

# A Window Into the Hopes and Fears of Foster Children

"Home" is a book written by youth in foster care. Below and on the facing page, the Law Tribune Editorial Board offers a sampling of the several-dozen essays, poems and other writings included in the literary volume.

These pieces range from deep to light-hearted, from raw to thoughtful, from heartbreaking to humorous—often all at once. Though they vary in tone and form, the writings explore common themes, including struggles of identity, school, family and home.

The book was published by Voices for Children, whose executive director, Ellen Shemitz,

eloquently states: "By publishing this book, we hope to provide a platform for some remarkable youth to share their lived experiences and, in so doing, help us better understand the realities of their lives and the impact of our public policies. ... We realized that, in addition to the opportunity to share their stories through legislative testimony or public speaking, many youth need a different, more creative, approach."

The introduction says it all:

*This book is for you.*

*For those who do not know the truth.*

*For those who haven't opened their hearts.  
And for those who haven't given us a chance.  
We alone speak for those without a voice.  
We represent those who are not victims,  
But survivors.  
This is our story.  
This is our voice.*  
—Faith Hatheway

Beyond the need to express themselves, these youth also need legal help beyond that provided by the Department of Children and Families. And so the Editorial Board

thought it important to introduce Connecticut lawyers to these young people. After all, some may need help in family court if they have children of their own; some may need assistance getting restraining or protective orders; some may require help navigating the Serbian Bog of Social Security appeals or in attaining proper immigration status; and some may require help in housing court.

In short, we hope that by reading their stories, you are led to tears, inspired beyond belief, but most importantly, as lawyers, you are driven to help. ■

## Found Myself

By ERIC BEERING

Well, my life is awesome. I have a family that is amazing: three brothers, one sister, and (saving the best for last) my parents. My journey here was like a roller coaster, though—bumpy, rough, smooth, then just plain crazy.

The first time I got on the roller coaster was when I went to the Waterford Country School. Walking into a group home, you wonder, where did I go wrong? This was my first group home placement, but not my last. Between group home placements, I was in and out of hospital care. I felt so different. Is this normal? Is this where other youth stay?

On top of that, I came out as transgender. I felt trapped in my body, and I wanted to be male, not female. That was hardest: I did not

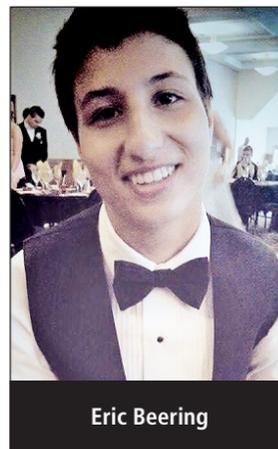
know who to tell or how to tell them.

When I was transferred out of the hospital I went to another group home. That is when I changed. There was a staff member there named Emily B. She cared about me—that was strange to me at the time—but I enjoyed that someone cared. Being transgender had gotten better for me. I went and got the clothes that I liked and wore them proudly.

The next step towards a family was at Alison Gill Lodge [AGL]. It was still a group home, but it was different. When I knocked on the door, I was greeted by a staff member named Sarah, who was really nice. I moved in the rest of my stuff that day, and met the coolest staff and girls. There was a girl who really stood out to me there—Lexie, a girl I looked up to. She became like a big sister to me. It was sad, though; since

group homes are not permanent, she had to leave at some point. That was hard, but I learned the importance of having a backbone from her. Of standing up for what you want.

I knew I wanted to come out, so I did. After Lexie left, I came out as Trans and liking girls,



Eric Beering

and refused to be ashamed of it. I wanted the next generation of girls who came to AGL to see me as a role model. At that time, I was still a sophomore in high school. High school was weird. I did not know where I fit in. That all changed on the date of 12/12/12. I found the family for me. The Meikles. They are the family that made me the proud person I am today. For the past 3 years (almost 4), I have had the most amazing Christmases and holidays.

I'm now pleased with who I am. I love my life now. I've graduated from high school. I love to advocate for foster care. I'm proud to be in it. As I see it, there is a family out there for everyone. It may take longer to find for some, but keep looking, and they will come. They finally came, and they love me. Now, I say: Family Forever. ■

## Finally, A Place to Call Home

By KIARA REYES

Most people's place of perfect contentment is their own home, or a beach, or their grandparent's house. For me, it was totally different. My place of contentment was a group home for girls in Hamden, Connecticut. It was a beautiful, big house in the middle of the woods, where the only thing I could hear was the sound of birds tweeting. More importantly, I felt safe there, like I was in a home for the first time in many years. Here is my story.

