

# My Life and Times

*(Names have been changed to protect identities)*

## **Jane Age 10**

*Winner (tie) of 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Prize for ages 7-10*

My life has been rough since I was three years old. I've been sexually abused by three people. It happened when I was three, six, seven, and nine years old. It's always been someone related to me. Life hasn't always been that bad. Then again most of my life I was raised by my real mom. I had to take care of my little brother all by myself when I was only seven years old.

Surviving difficult times can be hard and also easy. My life has been easy and also hard at times. I think the hardest time I have ever lived is what I am in now--foster care. Foster care has been hard for me even though I haven't been in it very long, just since April 20\_\_\_. The reason it's been the hardest is because I was so close to my mom, because when the last abasement occurred, my mother asked me what had been going on. She caught the 3<sup>rd</sup> person abusing me twice. I told her to let him stay the first time because I was very afraid of him. He had threatened to kill my mom and my little brother. It wasn't my fault or my mom's either. It was his. He knew what he was doing was wrong.

I didn't know what was going on until it was too late to stop him. He hit my mom too. That was the first time I ever saw anyone hit my mom. I was taught by my real mom not to ever lay a hand on your parents in a bad way or even call them a name. I loved my life as a child because I was a wild child you could call it. There are parts I love and again there are parts I wish I could go back and fix. I don't know when I will get to go home, but I hope it will be very soon. But hey, after all life isn't all peaches and cream.

When I grow up I want to be a lot of things. After high school I want to go to the army so they will pay for college. I think I have a lot of talents I want to spread out by being a teacher. I want to use my tallness by being a model. And I want to also be a marine biologist.

The best advice I have from one foster child to another is that you never give up your goals when it is so close you could just touch it. You will make it somehow. If you're a teenager you need to be very careful of what you do because it won't affect anybody as bad as it does you. If you're old enough to understand this you need to act as good as you can in front of little kids because you're supposed to be a role model. Life is hard only if you want it to be. Don't be stubborn. Always pay attention to your foster parents because they are giving you a home voluntarily. Never think that you are worthless.

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## **Jada Age 12**

I am going to tell you about the time I remember being in foster care until where I am now. The first home there was a woman by the name of Mrs. L. I can't remember much but I do know one thing she was nice. The only reason I had to leave was she became ill and could not take care of us any longer because at the time she had my brother and me.

So that is when we were sent to live with Miss S. She is a person that you would not want to live with long. My brother and I stayed there for while. We did not like it at all. So one day after school she picked me up, she told me that I was leaving. I was sad because I did not want to leave my brother, but I had to. That is when we were separated. So I went to the next home but it was no better than the last one. They had another foster child. She and I never got along.

There were rats and roaches all over the place. I hated it and I was glad she put me out.

So that is when I came to live with Rev. and Mrs. "Greathouse," where I am now, after I was here for 8 months my brother came to live with us and that made me happy again. I have been with them for 7 years now, and my brother and I have been back together for 6 years now. Being here is better than the other places I have been. My brother and I are just happy and glad to be together again. I have told you about the life and times of me.

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### **Cameo Age 14**

Hi, my name is Cameo and would like to say Hello, and this is the life of me. I will tell you about my life from age 6 to 14 the age that I'm now. Here we go.

Well I lived with my mom until I was 6, then my grandparents took me from my mother. Living with my grandparents was good. Oh, their names are Bob and Linda. Well as we move on, I lived with them for 5 years and 4 month after that I lived with my mother for 3 years. For a couple of years this is where I lived. We moved back to California, then to Texas and back and forth off and on for the next two years then I came to Alabama. Me and my mother got into a fight and I ran away from there and that's how I came into foster care.

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### **Cherie S. Age 11 ½**

Are you having a hard time? Well, let me tell you a story about a little girl.

Once eleven years ago, a sweet, precious baby girl was born. Everything was great until her parents got into a big fight and split up! It was a living nightmare!

Her mother took drugs and slept with other men. She didn't take much time for the little girl.

Her father smoked pot and didn't care about her either! Years passed and the little girl grew and grew and the worse it got!

Her father finally got custody of her. He made it where she could never see her mother again. She went to school just like everybody else, but it just wasn't the same!

Soon her father, his girlfriend, and herself moved to a small town. Her neighbor across the street started flirting with her father. He abandoned the little girl with them. He promised that he would come back, but he never did!

She lived with them for almost a year. They started being really mean to her. They accused her of touching the youngest child. But she didn't!

She left there and went to a new home. She lived with them for about two years, during this time her mother died! They had a few difficulties so had to leave. She went to a new family. They are doing great! In fact, I talked with her not too long ago. She said she was doing wonderful! She also said don't ever give up because you are special especially in God's eyes.

### **Susanna Age 10**

I am Susanna, I am 10 years old. I am a foster kid and I am good. I like where I live. It's nice here. My sister, my brother and I live here. My brother in school is a little bad. Today is a good day for me at my house, it is great at the house, sometimes it's bad. Sometimes I do not like the food. I like to look at the cars in the house. We have a green car. I like books too. Do you like books too?

My dad has a dog, and my mother has a cat. My birthday is on July 2, 1993. I love my birthday. It is fun to get a lot of presents, and I have a book that is a Dictionary that is big. Do not forget Susanna.

