



I am Reina V. I am 18 years of age and I have been in the foster care system since I was 12. It was extremely difficult for me to be separated from my mother and placed in the foster care system. Although my life with my mother wasn't a healthy situation for me, I still wasn't prepared for the separation; I guess it's that unconditional love a child has for their mother/parents. I have been blessed, to be placed in a legal guardianship placement since the age of 12, with a caring foster mother. And I have also been blessed to have my little brother placed with me. Even though it has been difficult being in foster care I have never allowed myself to make excuses for it; being in the system drives me to do better and be better, I want to live my life so that my children will never have to go through what I went through.

I didn't know what it felt like for someone to say Reina, "you did a good job" or "I am proud of you" I had never felt a sense of encouragement until I met my math Teacher Mr. Brand at Lynnwood Middle School. Mr. Brand wrote these words to me...

"You have been a wonderful student to have, and a wonderful person to get to know. You know it's amazing to watch you continue to be positive and uplifting, despite harsh circumstances. You are an inspiration to me and I will think of you always. You have so much to offer to the world and I wish you all the happiness and success life has to offer." Sincerely, Mr. Brand

Hearing these words on the page of my yearbook was the first time I had heard words of encouragement and love. This is where I really began to change, I felt as though just because my mother and family didn't care for or love me, that didn't mean that I wasn't worth having someone else care for and love me. I began to change my way of thinking and I began to be more positive and think more positive. I worked hard to keep my grades up and with this I gain confidence. I am now a member of the Prom Committee, I was in the AVID Program. My goals are to go to college; I will like to attend the Art Institute in Santa Monica, where I will study to be a chef. I dream of opening my own business, a restaurant. My restaurant will cater to all backgrounds: American, Indian, African American, Thai, Chinese and Mexican. I want my restaurant to satisfy all taste buds no matter what ethnicity you are.

In closing, my time in foster care hasn't been so bad; it actually has been a blessing in disguise. The foster care system has taught me to be tough and to be a go-getter. It has taught me to dream and to dream big because you never know one day you might just wake up in your dream.