

Mockingbird Times



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



NOVEMBER 2003

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

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Foster Parents Gather Together with Hope

DARIUS REYNOLDS



“No group in the United States is more predictably headed for an unhappy outcome than young people who spend their adolescence in foster care.”

— DOUGLAS W. NELSON

HOWEVER, for the last few years, the Foster Parent Association of Washington State (FPAWS), more than a hundred foster parents and even a few foster kids have come together to try to rectify this situation.

The 2003 foster care conference was held in Wenatchee, Washington. I'd have to say it was a very educational experience to be there as a former foster kid, because I had the chance to see how new parents are being trained to deal with their kids. I attended a couple of the workshops and found them pretty informative.

The first workshop I went to was called “Managing Escalated Behavior in Foster Care.” The presenter was Scott Hanauer, MA, from Children’s Home Society in Seattle. Hanauer talked about ways to stay out of power



Mockingbird Executive Director Jim Theofelis, left, with staff writers William Nelson, center, and Darius Reynolds, right, at the FPAWS conference. Photo by Shannon Barelo.

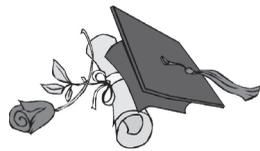
struggles with children and appropriate ways to discipline them.

I thought Hanauer made some good points on dealing with inappropriate behavior, like never stoop to the level that the child is on when they're angry — just stay calm and deal with the situation the way you see is fit. I wish foster parents were given this kind of advice when I was in foster care because all I experienced was yelling battles between myself and my parents. The other workshop I attended was “Say It Straight.” The presenter, Bob Wickline, was quite the character; very funny and energetic. In his workshop we played a communication game and had to sing. He sang a song about communication for us, and we played some role-playing games to help us understand how other people feel when we use the wrong kind of communication. Some new communication skills we learned included: sitting down when you talk to your child so you don't seem like a giant as well as making eye contact and trying not to lecture. He also talked about being sensitive to each others feelings and really

listening to what your foster children have to say so they will listen to you.

I wish I could have had more time to go to other workshops, because there were some other topics that looked really informative. In addition to the workshops they had information booths set up with info about other beneficial programs.

The conference was a great experience, I was able to talk to some of the new parents and many of them were very excited and looked forward to the challenges of being a foster parent. The only thing I would change about the conference is that I would like to see more foster kids involved. 



By surviving and thriving in foster care, I developed courage and perseverance to keep going when life gives me hard times.

thing, but I thought being a ward of the state seemed so much worse. It wasn't; I was just mad at the world.

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What Is FPAWS?

WILLIAM NELSON



BACK IN 1970, around 30 people who wanted to provide support for foster parents got together and created the Foster Parents Association of Washington State (FPAWS). The 1991 mission statement reads, “The mission of the Foster Parents Association of Washington State is to empower, to support, and to advocate for foster families in order to enrich the quality of life for Washington State’s children in foster care.”

About the same time that the mission statement was formed, FPAWS decided to hold a joint state wide foster care conference with the Washington Association for Family Based Treatment (WAFTS) and invited other agencies and organizations to participate as well.

Foster parents, social workers, and foster care agencies were able to meet and discuss issues at the same time in the same place at the 2003 FPAWS Foster Care Conference. Trainings were available for attendants that covered issues such as ethnic discovery, support services, managing behaviors, understanding each other, and self care.

According to Darlene Flowers, who is the Executive Director of FPAWS, right around 300 people attended the conference (10 percent less than the last two years). This was expected due to a decreased budget for foster parent scholarships, and state and private agency staff. 

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Founded in Seattle, Washington, 2001

ALUMNI CORNER: *Ending the cycle*

MY DADDY FIRST TRIED CHOKING MY MOMMA when I was six or seven. I woke up in the middle of the night frightened. For years, the violence would occur without warning, like the tornadoes that hit Alabama in the spring and fall. It was the courage I mustered to go next door to ask for help a few years after the first attack that ended the cycle of violence, hunger, and desperation. Ironically, my mother is alive today while the man who would twist and turn in his rage, taking it out on my brother and sisters, died after I graduated from high school.

