Acknowledgments

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For more information on Home At Last, visit www.fostercarehomeatlast.org; for more information on the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, visit www.pewfostercare.org. For more information on Children's Law Center, visit www.clcla.org.

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MY VOICE, MY LIFE, MY FUTURE
MI VOZ, MI VIDA, MI FUTURO

▲ ***Untitled*** **– Marcus, age 14, and Clay, age 16**

◀ *On the cover:*
New Home, New Life, New Joy **– Michael, age 17**

My Voice, My Life, My Future
...Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro

"I was only six when I went into foster care. I remember vividly just sitting outside the courthouse . . . my birth mother crying. And then suddenly, I was living somewhere else, in some house I didn't know. No one told me anything. For five years, no one told me anything."

Voices from the Inside
The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

Half a million abused and neglected children in this country are living in foster care. While the foster care system is intended to be a temporary refuge until families are able to put their lives back on track, far too many foster youth find themselves separated from all that is familiar and experience a turbulent life in motion as they drift from placement to placement.

Children living in foster care, by definition, have undergone life-shattering upheaval. At a time when they desperately need a sense of consistency and stability, they are often thrown into an uncertain world of multiple placements, unpredictable contact with their birth family, and the inability to determine what happens to them.

There can be no more eloquent portrayal of what foster youth experience than the portrait on the opposite page. Two teenagers from Arkansas drew this image of a child's face, significantly, without a mouth. They feel they have no voice.

Courts play a critical, often life-changing role in the lives of youth who enter the child welfare system—deciding whether children should remain in foster care or can safely return home; where they will live and how often they will move from placement to placement; whether they will see their siblings and other family members; and when they will leave the system.

As the Hon. Bill Frenzel, former Congressman (R-MN) and Chair of the national, nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, observed, "No child enters or leaves foster care without a judge's decision." Every significant decision in the child's life, from entry into until exit from foster care, is in the hands of the court. Yet in many parts of our country, these vulnerable children have only limited opportunity, if any, to participate in the court proceedings that so profoundly affect their future.

The art and writing presented in this booklet—"My Voice, My Life, My Future...*Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro*"—is a window into the lives of children in our foster care system. Through words and pictures, youth living in foster care affirm their need—and their right—to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives and futures. The work of these young people give a human face to experiences within the foster care system that no amount of statistics and reports can possibly convey.

Expression of youth perspectives should not stop with this one-time compilation. Youth need and deserve a continuing voice in the process. Empowering children by involving them in the court process is a first step toward enabling these youth to turn their lives around and face a future of promise, hope, and achievement.

Miriam Aroni Krinsky
Executive Director, Home At Last

▲ ***Un Medio Ambiente* – Silvia, age 18**

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

"All children need safe, permanent families that love, nurture, protect, and guide them," stated the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. This nonpartisan, blue-ribbon panel of some of the nation's most innovative and successful child welfare and public policy leaders focused on two significant challenges faced by the nation's foster care system.

First, the structure of federal child welfare financing limits public officials' ability to tailor appropriate responses to families in crisis. Second, state courts lack the tools, information and accountability to ensure that children are moving expeditiously into loving families.

The Pew Commission report, *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care*, outlines reforms that would enable the courts and child welfare agencies to move children more quickly from foster care to safe, permanent homes—and in some cases to avoid the need to put them in foster care in the first place.

The voices of youth in this booklet underscore the critical role of our court and legal process and the need to support and enhance this vitally important gatekeeper over the fate of children in foster care. The Pew Commission's recommendations regarding our court system identify changes in policy that could improve the way child welfare cases are handled in thousands of courts throughout the nation:

- To ensure that children's rights to safety, permanence and well-being are met in a timely and complete manner, courts must have the ability to track children's progress, identify groups of children in need of attention and identify sources of delay in court proceedings;

- To protect children and promote their well-being, courts and public agencies should be required to demonstrate effective collaboration as a condition for receiving federal funds;

- To safeguard children's best interests in dependency court proceedings, children and their parents must have a direct voice in court, effective representation, and the timely input of those who care about them; and

- To provide adequate direction and recognition of the critical importance of dependency courts, Chief Justices and state court leadership must act as champions for children in their court systems and in making sure these recommendations are enacted.

