

Mockingbird Times



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

December 2007

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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Second Annual Homeless Youth and Young Adult Summit

 BY JESSICA MARTIN

On October 29th and 30th 2007, eight youth peer leaders and thirty-five homeless youth from King County came together to celebrate Homeless Youth Awareness Month in a special way. **Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH)** held the **Second Annual Homeless Youth and Young Adult Summit**. This was a chance for youth and young adults in King County who have been or are currently experiencing homelessness to discuss the unique needs of their community and present their issues to Seattle's City Council.

I was a peer leader at the Summit. We helped organize and plan the two days. Before the actual Summit began, we had a meeting to discuss the event. The first day of the Summit, we met at the **Orion Center** and then all went to a meeting room at **REI**. We explained to the other participants how last year's summit went and what issues were presented to the City Council. Topics included bus passes, employment, and housing. We then broke into ten groups, each with a peer leader, to brainstorm any and every idea we could come up with for issues to bring to the City Council this year. After about twenty minutes, each group presented their ideas to the whole group, with people writing each of them down to create a huge list of 100-200 ideas. We were able to combine many of the smaller issues into broader topics.

Once the brainstorming was done, we voted. Each person got to pick their top five topics, and the five topics with the most votes were the ones we would present to the City Council the next day. The top five topics we came up with were: expanded shelter services for youth and young adults, affordable housing, expanded employment training opportunities for homeless youth and young adults, city supplied bus passes for homeless youth and young adults, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgendered, and queer) issues.

We then broke into groups for each of these topics. Each youth got to choose the topic they wanted to represent and were most passionate about. My group was on expanded employment training opportunities for homeless youth and young adults. Each group came up with a few main points under their topic that they wanted to present.

One main point that my group wanted to present was the concern that the barista training program had been cut. This is despite the fact that the program has more than proven its worth by aiding youth getting off the streets by giving them the skills, experience, and references to become a barista in the real world. Along with this, we want to create more employment training programs and also change the age limits so that older youth don't feel so stuck on the streets when they age out of these programs. Our third point was to help youth with criminal backgrounds get jobs. Each group came up with ideas like these for their topic and then presented them to the whole group so that everybody would be on the same page. The first day concluded after a humorous skit on what not to do when presenting to the City Council members. We also went over what to do, including body language, speaking clearly, etc.

We all met at City Hall in downtown Seattle on the morning of the second day. Things were kind of hectic and confusing as to who was supposed to be where and when, but we were able to work things out. We got back into our groups to refresh our memories on what we wanted to present, then, we got our lists of which council members we were going to see and at what times. Participating council members included **Sally Clark, Richard Conlin, Jean Godden, Nick Licata, Richard McIver, Tom Rasmussen, and Peter Steinbrueck**. Meetings were also held with **Patricia McInturff** (Human Services Department, on behalf

of the Mayor's office) and **Bill Block** (King County Committee to End Homelessness.)

My group first talked to **Tom Rasmussen**. We didn't have the best experience talking with him as he seemed uninterested in talking and listening to us. He blamed the barista training program's funding cut on Farestart, when it really gets its funding from the city. After talking to him, we got a bit discouraged. But then we realized that the next City Council member we were going to talk with was **Nick Licata** and that he is the man in charge when our mayor is out of town.

Nick Licata hadn't even known that the barista training program's funding had been cut and seemed to be very familiar with many of the other youth services our city has to offer us. He enjoyed our suggestion of having incentives for business owners to take a chance and hire youth with criminal histories with a strict probationary period to prove themselves. He seemed engaged and interested in what we had to say, which was very uplifting to our spirits. It made us feel as if we did, do, and can have a voice. It was empowering!

Each of the groups got to talk and present to a couple of City Council members as we did. The day ended with our whole group sharing with everyone how their group's meetings went to once again keep everyone on a same page. Many of the youth had a positive experience and are excited to do it all over again next year.

The SKCCH Homeless Youth and Young Adult Summit 2007 was sponsored by the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, YMCA-The Center, and the City of Seattle- Human Services Department. Other contributors include the 45th Street Clinic, Friends of Youth, Heroes Subs, The Mockingbird Society, New Horizons Ministries, Street Youth Ministries, University District Service Providers Alliance, University District Youth Center, and Youth Care's Orion Center.