Foster care was the first time in my life that I could eat regularly. I ate so much that the first year in foster care I gained 20 pounds. I suddenly started doing better in school because I could sleep through the night and not be frightened. I worried the other kids in school knew that I was in foster care. Being poor and abused was one thing, but I thought being a ward of the state seemed so much worse. It wasn't; I was just mad at the world.

Welcome to the Alumni Corner! Mockingbird is collaborating with Casey Family Programs to run a story from alumni of the foster care system every other month in our newspaper as well as online. We want to hear from you at submissions@mockingbirdsociety.org.

Letter from the Editor

THIS MONTH MY LETTER BEGINS WITH TRAGEDY and concludes with hope.

Rafael Gomez: August 7, 2001-September 10, 2003. The news hits you like an unexpected blow to the stomach. Two-year-old Rafael Gomez died at Spokane's Sacred Heart hospital six months after being returned to his biological parents.

Six months after foster mom Denise Griffith pleaded with state officials, a judge and apparently anyone else who might listen to protect Rafael. Born drug-addicted, Rafael suffered more injuries and pain than any child should experience, including two broken legs, burns, bruises, and skull fractures. When *Mockingbird Times* had gone to press, no charges have been filed and local police were waiting for an autopsy report. The Office of Child and Family Ombudsman has already initiated the ground work for an investigation as by the state Department of Social and Health Services. This is critical. Decisions about family reunification are some of the most difficult for caseworkers.

Rafael was three-days-old when first placed in his foster home. He lived with the Griffins' for approximately 16 of his 25 months of life. Several failed attempts to reunify Rafael with his biological family

resulted in emergency telephone calls to the Griffin family by DSHS, asking them to take an injured Rafael back into their home. According to reports, Denise Griffin warned all involved including writing a letter to the judge that Rafael was at high risk for further injury or worse if returned home. Through her continual demonstration of unconditional love and commitment to Rafael, Foster Mom Griffin earned her place at the decision-making table alongside the "experts." After the devastating end to young Rafael's life, we are left wondering why the concerns raised by the foster mom were seemingly ignored or dismissed.

ASK-Y: The Mockingbird Society is proud to announce the sponsorship of a new advocacy coalition. **Advocates for System Kids and Youth** will be a broad-based coalition that focuses on the needs of the children, adolescents and families involved in the Washington State child welfare system. **ASK-Y** will focus on the children and youth who are eligible for foster/kinship care and are also involved in other systems such as juvenile justice, mental health, chemical dependency as well as homeless and/or street-involved. This coalition will educate elected officials and other decision makers regarding the needs of our most vulnerable young people, while advocating for policies and services that genuinely meet the needs of those in care.

Please consider this an invitation to join **ASK-Y**. Our first meeting will be Friday, November 7 at 10:00A.M at 2100-24th Ave South in Seattle. I would especially like to encourage our friends from around the state of Washington. Even if you aren't able to attend every meeting, you can certainly participate in many important ways. Join us!



Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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 in foster care. The *Mockingbird Times* is a monthly newspaper that is written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of Mockingbird Society are paid between \$7.50 and \$8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to \$20 per published piece. The *Mockingbird Times* has a monthly circulation of 28,000 copies being distributed across Washington and the U.S.A. Youth involvement is 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. All donations to The Mockingbird Society are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated. No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2003 The Mockingbird Society.

ALUMNI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

I became the first foster child to attend college from Montgomery County, Alabama. When I left for college, all I owned fit into a brown paper bag. I was finally free to do what I wanted without any interference. College was a happy time in my life because for the first time I became just like the other students, no difference. No one knew my past, and I carved out my own future.

