Holidays with my family. To me, it is a special time of the year when everyone gets to be comfortable, love one another, play games, relax and just have the time of our lives.

I can't tell you how excited I am to have my brothers under my wings. I have had to plan so much for them in such a short amount of time, but long enough to put some good love in their heart. My siblings are 15 and 16 years old. To me, these years are very important. When I was this age, I don't know what I would have done if I didn't have the two foster parents who loved me and helped me when I needed them most. They never gave up, regardless of the situation, because they loved me. I want my brothers to have the same support I had and if that means I have to be the one to give it to them, I will. I want them to have all they need before they reach 18. I

don't want them to turn 18 and not experience what it's like to be loved by anyone.

I have come up with a plan to make sure that I can give them what they need. I am in college right now and I work too. I work from 11-4 and go to school Mon-Thursday from 5-7. Then I go home to attend to my brothers. I've noticed since I've got custody of my siblings, that when I am away too long they seem to be hurt. It's a hurt from feeling alone for so long that when you do have someone who you love and you know loves you, you don't want them out of your sight. It hurts a lot to see my brothers missing love that much. They were not getting the love they needed while in foster care. Because of this, I decided that after this quarter I am taking school off and for the next couple of years. I am going to give them all the love and time that they need and deserve. I am still going to work at the Mockingbird Society (of course) but when they come home from school they don't have to worry about me coming home too late to ask them how their day went and spend quality time with them.

My brothers are both smart young men. They want to go to college and be somebody someday. I know they will as long as I am here to encourage them. They want to play sports and do things that teenage boys do. I know being a good and responsible caretaker will take lots of time. For instance, my younger brother Leon left his lunch money at home one day. He called the house and asked if I could bring him some lunch. Within 30 minutes I brought him

his favorite (fried chicken and macaroni & cheese).

Later on that evening, he told me, "Mickey, I really liked when you came up to my school and brought me something to eat. I like stuff like that." He said, "I'm glad to be living with you Mickey. You just don't know. If I would have called my foster parent and told them I forgot my lunch money, they would have let me stay hungry until I got home." I was really touched to hear and see how happy he was over something that may seem little to us but really big to him. I told him that he was welcome and if it happens again he won't feel embarrassed to call me.

Now I know what I have to do to help them continue to grow into the sweet young men they are: close that hole they've had with love and whatever else it is that they may need. I know that I have to work them into my schedule now because this is what I wanted to do. I am going to give them all my extra time until they graduate from high school. Once the last one graduates, I am going to take myself back to school and finish up on becoming that Registered Nurse that I want to be. In the midst of me becoming that RN, I will feel a lot happier because I won't have to worry anymore about my loved ones.

Getting custody of my brothers was one of my goals and now that I have completed that goal, I am going to put 100% into taking care of them and fulfilling all of their needs. Stay tuned for more.

My Super Sweet-Sixteen



**RAQUEL
GRANATH**

Throughout life people are faced with decisions. The choices that you make can determine the rest of your life. As my sweet sixteen races towards me like imminent disaster, I'm forced to reach some adult verdicts on a child's timeline.

I have so many goals and aspirations that I would like to accomplish in this upcoming year, but I always feel like my age is a barrier. I'm trying my hardest to overcome the oppressions of being an overly independent teen, but despite my efforts, I'm still stifled by everything around me. I consider myself to be self-sufficient and competent enough to maneuver alone. My mother on the other hand, considers me reckless and doing too much for my age.

So what's the right balance? How can I breathe without being suffocated, in addition to pleasing my mother so she's more likely to keep me on a longer leash? How can I upgrade to the living situation I want when society says I should live at home until I'm 18? These are merely a few of my current dilemmas, and as my birthday draws closer, the answers seem to drift further away.

While I was in foster care, I was in twenty different placements. Throughout those situations, I attended approximately seven

schools. This constant moving and changing was very detrimental to my academics. As a result, I was extremely behind in my credits when I finally did enroll in a stable high school. At that point my motivation was shot and I was looking at being in High School until 2011!!! In order to bypass that time consumption, I've been taking GED preparation classes so that when my birthday does come around, I'll be ready to pass it with flying colors! I took the practice tests and aced every section except for math, which is my arch nemesis. When I get that certification proclaiming I have all the credentials of a high school graduate, I will then be eligible to apply for full time jobs. That will be my first and most important achievement, as well as my first step towards maturity.