Monday, March 17, 2014, was a cold and breezy night. I had just returned home to my house of horror after walking back from the Bridgeport Police Training Academy with my sister. The first thing that ran through my mind as I walked inside the house was that I was tired and hungry. I remember I went to the kitchen,

grabbed some cookies and went straight upstairs to my room to lie down. It was approximately 8:30 p.m. The next thing I knew, I heard my father's voice. He was screaming at the top of his lungs, making the house shake in fear. He was upset and angry that someone left the front door wide open. I didn't pay much attention, because I knew my sister was downstairs, probably outside, and that he was yelling at her. But I was wrong. Instead, my father stormed upstairs, banging on my door and screaming at me because he thought that I forgot to close and lock the door. I told him, "Mary's downstairs, I thought she closed it." But my father wasn't buying it. He started screaming at me. I remembered my body shivering in fear.

From my experiences in the past, I knew it was going to get ugly real fast, but I was also tired of being blamed for everything, and every time

I tried to stand up for myself I would get hit. But this time, I didn't care anymore. I screamed and yelled and told him off. I demanded respect, and respect is what I was going to get. The last thing I remember coming out of my father's mouth before he hit me in the face was, "I hate you, I can't wait until you turn 18, I can't wait for you to get out of my house! I'm sorry your mother ever gave birth to you." When I say I lost it, I mean I really lost it. I yelled at him, saying I hated him so much and that he could go to hell. That's when he got physical. At first, I couldn't process what happened. I was just so angry and full of hatred. I pushed my father to get him off me, and the next thing I knew my stepmom and sister were storming inside my room to break up the big fight.

The next day, I went to school crying. I wanted to kill myself. I remembered thinking

that life wasn't worth living anymore. Nobody could do anything for me and nobody believed me. Fortunately, Mrs. Smith, the school social worker, pulled me aside and asked me why I was crying. I told her everything that went down that night. She promised me that I wouldn't be going back to that house of horror anymore. She contacted my DCF worker and told her what happened and that this couldn't go on anymore. Within an hour, my worker was at my school for the rescue. I told her what went down and everything else I hadn't told her before. I made it very clear that I couldn't take it anymore. That afternoon, my hopes and dreams of ever getting out of that house finally came true. My worker took me to Hamden, Connecticut, to a girls group home which actually was a home. I was safe, loved and finally free. ■

## How Something Bad Can Turn Into Something Great

By TABBY GABLE

I was feeling like I had a huge black hole in my chest. I had no one to go to and no hope for my future. My old foster mom was never home, I was never comfortable talking with her about my problems, and she never encouraged me to do good things in my life. I remember the day I told my DCF worker that I needed someone who would be there for me, who would help me, even when I moved out. I needed a new home, where it could actually feel like a home, and a family who I could call my family. My social worker looked and looked for a home. She called me about a family, and we scheduled a visit. I was excited to meet them yet very nervous. As the hours went by, fear

grew over me. I had a problem with letting people in, and major trust issues. I always feared of getting hurt again or being placed in another bad home.

On December 16, 2012, I sat in the car with my mentor. As we were sitting in their driveway, we read the stickers on the truck. I was a nervous wreck. I had so many thoughts

**I always feared of getting hurt again or being placed in another bad home.**

going through my head. I remember walking into the house for the very first time. The Italian aroma hit me when I walked in, and the Christmas tree sparkled so bright. I had

finally met Mr. and Mrs. V. They were the cutest. They knew how to tell jokes and get a conversation started. They were in their early 60s and were still in the groove. After a good half an hour, we left. I left with a heart full of hope for my future. We had the total of two vis-



Tabby Gable

its, which was enough for me to know that I wanted to live with them.

DCF gave me the home of my dreams, with parents that love and care for me. They listened to my needs and gave me something that could never be replaced. To this day, they and I are an inseparable family, and we have been through thick and thin. When I come home from school, Mrs. V is home, and when I need to talk to someone, they are both there for me. My experience with DCF has been life-changing. When I was young, I was adopted into an abusive home. After 14 years, I was finally taken away. Ever since, DCF has always had my back and always encouraged me to follow my dreams. Without DCF, I don't know where I would be or end up. My life has changed due to their love and support, and that I will never ever forget. ■