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### **Pokemon Age 10**

*Winner (tie) of 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Prize for ages 7-10*

I am a ten-year-old boy. I'm really smart. I live in Alabama. I live with the best foster mom in the whole entire world and my two older foster brothers. At first, I lived with my birth mom and my brother on the street. It was a horrible life living this way. We had no food or water. I slept on the street too. I called the police because my step-dad was beating on Mom. The police called DHR. They came and took me and my little brother to a foster home, to Miss Anne.

It was fun, I stayed for two years. I felt really sad when they separated me from my brother. I cried all that day until my new foster mom said, "Let's go to the mall," where my big foster brother worked. He gave me lots of chicken nuggets. I thanked him so much. I felt better and happier with my new family. I can still see my birth mom and brother sometimes. I'm so glad that I have food on my table everyday. Really good food, like Lebanese food. Yum!!

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### **Sue H. Age 11**

*Winner(tie) of 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Prize for ages 11-14*

I am 11 years old. I have been with my foster family for 4 years, since I was 7 years old. They all love me very much and I love them. My foster family has a mama, a dad, 2 sisters, a brother, and there are a lot of cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. My foster sister said we have 66 first cousins.

The family is large and there are always parties and get-togethers. My foster brother and sisters are all a lot older than me and they don't live with mama and dad any more. I wish they did. They have a house of their own. I go to my brother's a lot. He has horses and I love horses. I ride, walk, feed, and groom the horses.

One of my foster sisters got married last year and I was the flower girl in the wedding. We had fun at the reception. Everybody danced, partied, talked and ate. My whole foster family rented a beach house and we stayed there the whole weekend of the wedding. Our house had a huge pool. We all swam and swam.

My foster sister told us in March that she was pregnant and we were going to have a baby in November. I was so excited I was going to be an aunt. I took baby-sitting classes with my therapist. After I did that, my sister asked Mama if she would keep the baby after she went back to work. Mama said, "Yes!" So I get to see the baby everyday after I get home from school.

So on November 20\_\_ my other foster sister came and woke me up really early and said it was baby day. I jumped up and got dressed. I did not have to go to school because we were having a baby. Mama had already gone to the hospital to be with my sister. My sister and I went together. (We go everywhere together.) But my niece had not come yet. Mama came out of the room and my sister went in. In a few minutes she came back out and said, "WE HAVE A BABY GIRL!!!!!" Her and I jumped up and down right there in the hospital.

I went in the room to see the baby. She is beautiful. Her name is E.V. She weighed 6 pounds and 1 ounce, 20 inches long, and was born at 8:55 a.m. This is going to be E.V.'s first Christmas and I am going to make it special.

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#### **Lil'C Age 14**

Hi! My name is Lil'C I am 14 years old I go to Middle School. I am in the house of Mr. & Mrs. H. Well, to start off with, I was born. When I was 2 or 3 years old my mom and dad got divorced. I have two brothers named Kenny and Lawrence who live with my mom and grandparents. Well back to my life. As I said when I was 2 or 3 my mom and dad had gotten divorced. It was a hard time for everybody.

When my mom and dad got divorced my mom had us with her. We never listened to her. We were just like what the heck, we don't have to listen to her because I need a family with a mom and a dad. So soon after that my mom couldn't take care of us so we had to go live with my dad and his wife and daughter. It was hard because we got tormented like every day. Like if we said nothing wrong, we would have to stand in the corner for at least 10 hours.

I mean I couldn't understand. Until one day when my brother and I were outside in the back yard, my brother ran away and went to my aunt and uncle's house. It was hard for me because they had accused me of knowing where he was but nothing would let me tell on him because I knew one of these days I would be out of there no matter what happened.

My brother had come back for me. It had been the best thing in the world that had happened to me. Then again, once my brother was in the car and my brother had been dragged down the road by his hair with my mom down trying to get my brother out from under his hands. He came down the road and my fat step mom got out of the car and my brother told me to run into my aunt and uncle's house. So we did and that night my uncle

had just gotten out of surgery, but he didn't care because he wanted to help his family. He went outside and helped my mom, and hurt my dad really bad. That is the day that I will never forget.

That night I had spent time with my mom and with my brothers like we hadn't in so many years. It felt really great to see what my mom was really like. Now I am 14 years old and have been in so much trouble it hurts. In July 20\_\_ I went to the County Youth Center—it was a living hell. When I was there I learned a lot but one thing I hadn't learned was don't take for granted what you have because I put my grandparents through so much that it hurt. I know it did.

Today I am sitting in foster care wishing that I were with my mom and brothers and my dog, Bud. I have been in foster care since March 20\_\_. My foster family is great. This is my report on My Life and Times.

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### **Assilem S. Age 13**

It was a nice warm day. My life couldn't be going any better and just when I thought nothing could ruin it, it happened. I was nine, at this time, an age when I didn't even know what foster care was. But, I was soon going to find out.

That day my DYFS worker picked me and my little brother up. It hurt badly being taken away from my mother. I cried that day like I never cried before. It felt like a part of me was gone. My blood, my love, my life, my mother was gone.

Then when I asked why am I in foster care, they said, "Your mom is sick and can't take care of you." Like you don't really know what's wrong: that your mom's a drug addict. You feel like, "Wow, my mom loves drugs and not me." For months, I cried myself to sleep because of this.

After that another tragic moment happened when my grandma died. But what really shocked me was that my grandma died the day me and my brother were going to live with her. For a while I jumped from foster home to foster home until I came to the place where I was meant to be.