The time for our nation to act on implementing these recommendations is now. We cannot afford to do otherwise. As former Congressman Bill Gray, Vice Chairman of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, observed:

> "There are a half-million human beings who could lose their potential.
> How many future doctors, how many teachers, how many lawyers, how many public servants are in that group? Because of instability, neglect, and abuse at the very beginning of life, because of no permanency and no family, we lose what they could become.
> That's a loss you cannot measure."

▲ ***Poetic*** **– Ronald, age 18**

MY VOICE, MY LIFE, MY FUTURE

Nothing worth knowing, nowhere worth going
Solutions to problems coming, but coming too slow
Told that failure is who I am
and all I could be
Decisions made for me, not respecting who I am
or want to be
Voicing words not just to be said,
but to be heard
Words not just of sound but of thoughts
Speaking knowledge, spirit, and fact
Keeping faith, heart, and soul intact
Thinking of my future, who and where will I be
Rage hidden inside unable to see
I faced my fears and drove them out
That's what this poem and I are really about
Also about something called courage,
don't you know
I have it, and I take it with me wherever I go
Whether things go my way or things
move real slow
I have no plans on ever letting go
Day after day, going through pain
Always asking, who's fault, who's really
to blame
Looking for help, but who is the one
Glancing left and right, I stand alone,
there is no one
Endless possibilities in an endless sea
I needed help, and hoped I had it in me
Facing ruin but now I rejoice,
To trust in "My Life, Future and Voice."

Paul, age 16

▲ ***My Little Prayer*** **– Daniel, age 15**

"All I ever wanted was to be heard and not just dismissed."

Former foster youth from Texas

My Voice

- Speaking to the Court
- Speaking to My Parents

THOUGHTS TO THE JUDGE

Childhood is: learning to jump as high as you can and not let your feet shake the floor. Childhood is drawing your dreams and wondering how on earth you could possibly be like your teenage sister, who has been talking on the phone for the last three hours, all about one subject. Childhood is learning that taking your first grade teacher's candy bar is stealing.

But judge, childhood is also letting your voice be heard; whether you are screaming because your sister called you "stupid" (a big no-no) or telling a judge like your high and mightiness what you need to say. But how can I do that if you don't even want to hear what I, one insignificant twelve-year-old, have to say? What if there was no obvious proof that mom and dad are on drugs? How would you decide who I should stay with? Flipping a coin? Drawing straws? That stupid little "I'm thinking of a number" game?

All I want for my birthday is a voice. And as I mature toward that teenage sisterness of mine, I want to know one thing: How old do I have to be? Sixteen? Eighteen? Twenty-one? Elementary school? Junior high? High School? College? Old and wrinkled, my bones turning to dust as I crochet in my old rocking chair in the corner?

Krystin, age 12

"The two microphones on the sides of the page signify my voice. The flag represents my pride. The face peeking from the sides of the brick wall means that at times there was so much pressure in my life that I would hide behind a brick wall; a wall that was full of anger and sadness."

– Ronald, age 18

▲ *How I Feel about Foster Care* – **Valarie, age 14**

TO THE JUDGE

Please don't put me in a place, a place of horror and violence. Let me stay in a home with loving parents that care for me. (though I haven't been in a really bad place) I want to be somewhere where I can live life as a child, in a better situation. Can you find a home that is truly good and where the people will help me? You are the one who makes the decisions, and I need to be heard so people may understand how I feel or what I need. Can you turn back the hands of time to make it all go away? Listen to me, since no one else will, and try to understand where I'm coming from. Maybe I am a child, but I'm not dumb; I know right from wrong. My life isn't great. It's sort of good, but in times of bad situations I'm misunderstood. I need to know that you will make the right decisions for me so that I can live life the way it's supposed to be. In 3-4 years I will be ready, set and off to college where I want to (hopefully) study law. I want to be a lawyer; one that helps others in a life and death situation. I have potential (so everyone says) and I need to use that and make something of my life. I want to be a great person, lawyer, and mom and maybe a wife—I want to be able to make decisions without having to think twice.

