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| What Foster Care Feels Like. |

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It is often asked to me by those not familiar with foster care: “What’s It Like?” I am asked because I spent eighteen years in the   
Michigan foster care system back in the 1950’s & 1960’s.  
  
Rather than share my personal story which I have shared in many ways in the past I wish to answer this question drawing on my   
experience as well as the experience of others not only from the same time frame as myself but also from those who have   
experienced it in the past 50 years; including within the past five to ten years. I do it using present tense words.  
  
Even in what might be considered the best of foster homes:  
  
We are sometimes unjustly placed or abused, neglected, abandoned or relinquished at birth.  
  
We bounce from place to place, with memories that walk the night alone, nor is the love ours that we must embrace. We sometimes   
slip through the cracks and get shuffled around unnoticed and forgotten.  
  
We are always living on the outside looking in. We think when we are little everyone is the same; only to find out we are treated   
different, not because of who we are but rather what we are.  
  
We live in a world of never knowing; where we will live, who will take care of us, where we will go to school, We never know if we will   
ever be secure again, where home is or where we belong.  
  
We have no friends as we are never in one place long enough to make them. We don’t know what it feels like to attend the same   
school more than a year or so.  
  
We are always movable once we have no home to call our own. A home is not just a place to lay our head. A home is where we can   
stay, where we can be comfortable, where we know we will always be safe and secure.  
  
Once we get used to all the moving and different schools we somehow find within ourselves a space to furnish as we would our   
room, finding scraps of things we can embrace. When we can at least become comfortable knowing we are alone, knowing we are   
the only one who is going to look out for us. We become known as a loner. We depend on nobody but ourselves, yet this causes   
more problems.  
  
We build up brick walls and don’t let anyone in. Once the walls are in place it takes so much to take them down. If they start to come   
down and something happens we put them back up higher than they were before. Each time we get hurt the walls get higher and   
higher. We can lose so much time keeping those walls up high and strong.  
  
We trust no one, build bond with no one; this makes it hard to build a relationship with anyone. If we are lucky enough to find   
someone who is willing to fight for us, we still cannot totally depend on them, which hurts them. We see the hurt in their eyes, which   
in return hurts us even more. The hurt only causes more pain and starts the walls going back up or we run and keep on running,   
from one relationship to another.  
  
Our childhood is almost impossible to trace.  
  
Our losses are etched upon our face and within our eyes, pain for which no penance can atone. How can we be forced to move and   
move from place to place, surrendering the love we must embrace?  
  
We are enigma tangled up in a mystery. We are the lost puzzle pieces swept under the rug. We are a missing link in a chain of life.   
We have no roots. We are tumbleweed blown in the wind calling home where ever the breeze takes us. We are a chameleon   
changing colors to blend into our surroundings.  
  
At some point we may be declared “legal orphans” waiting for special people to remove us from the merry go round our lives have   
been forced to continually circle.  
  
At eighteen most are moved once again; basically thrown out on the streets as the system “washes their hands of us” whether we   
have gained a support system or not. Even those who get some assistance, usually get it in the form of being taught how to survive   
at the minimum level. There’s no emphasis on breaking the cycle of poverty, getting an education, doing something with our lives.  
  
The system let us raise ourselves; a few of us get lucky, have people that care and help us along the way. The difference between   
those who make it and those who don’t can be as simple as one encouraging word at the right time.  
  
Yet, somehow despite what we have been through, some of us survive with a peculiar grace, even though our hearts should turn to   
stone as we are moved about from place to  
place. Many do not!  
  
Who are we? We are foster children! This is our lives!  
  
Today over 400,000 of us reside in some form of foster care. Thousands have already been declared “legal orphans” but no one   
comes forward to have us as their son or daughter. Many of us each year will be cast into the streets to make it on our own; over   
24,000 youth had this happen last fiscal year.  
  
We are foster children waiting! We are “nobody’s” children!  
  
This is my answer to the questions of “What’s It Like?”