When I was there, there was another little girl. For the 3 years I lived with them and we have become very close. I am now in long term foster care (since I wrote a letter to the judge) and still have contact with my family. I have been happy ever since.

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### **Wanda S. Age 13**

My name is Wanda. You call me Andy. I am thirteen years old and I am a respectable person. I've been through tough times. I don't know if I'm supposed to tell my life story. (I will anyway.) Let's start with why. Why am I thirteen with problems? One reason is my mother. My mother has been very sick. She has gotten three operations and she has arthritis. That affects me by being hurt and not being able to understand my mom's

problems. (And being scared.) My life is not that bad. Why? I have three adults that really care for me. My mom and foster parents. I fight with my foster sister. Why? She is always lying to me. I don't like liars. I hate when people lie because I used to get in trouble for lying.

Growing up is hard. Why? It's hard for me to be thirteen. Being thirteen comes with a package. By package, I mean three things. Instead of code I'm going to just say it. Well being thirteen brings haters, boys and peer pressure. What do I mean? There are a lot of people who tried to bring me down. They get in my way. Boys are always asking me to do what I'm not ready for. (If you don't, they will put you down. Peer pressure!) A lot of people try to get me to do things. Things like what? Things like having sex, taking drugs, smoking cigarettes, and fighting. I ignore the pressure (So should you).

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**Brittany B. Age 13**

*Winner (tie) of 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Prize for ages 11-14*

When I was growing up with my mother and two brothers, times were very difficult. I would be left alone. It was myself with my two brothers. My mom would stay out for days. We would have to take care of ourselves, on our own.

As I grew older, the more I found out. Things I never thought my mom would ever do. It surprised and hurt me, because I thought I had a really good mother. When my mom starting doing drugs, we had to dress ourselves for school and cook for ourselves. We were not provided for much.

One day I got so tired of suffering I talked to my teachers about it. People would come over my mother's house to check on us and my mom would never be there. One day my brothers and I called the police, but mom didn't know it. The next day we went to school, DHR came and took us. We were placed with my grandmother, and life got a lot better.

We were healthy, making good grades, and were dressed decent for the first time. Then about a half year later my grandmother died.

I felt so disappointed and heartbroken. I hated my life.

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**Pokemon 2 Age 12**

*Winner (tie) of 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Prize for ages 11-14*

I had a life I enjoyed, up until I was about eight years old. That is when "Peter" came into my life. It was a disaster. He got into a major fight with my Dad, and caved in six of his ribs, nearly breaking them. As a result, our Mom called my Papa. He came to pick us up. We spent the night at his house. Our mom came to get us the next morning, then came the bad news. She said "I've got some new, your Dad is um...in the hospital with six caved in ribs, your Dad and I are getting a divorce and we will now live with Peter in Papa's trailer park."

We lived there for about three or four months when we got a court order telling us we had forty-eight hours to get packed up and get out. “Peter” did the packing, which he packed all his things and then packed my Mom’s stuff next, instead of our bikes, which got stolen overnight like always.

So we lived over in a trailer park near a store. The reason we lived there was because “Peter’s” nephew and sister lived in that particular trailer park where Mom soon got arrested for taking money from her work.

About two months later we got her out on bond. So, again we lived peacefully for about six months when the police called and said, “Your bondage is over and you either turn yourself in by seven a.m. tomorrow, or we are coming to get you and your sentence will be longer.” So, my Mom got married to him overnight so that meant he could spank us. The next day when I woke up, my Mom was gone.

It had been a few days before Halloween and about less than half a month from my birthday, which was November 6. My Mom left a request on our birth dad’s answering machine asking him “Please come and get the kids from Phillip!” All except the baby my Mom had with “Peter.” My Dad got the message, but he said “no.” So we stayed and got beaten—literally.

One day a couple of months later, I wouldn’t get off the floor because he kept kicking me, so he threw me across the room yanking me up by my wrist that I had hurt when he pushed me off my stair rail and really broke it. I had to stay up at night because he made me. Some nights he forced me to smoke weed with him; which I really hated.

After a while the Department of Human Resources finally was informed of it by a nice friend—Miss B. Before I knew it my social worker came one night and woke me and my sisters up and we went to a respite home. The respite home was run by Mrs. R and Mr. J. We stayed there for three months, then our Dad took us back.

After three months passed he gave us up to the state, stating he “could not afford us and he had to go to Arkansas for the job to try to make some money to get us back.” (It turned out he really didn’t want us, he just said it trying not to hurt our feelings.) So, that is how we ended up in the loving and caring home I am I now with the loving guardians that I call Mom and Dad because I have been with them for a little bit more than a year.

Now, for the good times: I am finally getting to be a boy. Dad put me in Karate and Gym Tech, but since Dad hurt his back and is out of work he had to take us out and in exchange put me in horseback riding classes. I also get to draw so I am getting to start a new life as being able to do kid’s stuff like I am supposed to do.

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### **Kevin Age 11**

Hi, my name is Kevin, and this is what I remember about the foster homes. My first home was with my mother. Now she is in a wheelchair and not able to take care of us. My next home was with Miss L. She was nice. She gave out bananas.

My next home was with Miss S. She had two children: a boy and a girl. She was mean. She would heat switches, hit me with a shoe, and whip me with a wet leather belt. I used to hide in a closet or run away to a friend's house. She would come home late at night and my sister was once with me but she left. I don't remember if I was sad or happy. But I really missed her a lot.