Antoinette, age 14

"Children and parents often lack a strong and effective voice in court decisions that affect their lives."

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

ONE DAY IN THE COURTROOM

One day in the courtroom, a long time ago, my dad was there. The case was an emergency case deciding whether or not I would ever see my dad again. I sat terrified with a grip on myself that I did not have. Once upon a time, my dad did some terrible things, so my social worker, out of concern, took his visits away. The judge agreed it was best for us not to see each other until my dad took and finished parenting classes. All I could do was cry and cry. The room seemed to spin. The world seemed to come to an end. I wanted to see my dad because he was my father. He may have been sick in the head, but he was still my dad. I had no choice in whether or not my dad could stay in my life. My judge just saw the negative in him, but I saw my dad wanted help in his own way. I always tried to see the positive in him, but my dad never took the parenting classes, so apparently his second family was more important to him. After ten years of not hearing a word from him, I've started to wonder if he only used me—not that he ever cared for the true me anyway. I loved my dad at one point, but now it's more animosity.

Tiffany, age 16

TELLING THE JUDGE

I want to find my family.
I want to go to public school.
I want more freedom.
I want to visit my dad.
I want to go visit my great aunts.
If I could visit my dad I'd tell him what a jerk he has been.
If I could visit my great aunts I would get to meet their grand children.
I want to go to public school to get a better education.
Five years from now I will have my degree in Theater Arts and Photography
I will also be a famous author or photographer

Michael, age 18

EXCUSE ME, YOUR HONOR

Excuse me, your honor! You have to understand. Everyone makes mistakes. Even ones to this magnitude. Moving is not always better for the child. Don't get me wrong. If they're getting abused or sexually molested, then the children should surely be moved. But in my case, my mother made a few bad choices, and I understand that is probably the only way to make her learn her lesson, by taking her children away. But who knows how many times we'll move around? I mean, we have to make new friends, go to new schools, live in people's houses that are pretty much strangers to us, and somehow keep adapting to all these different changes. Can you possibly look at this from the child's point of view, and what we're going to have to go through? I understand that if I stay with my mother you probably think I'm going to make the same choices as her. Sir, not to criticize my mother, but I would never want to end up like her, and I promise to try my best at everything I do, and be nothing but successful. Just please give me a chance to show you!

Paul, age 16

▲ ***What If?*** **– Cierra, age 16**

▲ *Untitled* – Kathy, age 20

MAMA, CARRY ME HOME

I close my eyes at night and dream;
Your face the first I see
Just as tomorrow's gleam
Still devastated from the day
They took my brothers and I away
By the look you gave me
I knew I'd see you another day
Over time, I've grown emotionally stronger
Not wanting to feel pity;
Only accepting the facts of life God has written for me
Yet still I miss those days
I felt the safest; from your hugs and kisses
Never doubting your love for us
Now you're the biggest of my misses
In my sleep, I can hear the songs
You used to hum and sing to me.
The melody making the belief it's once again reality.
These past three years haven't been so easy;
Although I know things can be worse
Like some days, I feel I can't walk on my own…
I just need you, mama—
To carry me home.

Khadijjah, age 16

▲ ***What if your pictures were your only memories?*** **– Jennifer, age 14**

"If I have somebody I know I can depend on, who loves me and cares that I wake up tomorow and am still breathing, I can get through it."