Everyone here at The Mockingbird Society would like to wish you all happy holidays and a wonderful season!



Taybot and The Mockingbird Society

 by Andrea Roldan

"Walls closing in on the chest of the oppressed; hard to breathe the air, best I can do is put 'em in my prayers. Drop knowledge on the system that got them there." These lyrics are from "Walls Close In", track five from *Estrella: The Good Mixtape*, given to The Mockingbird Society by **Taybot**. Taybot is a rapper from Spokane, Washington who has made his way around the Northwest pursuing his dreams and demonstrating his lyrical talent in audio. Recently, he has partnered with The Mockingbird Society, deciding to sponsor our organization with a percentage of the profit he earns from his albums and mix-tapes.

Taybot has made a full-time job promoting himself and selling his music while also hosting a radio show in Seattle. He started in the field by doing promotional work with a very popular hip-hop station in the city and, through networking, he found himself at KEXP co-hosting *Street Sounds* every Sunday night between 6PM and 9PM. He's been on *Street Sounds* for about a year. He started with

some hosting experience dating back to high school when he hosted another radio show called *Kickin' Down the Door*.

His most recent product is *Estrella*, a twenty-four track mix-tape created by Taybot and Praxis. The duo has been together for more than three years and in their music they encourage hopefulness, optimism and the balancing of everyday life by creating "political hip hop." On the tape, the song "Walls Close In" addresses inequality, corporate destruction and educational disproportionality. In a more rhythmic mix of rap and blues, "A Change is Better" (featuring Kelly), the freedom of individuality is stressed. "I see cities of people who look exactly the same, going through routines with no passionate flame to spark their mind." In the summer of 2007, Taybot sold more than 1000 units of the mix-tape. He is currently producing a solo album expected for a January 2008 release. While Taybot is working on that he still vends *Estrella: The Good Mixtape*.

When Taybot began selling his music, he

knew that he wanted to give a part of his proceeds to a non-profit organization. "That's what I'm all about. I try to stay community minded," he says. He had been donating to another non-profit organization but began to search for a different organization in which to vest his proceeds. He found The Mockingbird Society by a simple Google search. He came into our office, met our staff and introduced himself, expressing his excitement to be supporting us. Since then, he says that he gets a good response from people. He met a young woman who is familiar with The Mockingbird Society. "That organization is dope" she said when she purchased a mix-tape.

The Mockingbird Society appreciates his generosity and support. You can visit Taybot's website at taybot3.com. for more information and at www.myspace.com/taybot3. Taybot says, "If you see me on the street, buy my mix-tape." Do so and you support The Mockingbird Society as well!

1 pronounced es-STRAY-uh

2 dope: slang meaning "great"



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

This is the time of year when it is dark when I go to work and dark when I return home in the evening. In fact, even during the day, the light is often so faint that there is always the reminder that darkness is close by. This darkness can be depressing and increase our sense of anxiety and even hopelessness. Add to this the holiday season and whatever memories that conjures up for us and this can be a truly difficult time of year for many.

It is during these times that I so appreciate the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he reminded us that "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can drive out darkness." I encourage all of you with children and teens in your life to be the light for them this holiday season. That is not to say, "buy them everything they

want." Quite the contrary: It is to say, "Invest in your relationship with the children in your life." Tell them how much they mean to you and add to your life. Spend time with them and share a special activity that will become a wonderful memory for all of you. Be intentional about recognizing and acknowledging the wonder, joy and hope in the world and your lives.

I would also encourage the caretakers to take time to care for yourselves. Kids have much more fun when the adults in their lives have the energy to participate and engage. My deepest blessings and season's greetings to each of you and to all those you love.

 Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Meet the Staff by Kenneth Larson-Rettinger

Hi my name is Kenneth Larson-Rettinger. I am fifteen-years-old and I am the newest member of The Mockingbird Society family. I am an intern from Harry S. Truman High School in Federal Way. I am also a part of a Mockingbird Family Model Constellation. The Hub Home in my Constellation is run by Joe Cotton who is a really great guy who helps me with any problems I have as well as helping me have fun with the other people in the Constellation.