She moved with another family. And then with the "Greathouses," and 8 month later I came. The first day we played in a lazy boy chair. We had fun that day. Now we get treated really well. I have my own room and television, Gameboy Advance, Playstation, Piano, Guitar, bed. I have a loving family that goes to church. They are always at home with us. That is the life and times of me.

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### **Lucie S. Age 19**

My life continued...

I am a poem

I am Lucie

I am 19 years old I am a very beautiful young lady.

I am an intelligent young lady.

I am an excellent student.

I am a helpful person that likes to help people out with their problems and give them good advice, but most of all I am Lucie Smithenton.

My name is Lucie. I am 19 years old. I was born in September at 4:28 a.m., at Memorial Hospital. I was a very healthy baby. I weighed 6 pounds, 11 ounces and 18 ½ inches.

My mother's name is "Charity". My father's name is "Quinn." My sister's name is "Barbie." My brothers' names are "Damian and William." I have 3 aunts and 1 uncle and lots of cousins.

I have long beautiful hair. I am 5'2" tall, 118 pounds. I am very kind and caring. I love to help people out with their problems.

My favorite colors are baby blue, red, black, gold, silver, purple and lime green.

My favorite food is hamburger pie, spaghetti and bacon stir-fry. I have all my own recipes too.

I like to do a lot of things with my spare time. My favorite hobbies are talking on the phone, dancing, singing, doing hair, doing nails, going to the movies, helping my peers out with their problems and just having a good time.

My sisters, brothers and I all have different fathers.

My mother was pregnant with me when she was 16 years old. When I was born, I was a very healthy little girl. About a month later, I got sick with a virus, and I had to go to the children's hospital. I was in the hospital for 2 weeks. When it was time for me to go home, my mother and grandfather had decided that they could not take care of me anymore, because I was too sick.

So, they decided to sign some papers and put me up for adoption. When I was 3 years old, I was adopted by "Annie." She was 68 years old. When she adopted me she loved me like I was her own child. We lived in the country. We lived in a beautiful house. We had

8 bedrooms, a living room, dining room, basement, kitchen, laundry room, TV room and a den. Most of the bedrooms had 2 beds in them. We had a huge backyard and front yard.

We had a dog. He was black. His name was Zeus. One day my mother was feeding the dog and her ankle got caught around the dog's chain and she fell. Mother started to scream and that is when I went to go get help. I went to go get my cousin Angela and my brother William. They both helped her up. She could not walk. We went to the hospital. The doctors gave Mother a walker to walk with and then a couple of years later she was walking with a cane. Mother had a bad knee too. Anytime it would rain, she would have problems with her knee.

One day I came home from school and my Mother could not get in the house. She told me to hand her a brick. She took the brick and threw it against the window. She asked me to "Reach in and open the door," I could not open the door, because my arms were too short. So, my mother had to reach in and open the door. As she reached in to open the door, the glass went through her hand and cut her. A piece of glass was sticking out of her hand. She was bleeding really bad. We could not stop the blood. I went to go get help. We had to go back to the hospital. Mother had to get 25 stitches in her hand. She had to wear a cast for a few months.

Everyone called her Mother. She was married, but her husband passed away in the 70's, because of an illness. Mother had 10 biological children and 3 foster children. Mother was born in May of 1916 and she passed away in March of '97. Mother loved children and she loved to cook. Mother taught me how to cook spaghetti.

When I was 5 years old, I started pre-school. I always rode the bus to school, because Mother did not know how to drive. It was her decision. She was scared and afraid. Mother had already been in a car accident when was a little girl. My Kindergarten teacher's name was Mrs. S. One day when I was in school, I was playing in the classroom and then I used the bathroom on the floor. My teacher asked me, "Did you go to the bathroom, Ashley?" I told her no. She gave me some more pants so I could change. When I got home, I did not get in any trouble. Mother just washed my clothes and hung them outside to dry.

It was scary to watch Mother go through all this pain. I was there when everything happened too. To me it was a blessing that she went through all this and thanks to God I did not lose her. Mother did not like where we lived, because there were a lot of accidents and storms. One day my aunt and I were looking out the window and a tornado struck right in front of our house. I was scared.

The same day a car had turned over in front of our house and caught on fire. I was praying to God that the people in the car were okay and then the man in the care came out. He had blood on his head, but he was okay. The next day a truck went through this lady's house, she lived down the street from us. Nobody was in the house.

A couple years later, Mother got sick with Alzheimer's. We had to move to Cleveland. Alzheimer's is a disease that affects the brain and cells, where you cannot remember anything. So as days and nights went by, Mother did not remember anything. Mother

would always ask, “Who are you?” “What’s your name baby?” It would scare me to see her like that.

She moved in with her daughter, who was a nurse at the Clinic. I moved in with her other daughter. When I moved in, things were getting rough. I started being bad. I was doing things that adults would do and not children. I would always get into fights with my cousins; even my boy cousin would kick me in my stomach and punch me in my face, because I was being a bad little girl. I stayed there for a year and then I called my caseworker.

They moved me to East Cleveland. I was 11, about to be 12 years old. I lived with The Bells. It was a horrible home. I could not go anywhere or do anything. So, I started doing the same stuff I did before I got there. I stayed there for 3 years.

While I was staying there, Mother passed away. I lived with Mother for 8 ½ years. I was devastated. Mother meant the whole world to me and there wasn’t anything I could do to get her back. It was like I had lost everything. I also got a gorgeous blanket she left for me.