Former Foster Youth,
California Youth Connection Permanency Project

MOM, MOM

I tell people I hate you and wish you were dead.
But truthfully I love and miss you.
I take back all I've said.
I wish you were here by my side.
I still don't understand all those times you lied.
I still remember the first time I cried,
I was only five.
Every time I saw you,
You were drunk one moment, sober the next
I never knew with you
I still wouldn't know what to expect.
The men, the drugs, they all got to you.
If someone could have only reached you in time.
Mom, you're such a good person.
If only you knew.
What the heck you put us through.
You are so beautiful in every way,
How come you went and didn't stay?
How come you left your daughter behind?
Did you think I was stupid?
I'm not blind.
Mom I love you but you hurt me so bad,
I didn't want to hurt you or make you mad.
This poem is for you and you alone
Please take time to read it, please come home.
I've waited so long to be by your side,
But it's like riding a bull, It's a rough ride.

Chyanne, age 16

QUESTIONS FOR MY MOTHER

How did you grow up?
Where was your mother?
How did you get treated?
Did you play with your friends?
Were you ever left alone?
Did your parents love you?
How did you know?
Did you have to care for siblings?
How did you feel?
Were you ever scared at night?
Did you have comfort?
How did she say "I love you"?
Did you ever say "me too"?
How many places did you leave behind?
Were your parents cruel or kind?
Did you care for us?

Antoinette, age 14

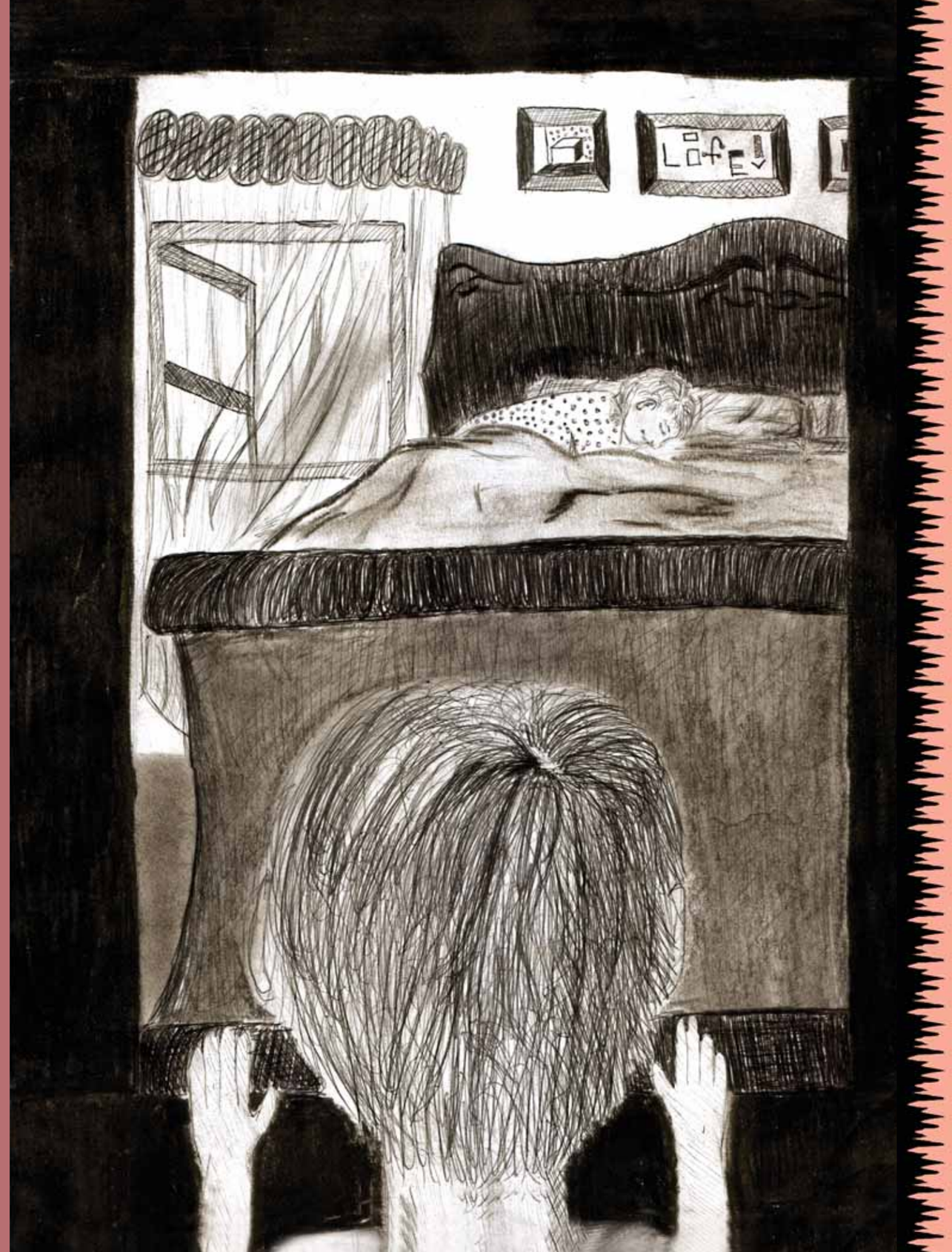
"On any given day, half a million abused and neglected children and youth are in foster care in our nation."

