



LeMarque M.

I am former foster youth from Los Angeles. I had a happy but not easy childhood. I was in foster care from the age of 16 to my 20th birthday. I began working part time at the late age of 15. I loved the game of basketball. As I got better at basketball I started playing on a local traveling basketball team. When the traveling team cost began to rise, I started catering to help pay for the rising cost, that had to be paid in order to keep playing on the traveling team. About the age of 16 I was placed in foster care. I was forced to move to a new school, as well as a new city.

Once placed in foster care (a group home with 3 other youth), my life began to change for the worse in my eyes. But little did I know that was the start of me becoming a Chef (Chef Leni). I always cooked for myself when I lived with my mom, before I was placed in foster care. I did not like fast food, I loved eating new things and I was always coming up with something new to cook. After my move to a new school things fell apart. I was behind in school credits and I did not care for basketball anymore. I spent my free time cooking for the other youth and watching cooking shows.

I began to think about what I would do with my life after foster care. I researched what type of help I could receive as a foster youth and after I left foster care. When I turned age 18, I entered an Independent Living Program. This program virtually allowed me to live in a house without having to pay rent. The only conditions were to abide by the rules of the program, maintain a job and attend school.

Once I graduated from high school I enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College to earn an Associate of Arts Degree. As time passed I started cooking for small groups of people 5-10. As I became more skilled in cooking, I moved up to bigger groups of 45 or more. That's when he discovered my passion for cooking. With that discovery, I set out to make a name for myself. At age 19, my first job was working as a chef at Mama's Hot Tamales Café in Los Angeles. I and others provided hands on training to bakers, cooks, caterers, restaurant owners, managers and permitted sidewalk vendors about how to run a catering business.

Prior to exiting the foster care system I was offered an opportunity to attend culinary school in Belgrade, Serbia. When I had completed culinary school in Belgrade I volunteered my time at a restaurant (Madera). Shortly after my return to the U.S. I received a letter from Madera extending me the opportunity to learn a new Cuisine (Serbian). I remain in Serbia today.

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