I learned in college that the only difference was being responsible for the consequences of my actions. My fellow students had parents to save them from their mistakes. I felt alone at times, but mostly I felt independent and proud to be on my own. I made my choices knowing that any mistakes I made, I would have to pay my own way. I worked through college and it was a struggle financially, but well worth it.

After college, it was the "sky's not the limit." I worked on rocket payloads until I was given my own experiment to fly on the Space Shuttle. All those years of making my own choices prepared me to lead a group of engineers and scientists. The self-confidence I gained from making it on my own helped me keep my cool when training the astronauts. The most exciting time of my life was being a part of the Oprah show on three different occasions.

For me, there was so much more to foster care than the feelings I had growing up of being scared and angry at everyone. By surviving and thriving in foster care, I developed courage and perseverance to keep going when life gives me hard times. By learning not to care what others thought, I learned to listen to my own voice. When a girl in high school who had lots of clothes made fun of my only nice outfit, I learned to hold my anger to not let her see how she hurt my feelings.

Living in foster care gave me so many lessons that have continued to serve me in life. Many people have helped me along the way in life including my foster parents. The greatest lesson I learned was my childhood was a result of my parents' bad choices. I was free to choose a better path for my life and I did. 

— CHRIS WATSON



"If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart."

— Buddha

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THANK YOUS

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Rachael LaMoureaux, Chris Watson, Phish at Slave to the Needle, Darlene Flowers and FPAWS, all of FPAWS' participants, Washington Association of Family-based Treatment Services

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★ Positive Power: Everyone Is Affected by Anxiety!

BRIDGETT SIROSHTON



EVERYONE EXPERIENCES ANXIETY, especially since the Sept. 11 World Trade Center incident. But how do young adults feel about the world around them now? Two years after 9/11 they are most likely scared, confused, and now very uncertain about whether the future is still relevant and worth looking forward to. They might start to develop severe anxiety about what could possibly happen next to our nation. Disaster is a constant possibility right now, especially because of what is going on in the Iraq War. I experienced similar feelings when I was 10, and was watching the Gulf War news broadcasts. Now it is happening all over again. My anxiety has shot through the roof and I know I'm not the only one!

Some people experience anxiety more than others. For example, you might get anxious when you get up to speak in front of large groups of people, or have an assignment due for school. Ways for coping are talking about it and letting other people talk about their views

of anxiety and their feelings, and doing something positive for yourself. Take yoga, hang out with your friends to get away, meditate, read a great book, or do what I do: a nice Epsom salt bath. Because everyone experiences stress differently, don't compare your progress with others or judge their reactions and emotions (www.nmha.org/reassurance/youngadults.cfm). Just know that it's not just you, everyone is hypersensitive, especially after the anniversary of Sept. 11.

More than 19 million Americans suffer from debilitating forms of anxiety, making it the most common mental health problem in the country, according to (www.helphorizons.com) Unmanageable types of anxiety include Agoraphobia (a fear of public stores or places where large groups of people are) and Panic Attacks (where the person feels overwhelmed suddenly and has intense dread

and peaks rapidly). Some people might protect themselves with anger, irritability, extreme mood swings, or even resort

to using an excess of drugs and alcohol, according to James Morrison's text, *DSM- IV Made Easy*.

Symptoms of anxiety include a chronic readiness, fidgeting, headaches, nausea and high blood pressure. For a more complete list please visit www.swimmingly.org/archives/000079.shtml. To get moving on with your life, with anxiety levels rising, you might want to see your doctor and have them evaluate you for an anxiety disorder. Anxiety is all about environment, crowds, and usually feelings that people are

judging you. People may tell you not to worry so much, but it is a disorder that you can get help with. Because why worry? What will happen will and what won't — won't! 🐦



The Hole Truth

COURTNEY KONIETZKO

"In America the practice of body piercing is everywhere, especially among young people, who are getting several parts of their bodies pierced either as an affirmation of their personal individuality, as a means of sexual gratification or stimulation, a reclamation of their bodies from physical or emotional trauma, or as a means of adornment. It is important to remember that persons with body piercing are generally not deviant or psychologically ill. Instead, they have a view of beauty which differs from that of the mainstream. This is simply an expression of individuality, a harmless and benign statement of who these people are and what they believe in. All too often it is ignorance that leads people to spurn body piercing. By educating yourself on the subject it becomes plain to see that body piercing is a powerful tool for self-expression and emotional security."