US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2003

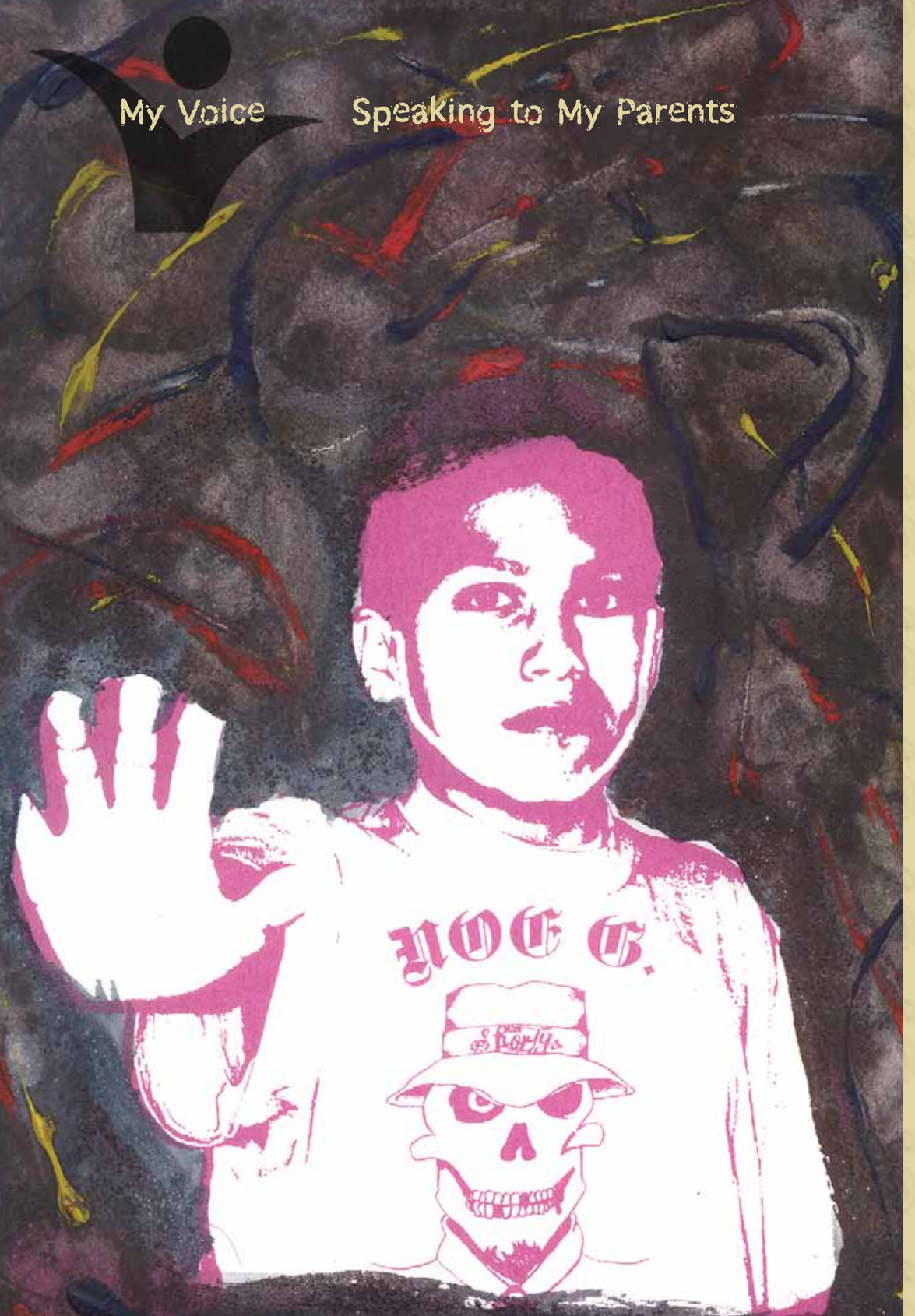
A FEW QUESTIONS FOR MY DEAD MOTHER

What was it like growing up?
Did you have many friends?
What was your favorite color?
Do you wish you were still alive?
Did you love me and my brother?
Are you watching over us?
Do you wish you had more time?
Alas, why did you have to die
and leave us behind?

Michelle, age 16



"What Could Have Been"
– Scarlet, age 16



QUESTIONS FOR MY FATHER

How does it feel to know your child can't love again—
Because of you?
How does it feel to know
your daughter can't trust again—
Because of you?
What is your motivation to keep going?
Keep getting high over and over;
To keep up with your lies
(which was the one thing you told me not to do)
To get up in the morning?
And, most of all....
Can you still love anyone?
Can you still love me?

Krystin, age 12

QUESTIONS FOR MY FATHER

Are you cold at night?
Do you miss me?
Is the food OK?
Did you get my letters?
Why haven't you wrote back?
Are you scared?
Do you think of me?
Why did you leave my mother?
Do you plan on coming back?
Do you want 2 do right?
Are you cold at night?

Krystal, age 16

Untitled
– Noe, age 11

▲ ***Untitled*** **– Victor, age 15**

My Life

- Looking Back
- My Life

I REMEMBER

I remember the loudness of the street
I remember being alone
I remember moving place to place
I remember crying because of bad times
I remember feeling scared
I remember going to new places
I remember seeing strange people everywhere
I remember a place with a mom and dad
I remember a fall that left me a scar
I remember being pushed around
I remember not having a solid foundation
