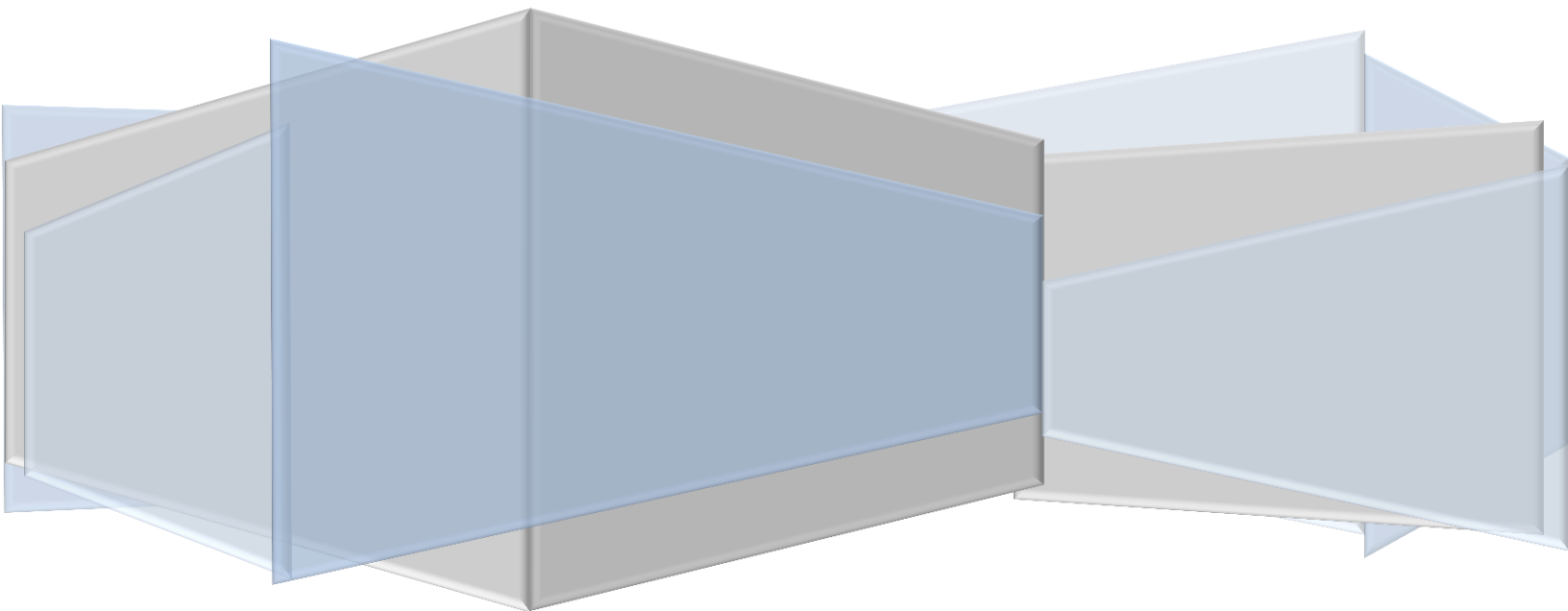


A Coming of Age FFA

My Foster Care Story:

Hope for a Better Future

By: Mikee Rice



Every character has an origin story and if you looked into the life of a foster it is not a pleasant one. Dysfunctional families, uncaring adults, and children with crushed dreams exist in these stories. Having such an origin, it is obvious we are not blessed with an ideal nor relatively uplifting family, and we do not all have a fairy tale ending. Although I was placed into foster care, I have come to see how it has benefited me. It is not always easy to have hope, to see the silver lining, to escape the dark clouds into the endless blue skies, and some are not ever given that chance. Being put into foster care has showed me that I am one of the smart ones, that I able to escape my past and have a future of my own design.

My name is Mikee Rice. I am 17 years old, with five months until I hit the ripe age of 18. I moved to California from Connecticut when I was 10. I am the oldest of six. I recently self-graduated. Those are the kinds of details in my file, but just being here you can assume that I am much like other foster children--I come from an abusive family with no other option but to leave. My mother is a manic-bipolar, on more medications than I can name, has a drinking problem and blurred lines of right and wrong. My father was not around much and had no relationship with me of any sort until I was put into the system. My family is like an intricate web of civil war that is too complex to explain and contains generations of a cycle of abuse. When I was 15, however, I decided to break that cycle.