In my spare time I like to read, (the Pendragon series by D. J. MacHale is my favorite right now), play sports (water polo, wrestling, and soccer), video games (all games), and going to The Mockingbird Society office to write. My foster care experience was... iffy. In my first few foster homes I was physically and mentally abused. I was young and naïve so I didn't understand that what was happening to me was wrong. I grew up under the impression that physical abuse was an okay form of punishment.

I was adopted when I was 10 years old and have lived with my family for almost 8 years. I have made mistakes but I live like a normal teenager now. Since I was about 7-years-old I have thought that homeless people deserve better than they get. I always dreamed of helping the homeless with my time and money. I think that the homeless deserve second chances just like anyone else. There are too many people living on the streets right now and most people go through life without even caring about them. I feel bad because I would

have been in the same situation as people that live on the streets if I had not been adopted.

If I could change one thing about foster care I would change the way that they put a child into a home. When they put a child into a new home, the parents get a packet about the child. I think the child should also get something about the people that they are going to stay with. It would be nice if children could choose from a list of people to pick who they would be most compatible with.

I would also like to change the fact that there are so many children on the streets. I think that children should be the priority of people that help the homeless because they are young and have done nothing to cause their homelessness in most cases. It really isn't fair that they are on the streets because they don't have parents that can support them. The state should take care of them at that point.

I wanted to be a part of the Youth LEAD program because I am really into public speaking about foster care. I want to give back because of the things that foster care has done for me.

THANK YOU!

WILLIE AUSTIN; THEODORE BEAUCHAINE; LINDA AND JOHN BOGGS; WILL CALHOUN; MICHAEL CAMPBELL; KAREN COWGILL; VALERIE DOUGLAS; ELIZABETH A. LYNN FOUNDATION; JAMES AND ROSEMARIE FLAHERTY; JUDY GREENSTEIN; SANDY HOWARD; MARGARET-ANN AND MARK LEROY; CHRIS MARSH, ATTORNEY; DONNA MATHUS; DAN AND AMY NORDSTROM; KRISTIAN AND DENISE PETERSON; JOUHAR RUSSELL; NASRIN ROUSTA

Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD program presents

LIFE ADVOCACY 101

Tuesday January 15th, 3-5 PM
2100 24th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98144 (Treehouse Building)

Come learn about how to be your OWN best advocate in all areas of your life. Participate in activities that will give you the skills you need to "make things happen" for your personal success!

Receive your own personal ADVOCACY 101 TOOL!

All youth/young adults ages 14 to 23 welcome
Food and beverages provided
Free for everyone!



Giving Trees BY KENNETH LARSON-RETTINGER

Many say that giving is the meaning of Christmas, but it is also nice to receive on Christmas, especially when it's something that you really want. Parents who live on a tight income and have children can't always get what their children want. Often they just can't spare much money when they have to pay the bills and such. In many places, giving trees are set up where a person can change a child's holiday by giving that child something that they really want.

How a giving tree works is a tree is set up in a public location and is decorated with ornaments/tags that have information about a child, youth or adult in need,

such as his or her age, gender, and something that they look forward to getting this year. You take a tag from the tree and then buy a gift that matches that tag and return the unwrapped gift to the tree. The sponsors of the tree wrap the presents and give them to the needy adult or the parents of a needy child. In this way, the child believes the present came from their parent and doesn't feel awkward about receiving charity.

There are many places doing giving trees this year: **Toys R Us**, **Babies R Us**, **Fred Meyer**, and the **2100 Building** in Seattle all have giving trees. In Bellevue, at **City Hall**, there is a huge tree that generates about 25,000 dollars in donations for

needy children all across King County. Most local malls also have giving trees. Other places that donate lots to families in need are **The Salvation Army**, **Goodwill Industries**, **Union Gospel Mission**, **Deseret Industries**, and **Value Village**.