After I receive that accreditation, I intend to immerse myself in the workforce, slaving day in and day out until I can save enough money to enroll in Driver's Ed, buy a car and eventually move out. Somewhere amongst all this confusion, I would like to get emancipated so that I can make my independence official. Emancipation entitles one to make all their own legal decisions short of voting. It would eliminate my mother's voice and allow to me to sign a lease to optimize my self-reliance. The drawbacks to this legal procedure are as vast as the benefits. It's scary being out in the world on your own, but at this point I question what other choices I have.

Ideally, I would like to be in an ILP (independent living program) that isn't comparable to a group home. Curfews would be acceptable, but for the most part, I don't

want to have to answer to anyone. I would even be willing to pay rent in such a setting. Even though I feel capable and confident in my own character, I can honestly say that I would still need guidance and assistance to maintain travel on the right path.

I bet you're wondering, well what about school? Do you think I would leave it high and dry? Of course not. It's on my list, but unfortunately, it will have to be postponed at least until next fall. My plan is to work full time until I'm able to leave the nest, and then at that point, focus on getting my Associates degree. I haven't thought far enough ahead to know which field I want to work in. But I know I want a job that would best showcase my talents as well as pay a high amount of money and be fun!! To be honest, I'm terrified. I'm scared about the big bad world because I don't have enough years stacked up to know what to expect. I feel alone sometimes because most kids my age could never imagine the tribulations that I've faced up to this point, or the fear of a dismal future.

I hope and pray that I make the right decision. I'm not sure yet if I will follow through with emancipation, but I don't see any other way to make the progress I want in the time frame of a year. I know I'll need all the support I can get, so don't worry my faithful readers, I have no intentions of leaving Mockingbird anytime soon. I will stay optimistic and hopefully this ordeal will pass and become part of my epic life. Stay tuned: this soap opera will continue when more news arises.

Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS



Once again I begin my article by thanking the young people who have contributed to this issue of the Mockingbird Times. I am always touched and left in awe by how these brilliant young writers can articulate their life situations with such clarity, insight and courage. A great example is Jamica's article on her determination to become a licensed foster parent so she can get custody of her teenage brothers. She is motivated by giving her brothers a sense of knowing the warmth of unconditional love.

Melissa's and Jessica's articles give voice to the impact on kids when they must accept the dark realities of life that most adults would shun. But mostly, they give voice to their desire to have the same opportunity for a good life that others have. Amelia talks about the critical issue of youth leaving foster care without access to health care. She does a great job of explaining how a lack of primary or preventative health care leads to more expensive costs down the road.

I am pleased to report that Washington State Representative Mary Helen Roberts will sponsor legislation during the 2007 Washington Legislature that will allow youth exiting foster care to retain their Medicaid until age 21, which will give them access to health care. This issue will be the primary item on the Mockingbird Society Legislative Advocacy Agenda for 2007 and I invite each of you to assist us getting this legislation passed.

I want to take a moment to thank all of you who have donated to Mockingbird Society and, in particular, I want to give a very hearty "Thank You" to all of the wonderful soccer players, coaches and teams that have sent Mockingbird Society Team Donations. Of particular note are the Holy Names Cougars (of which I'm a proud member of the coaching staff).

Finally, I want to wish each of you a very Happy Holiday season. During the hustle and bustle I hope you have an opportunity to express your appreciation and love to the children and teens in your life. They make our lives special and for that I thank each one of them.

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Meet the Staff: Andrea Roldan

ANDREA ROLDAN



Baggy sweat pants and tennis shoes, carrying a Panasonic CD player, singing no nobody can hear, that's probably me: Andrea Roldan. I'm a sixteen-year-old junior at Summit K-12 in Seattle. I was born in Seattle, but I moved around A LOT during my childhood. I am very self-motivated and I attempt to achieve a lot in a small amount of time so I am pretty busy most of the time. In my free time, though, I like to read, watch TV, talk on the phone and (of course) listen to music.

"Born a leader with the world on my shoulders/ age is young but my mind is much older."* I am very mature because of the many experiences and responsibilities I have had in my life which started at a very young age.

My younger sister and I were placed in foster care when I was about three. Our niece and nephew of my oldest sister were already in the same place so we felt somewhat comfortable, but they moved away within the first five months. I don't remember much that I can be certain of, but I have had many conversations with my mom and my sister about some of the terrible things that happened. The most shocking to me was about a baby the foster parents were caring for that died in the middle of the night and before they cleaned the crib they put my sister in it to sleep.