After Mother passed away, they moved me to a group home. They moved me to a group home, because I was out of control. It was a nice group home. When I went there I became suicidal. I thought since my mother had passed away, that I had nothing to live for. I met a lot of nice staff and I was friends with everyone. I had a boyfriend. He was a nice boy. We did a lot of things at Act 1. They let us get away with a lot of things too. We also had fun. We would go places almost every day. We had picnics and parties. We went to school and we had fun there too. I lived there for 1½ years.

After that group home, they moved me to another foster home in Youngstown, Ohio. I lived with M.R. I went to high school. I had many boyfriends. I got good grades. One day I became suicidal again. They sent me to the hospital; it was horrible. They would abuse children and teenagers, but they did not touch me. I disliked that hospital, but the people were nice. I stayed there for 1 year.

They moved me to another house. My new foster parents there will be forever my parents. When I went to visit I liked it a lot. In June 2002, I moved in. This home is the best home I’ve ever been in since Mother passed away. My parents are wonderful. We have fun. We do a lot of things that most parents would never do with their children. They are the best parents ever and anybody would love to stay here. Right now, I would like to say to my parents, thank you for taking me in your home when you did not have to. Thank you for caring for me throughout these 2 years. You are wonderful parents and I love you always and forever.

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### **Beth L. Age 17**

From the time I was born until I was about 12 my life was pretty easy. When I was young I did what I wanted when I wanted to do it. I guess you could say I was a spoiled brat. That was until my mom met a new guy. From the beginning him and I did not get along. This of course tore my relationship with my mom apart. I decided that it would be best if I went to live with my grandma over the summer, so that we could think about things and

hopefully work them out. My mom asked me a million times if I was sure it was what I wanted to do. I thought it was.

While I was living at my grandma's house she decided she wanted full custody of me. She went behind my back. She told me I would never again live with my mom. This happened when I was 13. I didn't think I could do anything about it, so I just went along with my everyday life. By this I mean I went to school, made good grades, hung out with all the right people, and did the things a normal 13 year old girl would do.

Things started to change when I was about 15. I still went to school, made good grades, and hung out with my friends. They were all much older than I was. This is when I became angry with my grandma for all the things she had done. I started not coming home very often. Instead of doing things like I used to such as football games, I would hang out with my older friends. I would drink and get high almost every weekend. When I was home I would have to sit there and argue with my grandma.

My mom and I were still pretty close. My grandma hated that. She would try to keep me away from my mom. She would tell me that she was a nobody and that she didn't love me. She told me that I would turn out to be just like her.

In August of 2001 our arguments had become worse. My grandma had gone as far as calling the cops once or twice a week. They would come down and tell me what I should or shouldn't do. It obviously didn't work. That is until they got tired of coming every time my grandma would call. They finally took me away.

They put me in the Youth Service Bureau (YSB) for 5 days until I went to court. Then the judge put me on house arrest. Towards the end of September my grandma and I got into 1 last fight. When the cops came they told me to pack enough stuff for quite a while. I walked out of my grandma's that night with a smile on my face.

That Christmas they trusted me enough to go home. I was still mad at my grandma so I lied about where I was going. I told her I was going to my aunt's, but instead I went to an older guy's friend's house. The day after Christmas I went back to YSB. Three months after that I found out I was pregnant.

When I was 6 months pregnant I got to leave YSB, but I didn't go home. They put me in a foster home. They were really nice and they accepted me for who I was. They believed I could raise my baby on my own. That made me happy because no one else believed in me. They thought I should give her up for adoption. I wanted to raise MY baby. It wasn't even a week before I was supposed to have my baby that I found out I was going to bring her home with me. It has been 16 months since then and Madison is growing up so fast. I am now able to see my mom, and my relationship with my grandma is healthier.

I have pretty specific plans for the next year or so. I will be 18 in 5 months. I plan to get my own apartment with Madison. I will be starting college at Ball State University to major in either business or the medical field. So there is my life up until now with just a small glimpse into the future. I know everything will work out great.

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## **Rose R. Age 15**

NSYNC, Backstreet Boys, and watching MTV, that's what normal adolescents do. For me it was babysitting, watching my Mother get messed up on drugs, worrying about food was also an issue. We also had to always worry about when cops were going to show up. In the fourth grade I lived in Wayne. That is when everything went wrong! My mother and step-dad couldn't do anything but sleep on the couch all day long. When the baby cried I dealt with her. She is my pride and joy— my baby sister, but of course the kids were always my responsibility.

Soon we began collecting stolen antiques. A couple of weeks later the cops arrived as soon as we got home from school. My mother took us to our Grandparents' house. We stayed there for about three weeks.

One day in the middle of Gym class my teacher came and pulled me out. My mom and my aunt were standing there waiting for me. We went to my grandmother's and picked up my brother and sister. I was finally going home. We went back to my ex-step-dad's house and lived with him for a while.

Then my mom's boyfriend dropped us off at school and was arrested as soon as he left the school. My mom didn't know where he was either. So she decided to call him in as a missing person. They told her they had arrested him.

Things gradually got worse. My mom had found a new boyfriend. He was nice for a while, bought us things, and took us out to eat. Soon we moved in with him. It was nice for a while; then the fighting began. First it was my mom and her boyfriend, then it was me and my mom.

We moved again, this time to a small town where everything was supposed to get better; it only got worse. My mom was never home and I had to stay home from school to baby-sit. She wouldn't even come home sometimes at night.