Thinking about the children that need a Christmas is hard as some are as young as infants. So, please take into consideration the idea of going to a giving tree and supporting a child. Also, you can donate online at the locations below. Check your local listings for additional places to donate.

www.pikeplacemarket.org
www.salvationarmyusa.org/donate.treehouseforkids.org

MEET OUR STAFF

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Become a Member of The Mockingbird Society

We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you'll receive a monthly edition of the *Mockingbird Times*. Thank you for your contribution.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to **The Mockingbird Society** in the amount of (please note amount on appropriate line):

\$1,000 +	Protector	\$
\$500 - \$900	Champion	\$
\$250 - \$500	Advocate	\$
\$50 - \$250	Supporter	\$
\$25	Contributor	\$

- 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.

Please mail this completed form and your check to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

ABOUT US: *The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. 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 The Mockingbird Society are paid between \$8 and \$11 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and 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 USA, 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 ©2007, The Mockingbird Society.*



My Senior Year, Pt. 3 BY SAMUEL MARTIN

The well known saying, "What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger" is the theme for my story this month. I am missing the one thing that kept me going although I am still searching. I have been through huge ups, and big downs but the issue now that has been the issue forever is, "How will I keep the flame going without having to build a new fire?" I don't really have anything to keep me going and I never have. All the motivation in the world will not keep me from staring an F in the face. I have always been someone who has taken grades very seriously. Unfortunately, I have never done this bad before. If you remember reading two months ago, I said I would stay motivated and do well. That hasn't been the story. I was really hoping for the Cinderella ending. Now I see that even though I may have done a lot for the community, I won't always get what I want.

Early in the month, I knew that once football was over, I would have to crack down and get focused. I had great intentions of doing so until I realized that I have no motivation. I think a lot of people who are successful find the motivation they need to be so. It is one thing to have the ability and potential to be something great; it is another to take those skills and mix them with work to actually be something great. I get what needs to be done. The hardest thing for me now is that since I have been put into an adult-like situation, I have to rise to the occasion and act accordingly. The point is that I couldn't stay focused and really sit down and do my homework.

When I reached the middle of the month, I had a conversation with my teachers discussing my grades and what I needed to do. I got a very clear understanding of what needs to happen. When I saw that I could still do the work, I was inspired and that threw a little piece of wood

in the fire. Soon after, the wood burnt out and the fire was just smoldering. I was sitting waiting for anything to get it roaring again. It was like I was just going through the motions. The teachers told me not to miss anymore classes so I went to class everyday and participated. They told me to do the work so I turned in a couple of assignments. I showed the smallest effort possible. Slowly but surely the efforts are diminishing.

Now, at the end of the month, I see that it is crunch time. I stare failure right in the face. For some, this would be an extreme motivator. For others, they would do what it takes to rise to the occasion. For myself, I don't know. Under certain situations, I have risen to the occasion and done what it takes. On top of the pressure of school is the pressure of college applications, and on top of that is the pressure of friends and wanting to actually be a senior. Sometimes it feels as if work, school, and extra-curricular activities get in the way of me actually being a seventeen-year-old. Part of me wants to just relax and take some time to myself, which is why I have trouble working hard. I don't want to make excuses and it does me no good anyway because I will not get anywhere blaming anyone or anything else.

Looking back and reflecting, I see now that I will have to make a completely different game plan at school and college. As the quarter ends, I suggest to other seniors to stay steadfast. Also think about your future, especially if you plan to go to a four-year university. It is pretty unlikely that I will get into the college I want now. I realize that it is my own fault. I just hope that anybody else who has the opportunity to go to a great college stays focused. It is so much harder to do it now than it was the previous three years.

This has really been a roller coaster with real unsuspected and unfortunate events. I know that something that has got to change. What that is, I have no idea. Hopefully, I can find it and utilize it to my fullest potential. I don't even know what is next to come. One thing that I still hold true to is that everything happens for a reason and this is no exception. In actuality, I needed this now more than ever, I think, because I see that I am not perfect. I can be a genius but if I don't do the work, I accomplish nothing. Once again, thank you and I appreciate your taking the time to listen.

Update Your Subscription

If you have recently moved, need to change the number of issues you receive, or if the address we are mailing the *Mockingbird Times* to needs to be corrected, please complete and mail the subscription request form found on page 2 so we can update our records.

MOCKINGBIRD SAYS GOODBYE TO A SHOOTING "STAR": JESSICA MARTIN BY MBS STAFF

MBS: What will you miss most about working as a Youth Representative at The Mockingbird Society?