We visited my mom on weekends and I remember crying and fighting, holding on to her leg so I wouldn't have to go back, but I always did. Finally, after one year, my mom took parenting classes and we were released back into her care.

More than ten years later, I am emancipated and residing in a Seattle-based independent living program. It wasn't easy to get where I am now. There were some laws that caused major setbacks for me. If I could, I would alter the details of the Becca Bill (Mockingbird Times, July 2006).

In October of 2005, I moved into a shelter in Shoreline to get away from my mother's drug abuse in our home. My case manager called my mom multiple times during the next few days and insisted she didn't want me and I was trouble. So, I continued to go to school and work while my case manager assured me he would do everything he could to keep me safe. Then, one Friday night, after I came home from school, he told me he had to detain me because the police were on their way to get me because a runaway report was made. That was very hard on me and stressful.

I'm a pretty simple person with very complex dreams. One of the issues that I think is important is the need for more educational support for youth, because a lot of teenagers don't have a strong family background that helps and encourages them to succeed in school. We need more programs to teach young people how to break into the work field and how to transition from a youth to an adult and prepare them with the knowledge and experience that will help them tackle the responsibility of adulthood.

What attracted me to Mockingbird Society was that I love writing in all different formats. I like to be challenged with the developing of my ideas in order to communicate them to people effectively because I believe there is a lot of power in writing. I also love doing outreach, attending different community events, and meeting people. I am hoping to help plan events here too. I am looking forward to this opportunity with Mockingbird Society.

**Lyrics from "Destiny" by Mary K. Blige*

*The Mockingbird Society
wishes you and yours a very happy
holiday season.*

Thank You's

Steven Stroh; Frances Demarco; Karen Cowgill; Steve Finney; Steve Shafer; Margaret-Ann LeRoy; Patty Sandoval; June Stinson and Bruce Cross & Perkins Coie.

On behalf of the HNA Cougar Varsity Soccer Team we would like to thank: Julie Braybrooks; Holly Norris; Stephanie Brosio; Catherine Woods; Robert Patten; Elizabeth Villanueva; Julie Shefts; Julie Tupper; and Wendy Shibuya.

On behalf of Coach Siri and the V6 Dragsters, we would like to thank: Robin Hopkins; Jim and Sandra Berglund; Jill Johnson; Laura Poulin-Moore; and Dawn Wilkinson.

On behalf of the St. Joseph 7th grade soccer team, we would like to thank: Coaches Manning and Dr. Jan Dwight.

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.

MEET OUR STAFF

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Kelly Hawkins

Meet the Staff: Melissa Stringer

My name is Mellissa Lashelle Stringer and I am 19 years old. I was born in Renton, Washington at Valley Medical Center on January 19, 1987. I attended Summit K-12 until I graduated. I enjoy taking pictures which I have been doing for four years. When I was in 10th grade, I played volleyball until I injured myself and I couldn't play sports any more. When I have free time, I like to hang out with my friends and go places as much as I possibly can. I was in foster care most of my life and aged out at 18. I then moved out of the foster care system into a group home called Ruth Dykeman Children's Center.

I never really got to experience a childhood. There was too much abuse and other things for me to truly understand what my life was really made of then. I was six years old when I first went into foster care because my mother and her new husband would constantly beat me (among other things). I bounced around from home to home my entire life. I really never got the chance to call any place home for a long period of time until now.

I recently moved into a transitional living program called Passages (Youth-care). It is the best place for me because it teaches me how to live on my own and how to take care of myself (which I am still working on). I know that you are probably wondering why you should care about me. Well, I am not asking you to care about

me. I am asking you to care about all the people that have to go through the same exact stuff every day. In this world, there are kids that have to figure out where they are going to sleep and what they are going to eat. I think that is a problem and if it wasn't for Passages, that would be me right now.

If I could change one thing about homelessness, it would be the way people treat the homeless. People look at them as if they were just plain dirt. It is rude, because sometimes people cannot help what they do and how they are. Everyday, when I go down to the "Ave" (University District), I look at the way people treat the homeless kids. It hurts just to watch, because half the people down there are my friends and they are sick and hungry and people ignore them. I really wish I could change the way many people treat the homeless.

If I could change one thing about the foster/homeless system I would change everything. It feels like people expect foster and homeless youth to be able to fend for themselves. That makes the whole system just ridiculous.

