



Christen Roberts <christen.roberts@gmail.com>

PRIMETIME - Foster Kids

5 messages

Christen Roberts <christen.roberts@gmail.com>**Wed, May 31, 2006 at 3:12 PM**

To: "abc.news.magazines@abc.com" <abc.news.magazines@abc.com>

Cc: Joey Patricia Roberts Adams <jpr.adams@gmail.com>

I was sent an article about your call to action today.

Thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Regardless of the relevance or whether or not you can use it, my story and that of my sister's is only one in hundreds of how a system designed to improve can cause more heartache, more abandonment, and more self-loathing than I sometimes think was possible before the system began.

Have you ever come home to find one sister gone, a mother in her bedroom, and a filthy man eating the food in your fridge? Have you thought that maybe life was just a series of adventures involving cocaine, alcohol, sexual abuse, prostitutes, and the occasional puppy your single mother brought home for you kids? Has your mother ever presented you with the school allowance check and asked you, ten years old, if she can use it to buy cocaine, turn it into crack, and sell it for more money?

Pictures like these make us grateful for the eyes watching out for our children. But one year later, when my sister and I are living in another state, and our foster parents are calling us fat, ugly, stupid, too good for them, and our mother is a piece of sh*t - well. I longed for that puppy and I longed for that mother and I longed for that fat man in my fridge.

In the course of 6 years, I lived in seven foster homes. One of those homes for three years. It wasn't until the third year, when they said they were moving to another state and we were moving with them that I learned something vital - so vital, I was flabbergasted I hadn't heard of it, or even IMAGINED it's existence: I had rights.

I had rights!

At 15 years old, I could say no! My track coach, Kris Provost, told me this. The truth.

My sister and I left class early. We packed clothes the night before. We went to the principal and I stood in his office, looked him in the eye, and said "If you send us home, we're running away." There was nothing he could say to make me stop. "If you send us home, we're running away." No amount of cajoling, petting, calming, reason - there was nothing to make me change my mind.

By that point, I had spent three years trying to convince my foster parents that I loved them no matter how much they tore me or my sister or my biological mother down. No matter how many times they encouraged their own children to join in the fun of torturing the foster kids; no matter how many times I was grounded from track practice or reading books! No matter how many times they said I could go to the school dance, help me get ready, then five minutes before we left say "No. You can't go." No matter. I wanted a family. If it meant I had to call my sister a nigger right alongside them, I did it. But three years later, I admitted that I hated them. And no amount of guidance from my principal would make me go back. "If you send us home, we're running away."

Eventually we ended up with a family. And it's as if they were always meant to be with us. On March 13,

2006, my 26-year old sister was adopted by our foster mother (our foster father died 10 years ago, after we had been with them 2 years). And on May 26, 2006, my 29th birthday, I was adopted. It took a long time, but we found families. This was one family that wasn't letting us go at 18. She helped me pay for books for college. And when I was 23 and I needed help and social services told me to quit school and get another job, it was my foster mother - legally no longer a foster parent because I had aged out - who sent me rent money. I know what a family is like now, but it's been years of therapy to teach me that I should never have to bribe people to love me.

Now, we have a two year old nephew in foster homes in Florida. Since before he was put in the system, my sister and I and our brother and his wife (now legal brother) have been urging the courts to recommend adoption with all of us as options. Our biological sister has finally abandoned him and chances are that he can be adopted. But his foster mother of 10 months gets first choice. And our sister, the mother who left him, gets to choose who can adopt him.

And I'm heartbroken by the possibilities.

I want your show to do one thing, and one thing only: save us. It's not so simple, I know. But there are people out there who can be wonderful parents if they just remember this: we are children. We are just like your children. There is nothing about our lives that makes our potential any less promising than another's. Believe and foster that potential and the stigma of being a foster child can evaporate. There is more hope in them because they have resolve and more than anything, they are the ones who understand what family means.

Make them listen.

Christen Roberts

--

"An intellectual is a person whose mind watches itself."

-- Albert Camus (1913-60)