Star: I will miss all the advocacy work and feeling like I'm actually making a difference. I will miss the times I have gotten to

talk with legislators and City Council members, being a peer leader for the Homeless Youth Summit, and helping to present a workshop at the Washington State Foster Care Conference in Ocean Shores. I will miss the family that The Mockingbird Society has formed for me, all the good times of laughter and smiles, and the support I have here.

MBS: What will be one of the things you will remember most about your time here?

Star: I will remember the agony of mailing days: folding and counting newspapers, stamping and addressing and stuffing hundreds of envelopes. I will remember giving Najja headaches about deadlines for articles each month but always coming through at the last minute.



Senior Youth Representative Andrea Roldan shares a laugh with Youth Representative Jessica Martin at her good-bye party.

Daddy's Little Girl BY WHITNEY ALLEN

At the age of fourteen I had to leave home. I felt numb, confused, and very much alone. Family and friends I missed, but most of all I wanted my mother. Every night I cried—cried hard for her. I felt as if I were going to fall apart, but somehow I managed to keep it together and maintain. Planning for a brighter future and better days I knew I'd never see was the only thing that eased my pain and kept me sane. They took me, they took my brother, and from one another we had to split. Every day I prayed my love for him he would never forget. Sometimes I became very emotional because no one seemed to care. I just wanted my family to be a family—why were we all here, there, and everywhere?

A majority of the time, I was left alone to figure out things by myself. So no one knew when I began to battle thoughts of death. Nothing or no one was making sense to me—I just didn't understand. I would fall asleep at night dreaming about the day I would meet my daddy and wonder if he really was a good man. Mama always told me that he was, but I didn't know if what she said was quite true. I'm not saying it was a lie, just saying, if it was so true then why wasn't he there to hold me and say "Whitney I love you"?

I'm not trying to point a finger or place any blame. I'm just so happy that my mama allowed me to keep my daddy's last name. When my mother told me her plans to give me another man's last name, I was hurt and deeply pained. I couldn't believe my mother. My heart ached so bad. Didn't she know that my daddy's last name was the only thing of him I had? Words couldn't express my deep emotion so I just simply cried, and when Mama told me I could keep Daddy's name, the tears that fell from my eyes I quickly dried.

That was so long ago, back when I was still with my mama and Li was a lot younger. It seems like back then I was a whole lot stronger. That was so long ago, back when I could light up a whole room with my smile. I'm talking about setting a whole room aglow.

Those days are nothing but a fading memory to me. I began to hate life and everything I turned out to be. The year of '03-'04 I went to court, Mama's rights were terminated, and I became a ward of the state. Life, if it hadn't been already, became extremely hard. I was officially property of the state and for foster parents I was simply money bait. Nothing more

and nothing less. All I wanted was to go home—was that too much of a request?

I knew pain and pain knew me very well. But to open up and tell anyone how I felt? NO! I would rather die and go to hell. Sick with misery and pain, every night I'd lay awake and each morning I would rise and say "Hello," to heartache. Why wouldn't anyone show me love? Was it—is it—that big of a risk? Was I—am I—that big of a dare? It wasn't fair. Would there ever be anyone, just one, willing to care?

I refused to let my feelings show. Bottling up feelings and emotion—they were the main ingredients in my anger potion. A loving environment and a better life is all I craved, something I had never seen, for family and friends had paved a road of destruction for me. There were no presents on the holidays but it didn't matter as long as Mama was there. I reminisced about the days when Mama would rock me in her arms, then all of a sudden Mama stopped.

That's when the real hurt began. My heart was broken into a million pieces and to my stomach it dropped. Day by day I grew angry and I didn't want to cause harm to anyone. That's how I got the bad habit of cutting my arm.

Home was never really home for me but that's irrelevant now. I just want a place of my own. But all I seem to find is temptation and all anything seems to amount to is complications. If only I got the chance to be "Daddy's Little Girl" then maybe it wouldn't feel like it's me versus the world. Do you think if I would have gotten piggy back rides and went to father/daughter dances that I wouldn't be afraid of intimacy and would be more comfortable in romance? The day has come and long past when I finally met my daddy and some man he was. No hugs or kisses between the two of us; there's no love. So much for being "Daddy's Little Girl".