I remember every new day as the same old day
I remember sitting alone and thinking
I remember the feeling of joy
I remember wanting to be loved
I remember the help that came from above
I remember the strength I never had
I remember feeling weak
I remember being broken
I remember seeing the only face to make me laugh in a long time
I remember the actual feeling of having
a mom to call mine
I remember the day of my glory
I remember my life as a great big story
I remember the ocean where my journey began.

Antoinette, age, 14

"Almost half of foster children spend at least two years in the foster care system, and nearly 20 percent wait five or more years for a safe, permanent family."

US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2003

▲ ***Confusion*** **– Jonathan, age 16**

WHERE AM I?

I remember awakening in the soaring sky
I remember my loneliness
I remember an empty beat
The vastness of space
The sparkling of light
The wonders of life
I remember the darkness
I remember floating in an empty dream
I remember wondering, where am I?

Rafael, age 19

▲ *I Dream of a Happy Home* – **Mayra**

I REMEMBER

I remember the smell of the sweet flowers that grew by my old home.
I remember when I learned that the taste of an orange was sweet and extravagant.
I remember the smell of the first dew of morning,
the fresh crisp air beating against my face.
I remember when I saw my first page of a book and learned
that reading was my passion,
like writing is my best friend.
I remember when I showed that writing was the thing for me.
I remember 30 minutes ago that the first thought in my mind was
"Will this workshop change my future?"