When I found out about what Mockingbird Society does, I was intrigued because I have always wanted to share about my life and what I have been through. Now I get to share my life with the outside world with no hesitation at all. Now I get to do what I love the most: writing!

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

JESSICA GARCIA



Last year, in 2005, I was in a lot of trouble with the law. I had warrants for my arrest and had been on Crystal Meth for a while. Most the time, I was in juvenile hall and got into a lot of fights. I was experiencing bad withdrawals and got to the point where I didn't want to be here anymore.

What was the most devastating thing was that I had no place to go. Every one has a story to tell. With all the things that I had already gone through in my life you would think that things would be different for me and not such a struggle. I was worn out last year because I was struggling really hard. I didn't know where I was going in my life, what I wanted to do or even how to get there.

My life in 2006 has been much different. I have worked at Mockingbird Society for seven months now and have been clean from meth for a year. I have had the chance to go to many events and conferences with Mockingbird and have enjoyed those times a lot. What I also enjoy is that even though the place I live right

now it isn't the best place in the world, it's teaching me a lesson on what I would do in a "messed up" position and how to handle the situation.

I made the decision this year to stop going to high school and go get my GED. I realize that I have to deal with what cards I was dealt: that being a person who grew up in the system with no stability, no money, and having to struggle every day on surviving with people and life in general.

Now I am looking towards my New Year resolutions. I'm going to go to Shoreline Community College and complete my GED; have a place of my own or have a family with a foster home with Casey Family; stay focused on my goal in life which is to become a lawyer and cosmetologist.

So what I have to do is become the best person that I know that I am. What I have learned while being in the system is to pick myself back up and show that I can do anything anyone else can do and to be the better person. Yes, people fall down. I have fallen down a lot. The problem for me was that I would sit there and pout rather than do something about it. I have a mouth and I won't let people make my choices for me. I will make my own. Because then I can blame myself for the mistakes in that case and I'll pick myself back up again.

Mockingbird Gives Thanks



Mockingbird Youth Representatives Raquel (foreground) and Jamica (background) excited to feast on Thanksgiving dinner.



Mockingbird Youth representatives Jessica (left) and Misty (right) get caught chowing down.

Life Without Medical Care by Amelia Lee Logen

When you are sick, run out of medication or are due for a check up you go to the doctor. I mean, that is what you have done your whole life when you were in foster care. You get a runny nose and off to the doctor you go. But, what happens when you age out of foster care and aren't able to find a job that provides full medical, dental and vision benefits by the time you turn 19 (which is the age that you lose your medical coupons)?

Once you lose your medical coupons, you only have a few options: 1) You can go to the emergency room every time that you have a cough or don't feel good. 2) You could find a sliding scale clinic to go to (which you still may not be able to afford even if you qualify for the lowest sliding scale fee that they have). 3) You can rack up doctors bills that you will never be able to pay. Which, if you think about it, really isn't fair because if it comes down to that then you are getting punished just for being sick?

Then, you still have to think about paying for medication. What are you supposed to do for your medications when you no longer have medical coupons and are just making ends meet as it is? A simple chronic illness, like allergies, can cost you a lot just for one month. Now, add a cold or flu on top of that and there is more money in just medications to get better.

The fact of the matter is that when kids coming out of foster care lose their medical coupons, it's not a small matter. It is something that will impact our lives in a huge way. In most cases, this is something that we aren't prepared for. Even just adding another year to the amount of time we get to keep our medical can make a huge difference, because another year can mean the difference between having enough experience to get a job with benefits and being stuck with a ton of medical bills that will never get paid and a handful of needed prescriptions that will never get filled. And that is a huge deal for everyone.

Get Published ~ Get Paid!

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be published in the Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. For more info and to check us out, go to www.mockingbirdsociety.org.



partnered with

The Mockingbird Society

proudly present

HOLIDAY STARS

DATE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

TIME: 6-9 PM

Kids, families, caregivers, and friends are invited to a fun-filled evening celebrating the passions and talents of Treehouse and Mockingbird youth! From powerful poetry, martial arts demonstrations to innovative dance, come see the wide array of talents our young people possess. If you want to showcase a talent in singing, dancing, juggling, poetry or more, contact Rachel Walker: (206) 267-5141 or rachelw@treehouseforkids.org. Call or email to register by November 27.

Location: 2100 Building,
Rooms 1A and 1B
2100 24th Ave. S.
Refreshments provided.

MOCKINGBIRD YOUTH WILL EMCEE THE
EVENT AND JUAN RAMIREZ WILL D.J.