— Sander Thomas, *Reclamation, Enhancement, and Self-Expression*

Hi, my name is Courtney and I enjoy putting holes in my body. I currently have seven non-infected piercings but that wasn't always the case. I strongly suggest not doing it yourself because the risk of infection is high, it hurts worse than a professional piercing, and it's hard to see what you're doing. I was twelve when I jammed one of my mother's earrings through my nose. I wanted it badly, enough to deal with the pain but I wouldn't do it again because it took forever and a piercing needle meant for puncturing the skin hurts a lot less. I don't remember what happened to the nose piercing. My other two do-it-

yourselves happened one dark day when I was confused, homeless, and desperately wanting to prove that I was cool. I was in a friend's bathroom with a guy who challenged me, "You think you're punk? Can you do this?" Then he put a couple safety pins through his lips. I followed suit and put a couple in my lip and brow, which I thought looked cool. They proceeded to swell up huge and ooze green puss over a period of three days. I couldn't talk and had to go to the Dr. to get some antibiotics. Cheap metal is bad metal.

It's really important to get your piercings done professionally and to follow proper aftercare instructions which include washing the new piercing with antibacterial soap, doing seal salt soaks, and not over rotating and touching it. I eventually plan on putting two more holes through my nose when the time is right but it's not right now. My chin (labret) piercing was done for looks only. I wanted something pierced. I had just turned eighteen and I thought the chin looked cool. My other piercings have more meaning because they symbolize different things like breaking away from a boyfriend and letting go, ending substance abuse and self harm behaviors, and coming to terms with my sexuality.

I have found Slave to The Needle and Lucky Devil Tattoo and piercing to be the most comfortable, sanitary places to get pierced. Chuck Heller is a lady piercer at Lucky Devil who is really nice. You get a piece of candy when you're done getting pierced. Phish is a guy piercer at Slave to The Needle who I interviewed for this article. Both Phish and Chuck are certified by the APP (The Association Of Professional Piercers), which means that they have undergone extensive training on piercing safely. The APP is an international non-profit association "dedicated to the dissemination of vital health and safety information related to body piercing to piercers, health care providers and the general public. The group believes

that it is the obligation of all professionals in the field to assume responsibility for their continued education. The organization dedicates itself to enabling this responsibility to be met." For more information about the APP and body piercing go to www.safepiercing.org. They have a lot of useful information including what materials are safe to wear in new piercings and the "piercee's bill of rights" which informs you about what to look for in a studio and a piercer. I wanted to ask a professional a few questions like: Are oral piercings as bad for you as the media makes them out to be? and What do you think of ear piercing guns?

For the answers to these questions and more **check out the rest of the article online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.** 🐦

Poetry Corner

• Giving is not charity, nor is it a helping hand.
• You must first know how to be a friend, you do
• not have to love to help another, you must simply
• care for one another. To share what you know
• may be of some assistance, foul mouth and foul
• mind does not bring forth happiness, nor does it
• win you a place much greater. An open mind will
• bring forth opportunities that a closed mind does
• not have to offer. So step outside and take a wiff,
• the air is nicer there. This may be a little simple,
• but it may be the best thing, and yet its not illegal,
• so don't waste anytime and don't change your
• mind, another way may await. So take a chance
• and move a few steps that way, climb a few steps
• higher, a smile may be great.

— RACHAEL LAMOUREAUX

Madonna Equals Anarchy!