Being in foster care has really opened my eyes to the world. I wrote this shortly after I aged out of foster care, after years and years of both long-term and short-term treatment facilities, psychiatric hospitals, and mental institutions. I had pills and pills for depression, anger, anxiety, and rapid mood swings. Therapists. Jail. Work release. The only thing that kept and keeps me sane and feeling is my pen, paper, and music. Somehow and someday I will reach out to others and share all my experiences and pains through my writing. After seeing how bad and messed up life can be, I now strive to be the best I can be.

MBS: Is there anything you would like to share with your readers in regards to the importance of homeless/foster-youth advocacy?

Star: Advocacy is very important! Without it, who knows if we would have come as far in the foster-care/homeless youth world? If it weren't for us going to the Seattle City Council for Homeless Youth and Young Adults Summit to advocate for job training programs, some of the City Council members wouldn't even know that the funding for the barista training program had been cut.

The people who have experience with homelessness or the foster care system need to speak out about what is going on—what's going well and what isn't. Without that, no changes will ever be made and the things that aren't going so well will just continue because nobody will ever know about it.



Youth Representative Jessica Martin smiles at her good-bye party. The gathering is bittersweet: she is excited to leave for Job Corps but sad to leave The Mockingbird Society.

MBS: What are your plans after The Mockingbird Society?

Star: I'm moving to Astoria, OR for Job Corps at Tongue Point center to study business because down the road I want to open my own BMX bicycle shop.

This Feeling

KATIEE HARMON

When I see you,
when I am with you.
Talking to or about you,
thinking about you.
I get this feeling,
is it butterflies?
is my heart skipping a beat?
you've taken my breath away.
You're always on my mind,
and I'm not quite sure why.
Anything having to do with you,
I get this feeling.
I am not sure what it is,
is it butterflies?
is my heart skipping a beat?
you've taken my breath away.
This feeling's so good,
but I only get it when I see you,
when I am with you.
Talking to or about you,
or thinking of you.

Cherry Blossoms

EMMA CUMMINGS

the wind blows fears away,
as tides wash upon the shore,
shells once black with grit,
now bleached white,
as life fades away,
new stories begin,
once the sight of leaves falling,
scared me to death,
reminding me,
not only fall brings an end,

And yet,
with springtime new life begins,
now long forgotten sorrows,
bloom into bright pink cherry blossoms,
causing me to slow and smile,
instead of running at my steady pace,
i believe ill sit down,
and watch for a while.

Overtaken

LOUISIANA

I am naked
My stomach empty
My mind blank
My feet feel like I've been walk-
ing.....
For days
And
Days

My heart hurts
It's hard to breath
The blood is rushing through my veins
Spreading to my skin
But closed in

I bruise easily

My eyes are clouded
It's tough to see

Home Base

MYKAL HAUNTED

A warm house
Mom coming home at the
Same time every day
The first one she sees
Gets talked to
The house
Food gets cooked
The smell
Candles and soft carpet
Couches so comfortable
They double as beds
The rest
Where you sit is where
You sleep
If you want
It's home
Where the day takes you
The house

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

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

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We pay for articles, poetry, artwork and photography from youth who have experience in the foster care system and/or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the *Mockingbird Times*, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org.

Life is tough but when you don't give up and take the punches, it gets better for real.

~ Youth Representative Jessica Garcia



When I decided to do a movie review for the holiday season, the first thing I needed to do was explore what new movies were being released and which movie had content that I'd like to sit through, watch, and compose an article about. *This Christmas* (Sony Pictures) starring Loretta Devine, Idris Elba and Regina King, was one of the first to be suggested.

I decided to do it, but not with anticipation. I wasn't very excited to see this movie because I had assumptions about its plot and outcome. I thought, "Another black-family Christmas: backstabbing, arguing and drama," not to forget Hollywood's touch by filling the movie with young, limited experienced, fresh faced actors because they have a large teenage fan population due to their sex appeal (did I hear someone say cliché?) Did I forget to mention Chris Brown, Lauren London (ATL) and Columbus Short (Stomp the Yard)?