Michelle, age 16

I REMEMBER

I remember the day my brother was born. My grandma answered the phone. She mouthed, "It's time," and we went to the hospital. I remember feeling my heart beat with anxiety as, once again, I visited a hospital for my brother's sake. I remember feeling my stomach hurt with a sinking feeling as my mother, face screwed up with grief, came out of that unwelcome-feeling room to say, "He's gone." I remember wondering whether or not I was going to be okay tomorrow as I buried my head in my fleece blanket to drown out the sound of my parents' screaming at each other; my mother crying and hurling delicate things at my father; and my father stamping his feet and roaring in frustration, "Now look what you've done! You've scared our daughter—my daughter—half to death!" I remember looking into my father's eyes, as we visited my brother's grave, and listening to him making up stories. And how I knew that I was right in thinking that things would never be the same between us again. I remember sitting, wide awake, at three a.m., afraid that I would wake up back at the apartment complex.

Krystin, age 12

▲ *Untitled* – **Seymore, age 16**

MY LIFE

My life wasn't the best, but I feel like I have to get this off my chest.
All the time I try to hide, what's really deep down inside.
My heart is locked, I hope someone will find the key.
I'm scared to change 'cause nobody will accept me.
I have no family, I am all alone.
When I call they know it's me, but they won't pick up the phone.
My heart is solid as a rock, and my head is solid like an ice block.
I try to hide that my spirit rots, I am scared to share my deepest thoughts.
I think about this everyday, I don't want
to go the wrong way.
I feel like dirt, I feel so hurt.
But, when I look there's no one to talk to,
So, somebody please tell me what I should do.
Every day I keep growing bold,
But things will get better...or so I'm told.
Each day I try my best, and each day I feel blessed.
To have a family who will care, and I can finally stop and share.
So.....things are looking clear,
Cause my choices are very near.
My heart isn't as cold, but I am still only twelve years old.

Cierra, age 12

UNDERSTAND ME

What's beneath the clothes, the hair, the smile?
Look deep inside to find me.
The lost and lonely girl inside,
That hides deep inside me.
Please don't judge me for what you see.
'Cause I don't look and act like you remember,
I can only be me.
Look closer, pay attention.
Forget about the fake smile you see.
Can you see what lies inside of me?
The girl with a big heart,
The loving one that constantly gets hurt
So please don't judge me by my looks.
Take a step closer.
Can you understand my twisted mind?
Can you find the real me?
I hide so quickly.

Adreana, age 18

"On average, children in foster care move through three different foster placements, frequently with little or no warning."

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

▲ ANOTHER LOST SOUL

When I painted this picture, I basically painted how I was feeling at the time. While growing up in the foster care system, I was placed in various homes. Jumping from placement to placement, I started feeling unwanted and alone. That's why the girl is carrying a bag around. The surroundings of the girl are so unfamiliar to her that she is uncertain of where she is. This to me symbolizes my life before I was blessed with guidance. This is what started to break me down, the fact of feeling alone.

I painted this picture to make others aware that foster youth need someone consistent in their lives. If not, they would be like the girl in the picture, another lost soul. We as society should try and help to prevent our youth from being another statistic.

Gabrielle, age 20

Mis Razas Mexicanas
– Martin, age 17

I'M SO MAD I COULD SCREAM!!

I'm so mad I could scream!
I am so mad I could throw a fit!
I am so mad I could hit my sister
And bang on the walls.
I am so mad I could scream!
I could blow up
And throw paint on the walls
Or wrestle my sister.
I mean, I am ferocious and in a terrible spot.
I am going to yell and scream,
And boy am I ready to fight.
I am really ferocious.
I really am mad.
I am ready to hit,
I really am furious!
On thinking it over, I will not hit.
Instead, I will put all my anger in this poem.
I am feeling much better now
and will not pout.
For a poem is the best way to get it all out!

Emily, age 13

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

How would you feel if you had no mom to come home to?
For 6 months, 3 meals a day, just eating tomato soup.
How would you feel if you lived in a drug house? Walking around, and wandering about.
How would you feel if you saw your mama hit a pipe?
Eyes red, dry throat, BAM! Passed out until the next night.
Because of her actions, you are not where you want to be.
Not even being accepted by your own family.
Now that those years have passed me up,
I thought it would go away, but I just cut.
Watching my skin slit open within seconds every night.
Looking at the blood, my heart gets tight. The devastating pain of being without,
Just came out in scars over my body without a doubt.
One day, I finally got support, but I knew it wouldn't help what I've been through.
Every day I tried not to change because I was going to do what I do.
Being locked up, I had no choice to be in control and run.
This was the time to learn from what I have done.
I know I can't change the past, but I can change my future life.
Controlling my thoughts and actions, because it's not worth
going through the pain and hurt twice.