I blew up one night, and ran away to my boyfriend's house. I called someone I could trust. The next thing I knew, the cops were questioning me. My next stop was at the Group Home; I was there for three weeks and then was placed in a foster home. I was there for a month and then went to another foster home.

Four months later I went back to my mom's house. Everything wasn't fine and dandy, it was worse. I ran away again, and went to another foster home. I didn't follow rules and got sent to the Group Home. I was there for eight months, and was placed in a new foster home. I have been here for four months and am quite happy here.

I think I have made good improvements. Being in the system has changed me a lot. Now I know what it's like to live in a real house and family. You always learn from someone else's mistakes! And I have.

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## **Kitten Age 17**

As far back as I can remember is when I was in the third grade. I was living in California and my step dad made my mom go to a prostitute house because we were in need of money. That's when all the pain comes in...I believe I was six at the time. My step dad called my older sister and me in the bathroom, so we went in not knowing if we were in trouble. Then he asked us if we wanted to know what mommy was doing I said yes so did my sister.

He started to touch me where he wasn't supposed to. I was scared at first and then he asked me if it tickled I said yes. Then it started to hurt so he stopped and I left the bathroom but later that night he said it would be our little secret so I did not tell any of my friends. After a month or two my dad started to pack up all of our stuff and said we were moving.

I was mad I told him I did not want to go because I had my friends here. Then he told me we were going to see Grandma. When we got there we stayed for almost a full school year. Then we had to pack up and move again; this time it was not as far, only to Austin, Texas; my grandmother was in San Antonio.

My drunken aunt took us there. I was so scared she was such a crazy driver. Then my step dad started up again. This time my little brother was brought in it. Soon all of us were being touched there; I did not like it all anymore. He kept telling me he did not care if we called the cops on him, but I was just plain scared-y cat to face him even though I did not like it. My sister is the one who told our uncle and he turned him in.

When I was nine, it finally stopped and he pled guilty to five counts of sexual child abuse. They took me and my brother and other sisters away from my mom also. They put us in a shelter, and I ran away from there two times: the first time we were caught within 30 minutes, and the second time I stayed there for over a week and actually found my mother. She turned us in simply because she did not want to go back to the jailhouse. I was really mad but most of all it hurt that she would just say, "I love you," and "Good-bye."

I never ran away afterwards—because of that. To this day I still cry about it. My younger siblings were adopted in Georgia. And nowadays I am in a study foster home in Texas, finally able to learn how to it is to be a teen on their own and hopefully able to find the love I once lost.

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### **Adriana F. Age 16**

In March 19\_\_ I was called out of class to see my mother cry. When we arrived home, she told me my brothers, sister and I were going into foster care. Before this day I'd never heard of such a place. I soon learned all about this new world.

After a horribly long drive, we arrived at our destination. I was so angry. How could this have happened to me? Only in the sixth grade, I had decided to hate everyone I'd meet. Well, of course that didn't work. I'd become this funny, joke-telling kid within hours. Inside I was so angry, I felt like I'd deceived myself.

My caseworker visited and said we would only be in foster care for one month, I was so excited for a while I got visits with my mother, six brothers, and my sister lived with me.

Two months later I was told it would be a little longer. It hurt to think I was so excited, and now I had nothing.

It took a while to be ok with my situation, but I still wasn't happy. I barely made it through the days, and the nights were even worse. Only being eleven, I was lost and confused. All I could think about was myself. I never thought about my mother, or siblings, and their feelings.

The following March, over spring break, my sister and I returned home. Things went well until my brothers came home. It was too much for a single parent. My mother had no help from my father because he wasn't allowed to be around. In May my family and I returned into the system, since then my world has changed so much. I started to understand things and accept things I couldn't change. I am now sixteen and finding it really hard to be happy.

I've learned so much about life, and did it through mistakes I've made. I could never make it through counseling; I went through three counselors in one year.

My oldest brother is now getting married; the other has a son. My four youngest brothers were adopted, and have a great life. It's hard to be happy for them when I can't find happiness within myself. I do my best to show them the happiness and acceptance they deserve. Sometimes I forget how this situation has affected my whole family and just think about how it hurt me.

I hope someday that I will be able to be happy with myself. Some advice for other foster kids is to stop feeling sorry for yourself, and think about others that are affected. It is hard to realize that the people we love are the ones who can hurt us the most—but forgiving is half the healing. Sometimes when we're treated wrong we begin to think little of all people. We need to realize no two people are the same.

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### **Sandy M. Age 16**

My life is not very good sometimes. I wish I were someone else. I tried finding my way out of life, but I know I would hurt the people that really love me. I was abused, but life goes on. I am away from my brother and sister. It makes me very sad because I raised my brother and sister by myself. I took the beatings that they were meant to have. I did everything I could to make sure they had food.

My mom always went out with men that beat her. We were always scared because she would be gone for days, sometimes weeks. When she finally did come home, we wished she would just disappear forever. She paid men to sexually abuse me. I always got in the way she said. I was only trying to help.

Finally, one day, she and her boyfriend got into a huge argument. He said he was leaving her. My mom tried to kill him...and herself. She about got into a wreck. She was running over curbs and everything. I jumped out of the car and ran to a payphone and called an ambulance and the police for mom. They took us to my grandmother's house and the next day we got put in state custody.