This Christmas is set in the Los Angeles suburban home of Ma'dere (Devine). It's the Whitfield family tradition to come home for the holidays. Everyone trickles in to share the meals, games, and communion that is set to take place in the next few days. We see the status of the family members as they accept their welcomes and settle in. Optimistic Ma'dere is cheerful; popular Michael, "Baby" (Brown), still lives at home; the "girl next door" Melanie "Mel" (London) invites her boyfriend, respectable Claude (Short), who is on military leave; and successful business-woman Kellie (Sharon Leal) comes single. Family relationships are displayed; there is tension between sisters Kelli and Lisa (King), indirectly because of Lisa's controlling

husband Malcom (Laz Alonzo). The biggest surprise comes when Quentin (Elba), Ma'dere's eldest son, shows up for the first time in four years.

From the start of the gathering, the movie is surprisingly interesting and comical. One of my favorite scenes is during dinner when everyone checks in about their career, education and personal goals. The family is discussing Melanie's progress in college as an undergrad: seven years so far, without a completed college degree, beginning her 3rd major. Someone concludes that her majors change as often as her boyfriends because "her major is determined by whomever she is dating at the time." She's decided that her current major is pre-law; it's humorous when her boyfriend is asked what his major is. Of course, while he's stalling to avoid answering, it's predictable, but the family is enjoying the teasing and everyone gets a laugh out of it. The confrontational attitude of Quentin towards Joe Black (Delroy Lindo), Ma'dere's longtime boyfriend, means everyone must keep the fact that Joe lives there a secret. Although Joe has a very strong personality, he respects Ma'dere and her children.

Throughout the movie, I was assured of the actors' strengths in their characters. The more "experienced" Devine, Elba, King and Mekhi Phifer had strong presences, but even the "fresh faces" delivered full performances. The personalities of the different characters were fulfilling in a variety of aspects; from the charming Baby, the fearless (in her mother's house) Mel,

the tough guy Quentin, the independent woman Kellie and so on. The characters and their different relationships with each other can definitely be related to the audience and our own families, along with the saying, "There's one of those in every family." The situations that transpire in the movie reflect situations that happen in families from all different races. The wom-

an who first resents her sister finds the strength and courage to make her own life better after the two sisters confront each other and, in the end, have more respect toward one another.

The stigma of interracial dating and the challenge of other people's accepting it as well as the step-father verses the biological father and his memory are themes that are universal.

The most cliché Hollywood decision for the film was having a professional singer "act" like an aspiring singer. This always ticks me off and Hollywood continues to do it because it brings in large numbers at the box office. The singer's fans watch the movie just because that person is in it. We all know Chris Brown can sing, but in the movie we get to see what it would be like if he weren't already famous and were afraid to let people know that his voice can give you goose bumps with the right song (and let his mom know that he had a passion for music). In the beginning I shook my head, as unimpressed as I can be witnessing this, something about the scene really moved me. Not knowing that his brothers and sisters were in the audience for his first live performance, Baby sweeps the crowd off

off their feet. His vocal performance and the feel of the whole scene was finale worthy, to say the least.

One of my concluding thoughts after the film was how much it reminds me of Tyler Perry's movies which are filled with morals taught through witnessing unpleasant situations, the characters finding themselves learning about a family's history and watching a change transpire in the characters or the situation. *This Christmas* is less dramatic than Perry's films and more family-oriented. Still, the characters have individual struggles to overcome and some situations that challenge the whole family. This isn't far from reality.

During the holiday season, people may experience a number of different emotions and challenges. Families might come together and it's not always the best experience for some, gift giving becomes a frenzy, people get lonely and depressed; these things can really bring down the cheer of the season. Reality, unlike most movies, doesn't always reflect "good guys always win." But we might get closer to a win and a great holiday season if we think like the good guy. We aren't all privileged to have our ideal Christmas or the most pleasant family get-togethers or even a stress-free holiday but there are ways we can find the best out of what we do have and enjoy the season. Be grateful for what you have and what you may receive *This Christmas* (no pun intended). Think positively and appreciate the people around you, not just the things. The different elements of *This Christmas* contribute in total to a funny, enjoyable movie experience: perfect for the holidays.

"You cannot be grateful and unhappy at the same time."

~Anonymous