BRIDGETT SIROSHTON

MADONNA is a true chameleon. She has endured since she busted out on the scene with the singles “Holiday” and “Borderline” in 1983. She is smart, sexy, provocative and political at the same time! Madonna is

American Life

 Madonna

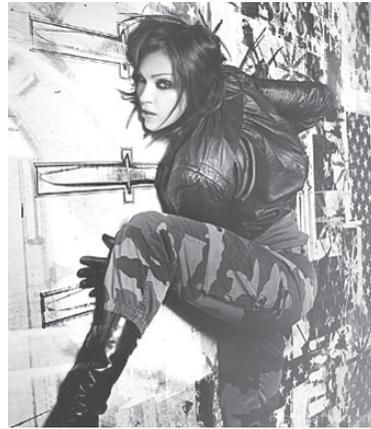
back on the scene to change fashion, music, and the world again, in case you weren't ready to change. With her tenth studio album, *American Life*, Madonna makes a statement about the way Americans live and what we hold important — guns, bombs, and television. Pretty intense for a pop/electronic (music that incorporates techno and pop music) album, huh?

While the album falls in the electronic genre of music, it also combines a “cowgirl” acoustic sound that was on her last album's hit, “Don't Tell Me.” There is a pre-disco cool to it. I grew up listening to Madonna, and she has always surprised me. Not only has she challenged the racial lines in her video “Like a Prayer”

in 1989— where a black Jesus is weeping — but she also has a way of making us question our thoughts and authority and strive to do better. In a way, she is the only socially accepted anarchist!

Madonna's music video for the title track was banned and another version of the song was issued and played for MTV and VHI. In the original there are bombs being dropped and explosions while she tosses a grenade to George W. Bush and he lights his expensive cigar with it. Unlike many other bands, Madonna showed her sensitivity by withdrawing the music video “American Life”. She felt the video was inappropriate to air at the time and said, “Due to the volatile state of the world I do not want to risk offending anyone who might misinterpret the meaning of this video.” because of the current war with Iraq. You can find more out from this video at www.madonna.com.

Madonna's single “Hollywood” is about image and



how some people are obsessed with the “fake up as make-up” scene, especially Hollywood (movies and music stars) glamour and glitz. In the video there is a scene when she is looking at a young maid and feels her youth leaving her, but has only an empty sense of comfort with jewels and diamonds. She is on a television that keeps swiveling and she looks like Marilyn Monroe, trying to make it in the “business.”

A standout track on this album is “Mother & Father,” which is a techno rendition done superbly, because it incorporates how she has felt all these years without her mother (who died when Madonna was very young). Having her father take on the responsibilities, she sings “Yes father you know I'm not so free.” She even raps, “my mother died, when I was five — and I cried and cried until the neighbors went away, they couldn't take my loneliness, I couldn't take

their phoniness.”

Madonna has been in the spotlight for 20 years now and is possibly the world's biggest female star. Go get *American Life* — it will not disappoint you. This album triggers goosebumps in me, it's that good. 🐦

My Headspace

COURTNEY KONIETZKO



I'VE BEEN CALLED an artist, a strong woman, a disaster, a rocker, mentally ill, a poet, a ward of the state, poor, homeless, sensitive, a leader, a creative spirit, a weirdo, a liability, a runaway, a genius, a Satanist, and a confused little girl. I prefer to be called an artist.

I believe everyone is an artist in their own way. Art doesn't have to be painting, drawing, or playing the violin. Art is anything you create. If we are all created in God's image, it makes sense that everyone would have the power to create, to be an artist. I think of God as an artist somewhat. My mom's an artist in the way she can look at a plain room and turn it into an interior decorator's dream. My dad's an artist in the way he thinks of the river and how he fishes and the many ways he chooses to cook them.