Before I was ten years old, I was given a leadership role; one filled with babysitting, lunches, tutoring, and nap time. I was inadvertently taught to be self-sufficient; if I was going to take care of 5 other children I should know how to take care of myself. I learned then that I am the only ally I will ever need and felt any time I relied

on another, I would be weak and vulnerable. Being as hurt and lonely as I was, I never wanted to be susceptible to more unnecessary pain. That is a lesson I still cling to, but that I have been showed was not fair to my child self. It made me very independent and mature, but, I realize now, also led to a general lack of hope, also not fair to any child. I had little hope, little spirit, and little imagination. I was suicidal, and feared that I would always have to live with the family I was born to, that I was destined to be just like them.

Do not mistake my pain for innocence, though. From the age of 12, I smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, sold opioids and snorted ‘God knows what’ with my aunts. I did not know any better, but I denied having a problem, my whole family denies having problems. A series of fallouts, fights, negligence and abuse led me to run away when I was 15. I was sick of the lies, of the hurt, and I was sick of constantly being scared. I left the state, supported myself for a few months, and ended up in a few shelters. Though there were times when I was alone and starving, I was still happier than I had ever been. Eventually, I got picked up by the cops when I was 16. Somehow I did not end up in juvie, but I went straight a group home that I stayed in for a year. I was so scared, and knew nothing about the system. It seemed like every month I got a new worker, each being a little more vindictive than the last, but just as fake to my face. At school, I tried to hide my placement, but eventually my friends found out and had limitless questions that I did not feel like answering. When a teacher found out, however, they said things like, ” Well, you do not act like *one of them*.” It is hard to describe how worthless comments like that would make me feel. I did act like *one of them*; why else would I be I here? When I would look back at all I had done, all I could see were the mistakes that led to down this path. For a time I was cold and hopeless seeing my mistakes so bluntly thrown

in my face and wondering if any of them were worth this new, empty pain. They say you are your toughest critic, but I was beyond criticism, I loathed myself.

Being in foster care, I was required to attend various therapy sessions, do multiple intakes, and talk to an array of social workers, mental health workers, ILP workers, etc. When telling them my story, I expected them to laugh, call me pathetic, tell me that it was all my fault, that I deserved to be here, and anything else negative and demeaning. To my surprise, they never did. Not a single one. Aside from the jerk workers who did not say much of anything to me, every adult I have opened up and shown myself to admires my determination and calls on me to help guide those who stand where I once stood. They tell me I am mature and independent, that I will go places and make something of myself. Those teachers meant no disrespect, but pointed out that I was doing something right in terms of rectifying my life. It is all but humbling, but so curious. How could these people who have known me so little time already have ‘such high hopes’ when my own family said I would never amount? I have been praised so much that I cannot help but believe it. If a majority of people can see something in me, it is logical that it is there. I was given a hope that maybe I do not have to be like my family, that I can escape and pave a better life for myself, and that I am more than just *one of them*.

Hope is a powerful thing. It can give someone so much strength and courage, but take it away and it would leave someone miserably apathetic and empty. Coming from the world so many foster kids, like myself, come from, we know hope to be a scarcity. Hope brings imagination of possibilities-- take it away and one would feel doomed to exist is a continuous loop. Before foster care, I was a runaway with no possibility for a

better life and a self-hatred that could destroy. It was the echo of my family in the back of my head, and of my own consciousness that stripped me of hope, leaving me alone and scared. Although I was placed in foster care, and made to face myself and my past, I have come to realize that it was in my favor. To regain hope and get over the past is the only way to improve one's life. Being in foster care has showed me that, and helped me define my own road, and create my own destiny.

In short, it can be said that foster care has helped me to find myself—the real me. I am not a coward, I am not useless, and I will amount to something great. I will not be held back. I got myself taken off the medications I was on, and stopped drugs cold turkey, passing all of my drug tests. I was selected as the Girls' State Delegate of 2014 at my last high school. I got myself out of the group home. I passed the California High School Proficiency Exam, which I paid for myself. I have my own online store, and recently got a job at a marketing firm. I have accomplished more in my time in foster care than I ever did before. Foster care has opened so many doors for me simply by making me look within, forgive, and accept myself. I guess you can say being in foster care has showed me a power I always had; I just had to forget my past and forge my own future.