We were able to see my mom for a while until she kept upsetting my brother. He was 7 years old and had the mind of a four-year-old. That was bad for him. My sister was 9

years old. So after a few years, my brother and sister and me got separated from each other. I was most affected. My brother put it all behind him. He tried to tell me it's best just to forget. So did my sister. But I just could not do that.

I've been through about thirty placements. I wish I had listened to them because they are doing great as far as I know. So what if I don't forget. What makes me weak, and I deal with it, makes me stronger. Every foster kid should know that. I've been doing good. Instead of going crazy with tears, I made a scrapbook. It makes me feel better. I used to not trust anyone, but I know I can because I took a chance and talked to someone. It helped me a lot. The past is the past. I have to move on no matter how much pain the past brought on.

I'll always love my mom. But she knows what she lost and she hates herself for it. That what she told me. I'm proud of her because she finally came off her drugs and broke up with the guy that made all this happen. I just hope she finds herself and moves on just like I have. I know she will make it. I wrote a little poem:

I want you to know  
I still love you  
No matter what you do  
I want you to know  
I still think you're a good person  
No matter how much you hurt me

I want you to know  
I've moved on and you can too  
I want you to know  
I'm proud of you  
You could do it, that I know

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### **Mopar 1588 Age 17**

*Winner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Prize for ages 15+*

My life before I came to foster care was a mess. Today my life is all coming together and getting back on track.

I was born in August of 19\_\_ to my loving mom and dad. Then in January 19\_\_ my little brother was born to our parents. Before us my mom had 3 other girls with 2 other men. These girls were adopted when they were just little so I never really got the chance to meet one of them because she died in October 20\_\_ due to an accident involving a drunk driver. But the other two girls I have met, and I love them very much even though we still have our sisterly fights. My brother and I are very close and we will continue to stay that way through everything. Then my mom met my dad when I was 6, and we have been with him ever since. He is my dad. So that is a little about my life before it got ALL chaotic.

Today I am in a foster home and I will tell you some events that have led up to my being in a foster home. One thing is that when I was about 13 I was introduced to the world of drugs. That is when my family started moving all over Nebraska. My mom was an alcoholic at this time so we were everywhere and I just never fit in with anyone. Then we

moved, and of course, I right away got in with the wrong crowd and started right up with the drug world.

I, then, met my ex-boyfriend and we started to hang out all the time, and he never let me do drugs so my drug life seemed to be over. Then he decided to move in with me and my family and of course I got pregnant, I was 14 at this time, definitely too young to be getting pregnant, actually too young to be doing any of this.

So my boyfriend and I talked about it forever and we talked to doctors and support people and then we came to the conclusion that I should get an abortion. In August 20\_\_ my family and my boyfriend came with me to get an abortion. It happened on my birthday, and I will have to live with the decision for the rest of my life. After I got the abortion my boyfriend left me, of course, that is how most stories go.

I started doing drugs again, but this time it got a little out of hands and my parents decided I needed to go get treatment. They got me into a good rehab. I will never forget that day either—even though I thank god I found that place. I was kicked out of that treatment program, and then, something must have kicked me in my head because I have been sober and clean for a year and seven months.

Then I came home and it was Thanksgiving time so we went to see my Grandma and then a couple of months later my brother was put in jail. A couple of months after that my brother and I were put in a county holdover. My mom went to prison and I went to a foster home. I did not get a long with them that well, so my caseworker put me in a new foster home, and I have been here for about 10 months and I love everyone here as if they were really my family. They are trying to get guardianship over me and we are just waiting for the papers to go through at the attorney's office.

So, in closing, I will give a little advice. First for the foster parents, I would say to never give up on us children, because we can change for the better. Then for the foster kids I would say to always believe that the foster parents are in this for you and not for anything else, they really want you to change for the good and they will do anything for you. Thanks for taking the time to listen to my story.

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### **Flower Girl Age 18**

My life and times, well that's a subject I said I'd never get into simply because my life was terrible at times. Now I'm sitting at my desk wondering, "What am I doing?" I'll tell you what I'm doing I am getting this hurt out of me for once.

I spent my life moving not because I was a bad child, but because I was confused. Confused of how a little girl could go through so much pain. The pain was no ordinary pain. You know the pain that makes you say ouch. See this pain makes you say "Lord take me now!"

I was three years old when I entered foster care. My mom was a foster child. That placed me in a situation that made me hate everyone around me. I felt unwanted and useless. As I grew older things only got worse. When I was five my lifestyle was that of a grown woman. I provided for myself. No, I didn't work. Social workers always told me they

would take care of me, but this particular foster home was different—I had to fight off my foster brothers for a year.

I prayed to God every night asking him to help me. I was only five and confused about life. At the age of six I received notice that my mom wanted me back. I appeared before court and agreed. I'm not going to speak for my mom but I believe she asked for me because she felt bad. I'm not saying that it was wrong, you should want your family to be together.

At the time my mom was having her own problems. That was not good for a mother and daughter that did not have a relationship. Based upon that fact we did not do well together, at the age of twelve she put me out. I went from a grandparent to an aunt then to a step aunt. The placements did not work because in my heart I felt alone but in my mind I felt grown.

From my step aunt I was placed in the state's custody. They placed me in a group home. I had no home. After a few months in there I was placed in my first real foster home. This home was perfect. The only problem in the home was me. There I was almost thirteen and hated the world. I could not trust anyone. I didn't want to trust anyone. How could I trust someone? I had to protect myself from hurt. The only way I could do that was to guard my heart.