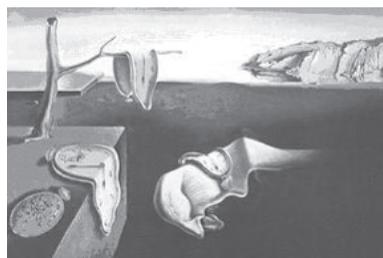
Everyone has gifts that are unique to them. Nobody should feel they have to compare their gifts or ever think they are nothing because they don't have as much in material wealth as others. Certain thoughts and ideas when they're applied right can be priceless.

I wanted to be a rock star when I was younger. It seemed like that was the cool thing to do. It wasn't a very original idea; every other kid wanted to be Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Manson, or someone famous. Obsess about Kurt Cobain and buy everything Nirvana related possible — yeah, that was what I did. I don't even like Nirvana's music now. I guess I was a poser at that time, I didn't feel comfortable enough thinking for myself... yet.

When I look back to that period of my life (age 12-15ish) I see that my ability to think for myself was suppressed. I was trying on different personalities and forgetting about myself. I didn't know that things have to happen from the inside out, not the outside in. There was this huge barrier of anger that wouldn't let anything in, including love, because it hurt too much.

Music and writing were my two main “healthy” outlets — two tools that helped me deal with the anger

Near right: *Persistence of Memory*, by Salvador Dali; far right: *I, Dogeater*, by “I, Braineater.”



while I went through seven psychiatric hospitals. The artwork that came out of suppressing and exploding the barrier is some of my best so far. Anger and hatred fueled mad, chaotic, dark, surreal ink drawings of odd creatures that were “anythings”: a mix of man, animal, and who knows what. They usually started out with an eyeball that would gradually morph into something like a pissed-off sunflower cocking a handgun or a bathtub with snakes for handles, lion's feet, and a screaming person's head for a spigot.

Too intimidated with the messiness of paint right now, I choose to draw on 8x11 paper with black fine point pens. My favorite pen that I've found so far is the Pilot V ball. I don't like pencils. They scare me and remind me of school. I like mixed media too, making collages of poetry, magazine clippings, drawings, and whatever's around the house like bottle caps or screws. I never know what it's going to be when I start out. It usually turns into something vaguely animal or human with a lot of objects connecting to or around it, like leaves and vines surrounding and weaving through the main object.

Out of all artists, I admire Salvadore Dali and Jim Cummins (also known as “I, Braineater”) the most because they deal with fantasy interwoven with reality. Their material resembles dreams a lot of the time. They also both manage to blend the disturbing with the beautiful. Jim did artwork for some of Skinny Puppy's (one of my favorite bands) albums. There were three factors that influenced Dali: his soulmate and wife Gala, Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious (for more info about Freud, go to www.ship.edu/~cyboeree/freud.html) and his relationship with the French Surrealists, a group of writers and poets of which Andre Breton the poet was head of. As the website www.daligallery.com explains, “Dali often described his pictures as ‘hand-painted dream photographs,’ and had certain favorite and recurring images, such as the human figure with half-open drawers protruding from it, burning giraffes, and watches bent and flowing as if made



from melting wax.” Jim Cummins (“I, Braineater”), painter, musician, poet, and thief, is, according to Georgia Straight and Bill Shirk, also a “painter of densely disturbing, vaguely amusing pictures, and a sculptor of strange, human-type shapes that mock and employ you to take stock of your own imagination.” I hope one day to expand my medium and learn how to paint my drawings on a larger scale. I hope one day to paint my dreams too.

Right now I'm beginning college to become a lawyer and work with kids in the system, but I still want to create art. I don't know exactly what I want to do, but I think I'll know when the time is right. Maybe I'll find the right school. Or make films, or do murals.

I think art will always be involved on some level in my life. Art is important because it helps externalize emotions and express things that cannot be said in words. It gives a voice to the soul.

“Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning.”

— Katherine Anne Porter (1894-1980) U.S. novelist and short-story writer 🐦

Check out Courtney's artwork online at [www/mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org).