

Sonya L.

I didn't enter the foster care system until I was 13, and when I did the only thing I could think about was the stigma that goes along with being a foster kid, which was definitely a negative outlook. My father was killed when I was 3, and living with a single, addict, abusive, alcoholic mother did not help my self esteem. I had been living at home unhappily for a long time, and enough was enough!

Although my mom had her extravagant faults, I still loved her endlessly, she just made it so hard. The whole time I was in foster care we remained in contact, and had a better relationship than ever.

When I was taken from my mom, they gave her many options and chances to reclaim custody of my brother and I, but she never changed her life.

When I entered foster care I was scared, troubled, and confused, all I wanted was to go home, even though I was better off in the system. I went from one foster home to the next, then finally I entered a group home, and that was when my life changed dramatically, and for the best.

While in foster care I was seriously depressed, and I had the biggest chip on my shoulder. I always wanted to do what the "crowd" did, and being in trouble was the only way I could get the attention I wanted, and needed. When I entered my group home I had these issues, and it definitely took me some time to work on my attention "issues". All the staff I came in contact with considered me to be a "know it all" , and a "complainer", and they had no problem making that known to me. It took me a while to learn that I had to look inside myself to find my issue(s), and overcome them. My life changed so much due to the restrictions that were implemented upon me while in foster care. At the time I thought all those rules were dumb, and had no purpose, but to make my life miserable. The staff were always in my "business", and I hated that. I always thought the staff was just being nosy, and trying to get me in trouble, but I found that many of the staff were nosy because they cared.

When I was 16 my mother went missing for a couple of weeks, and then they found her body dead in a park. I was devastated, and not only that, but it was official that I was an orphan. I went through so many mental battles, before I decided I couldn't take on life by myself.

I know this may seem corny to you, but I had to learn this the hard way. Let them in! If you have someone in your life, whether it be a staff, foster parent, or social worker let them in. It took the death of my mother to realize, not everyone is out to get me. Before my mother died I looked at the staff as people, but after she died I looked at them as family. Listen to what your elders have to say, because although you may feel they have no idea what you're feeling, life is a journey for everyone, and you can't go the distance alone.

I am 21, with a good life. I am a smart, caring, respected young lady.

I've made some pretty good decisions for myself, all because I decided to finally listen. I'm glad to say I have no children, and although it would be nice to have one, I don't have a boyfriend, and I also know I don't need one. I'm working for the Los Angeles County Internal Services Department now, and I have aspirations of becoming a juvenile probation officer. I just want each person reading this to know, "You are not alone!" I'm not just saying that, and no one told me to. I just know that lonely feeling, that void I used to have is filled. That void is filled with love, love for myself, and love for those who sincerely love me. If you feel down and out, just know you're not the only one who's going through "it". Reach out to people, and don't be afraid to accept help. Take in every word of advice like those will be the last words you'll ever hear, because wisdom is only passed on to the wise! I want you to know that I was as average of a teenager as they come. I wasn't some over achiever that did everything right by nature, nor was I interested in doing anything right, so take my examples personal, because they are from me to you. From one youth to another, from my heart to yours.

THERE IS NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW TO LEARN, STRIVE, AND GROW!