I messed up four homes because of this. In between these changes, I gave birth to a handsome baby boy. He is now 1 year old. To me he was a gift from God showing me that I have a reason to live. For that reason I will not give up. For that reason I will appreciate foster parents. If it weren't for foster homes my baby and me would not know each other. So I am very thankful. Now I am eighteen. I love my foster home but I'm ready to be on my own. No one can help me heal but me. I have to live a new life for my son.

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### **Big D. Age 15**

What do you think of when you hear the words “foster child”? I hear those words and I think about a child that doesn't live with their parents for some particular reason. I have been a foster child for six years, and have been through some of the hardest times that you could imagine. Usually as a foster child you've been exposed to a lot of things you shouldn't have been. Foster children are just kids that don't have the love and attention of their original family. Most times when a kid is taken from their parents, it's for a good reason. DHR really helps a child have a decent form of growing up and they are included in a real family that will take care of their needs. But some kids think that DHR is here only to ruin lives, and that's not true. DHR has been the biggest turnaround for me.

When I came into this agency I was placed with a family of four. They have been the biggest help to me. When I came from my biological family, I was always getting into trouble and had poor grades. My foster mother (who I call Mom) got me into gear and got me a tutor. I passed 7<sup>th</sup> grade by the edge of my teeth.

I have always wanted to play football, but never could because my grades were too low to be eligible to play. But now I play for the Bruins varsity football team and the last nine

weeks I was on the A/B honor role. This was a real big improvement over the last couple of years. My Mom has taught me a lot, like how important my grades are and stuff that I am going to need when I go out on my own and have to live by myself.

Just last school year I was a volunteer at the YMCA. I helped with the after school child care program. Then over the summer I was an LIT (leader in training) which could help me get a job there someday. I volunteered my whole summer from 8 in the morning until 6 in the evening at the YMCA. I plan on going back to the YMCA, because I was told that if I came back I would be able to get a job next year when I am sixteen.

My mother and father have helped me put all this together with the help of the state and my foster care agency. I really appreciate them for all their hard work and commitment to me, and for helping to make me a better person than I was six years ago. I look back and actually realize how better off I am now than I was before. My biological family had to struggle to make ends meet and it was difficult on the family. But now I'm in a new home and it is the best place for me. It has really changed my life completely around. So next time you hear the words "foster child," think again about what it might mean.

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### **Pickens Co. Girl Age 17**

This is an essay about the life of a young teenage girl named Heather. She was born in Francis Scott Key Medical Center in Maryland in July 1986.

My parents were not reliable. They were drug addicts and alcoholics. They would leave for days at a time and leave my brothers and sisters to watch me. My dad would come home drunk and he would abuse me sexually, mentally and physically. One day my parents left when I was three years old. I was yelling and screaming and my sister could not get me to shut up. My neighbors ended up hearing me and they called the Pickens County Department of Human Resources. My sister and I were then placed in their custody and later placed in a foster home.

I was placed in this home where the foster parent abused me. When I told I would get in trouble. They would tell DHR that I was a liar and that they did not know what I was talking about. I was finally moved to a more loving family. At that time my sister and me were separated. My sister went bizurk and she would not move unless I moved. I moved and we were placed in a lady's house that whatever my sister did I got my mouth washed out for her cursing. When I finally had enough, I told her we had to leave and I was thankful that this lady would not be able to hurt me anymore.

I was then placed in a group home when I was ten years old. There was a family that wanted to adopt me but I would not let them so they made me leave their home. They wanted to have kids who wanted to be adopted. I went to a lock up facility where I became suicidal and anorexic. I had stopped eating for three months and I lost one hundred and twenty four pounds. One Saturday I went to see my family in the cafeteria and I fell and hit my head and I busted my nose. They took me to the hospital and I went home. My doctor said "If you do not eat then we are going to admit you in to the hospital and put three feeding tubes in you." So, that is what they had to do to get me to eat besides they paid me for every ten pounds. I did not care about the money I cared about getting better.

I went to a group home where I stayed for only five months. I went to boot camp for violation of probation, drugs, running away, and criminal mischief of the third degree. I stayed there seven months and then came to TPI and stayed for four months. After I left, I went to another foster home. I only stayed for two weeks and then I went to another agency and stayed seven and a half months. Later I went to an independent group home. There I tried to commit suicide and was sent to the children's hospital. They sent me to a shelter. Now I am living with a loving family in Alabama.

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### **Stargate Age 16**

Hi, my name is Stargate and I am a white 16-year-old female. I am in the ninth grade. I enjoy singing, writing, reading, and dancing in my spare time. I try to maintain my grades and keep a positive attitude. Even though, I have been through a lot, I still put a smile on my face and keep my head up. I have to go on with my life. I wake up every morning and go to school. When I get home, I help out with chores and do my homework.

Inside I am going through a lot of changes, some are good and some are not so good. Like the fact that I had my body violated. I have been able to escape eight rapes in a row. It is going to be hard for my body to develop like a normal teenager's. I know deep inside that I should not feel sorry for myself. It was not my fault. I know that God helped me to escape and he is helping me to become a healthy young woman. I love myself because I believe in my Lord.

Thank you to my aunt and uncle and my two cousins. Thank you to my first foster mother. Thank you to my new foster brother. God bless Mrs. D. and Mrs. W. May everybody be healthy and happy. I am going to close with this sentence: Teens keep your heads up and you will succeed.

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