Ausialee, age 16

▲ ***Untitled* – Marcus, age 15**

▲ *New Home, New Life, New Joy* – **Michael, age 17**

My Future

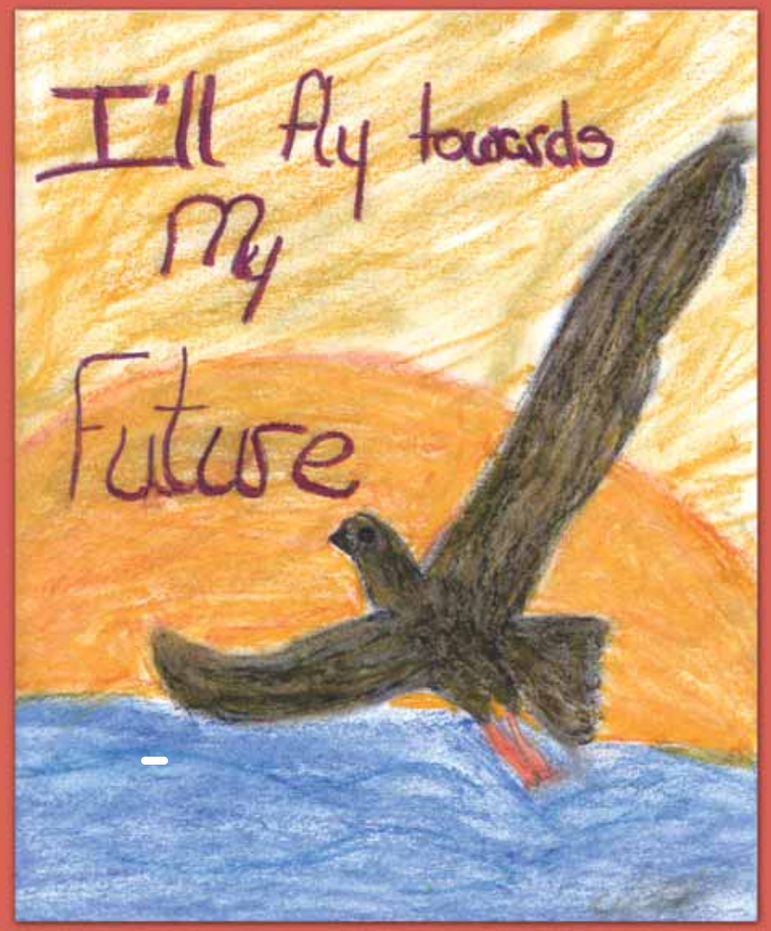
"You can't go back and change what you've done, or what you've seen, but you can always dream; and that, along with determination, can accomplish anything."

Chelsea, age 16

OPEN THE DOOR

My voice is one, my life is another, but my future is much more
When I think about my life, it's like an open door
When you walk into my life, everything will change
When you walk out of it, it'll all be the same as before,
because you've closed my door and shut me in
And my life will be the way it's always been.
I try to speak out, but my voice is weak,
Just like a mouse's squeak
You can't hear it, it's so low,
So how I feel you'll never know
No one can hear me behind closed doors
So all I'll do is wait and weep
Knowing that you can't hear me, not a peep
Until then, my future is kept from me,
But one way or another that shut door will open
Then I can stop my wishing and hoping
I fear the loneliness, the emptiness,
The thought of being in an empty room by myself
With no one there to help
I fear the thought of my voice not working
My life locked up, but most of all
My future is out there,
Lost and lurking
Without me knowing that
It's out there somewhere
With no owner to claim it
And I am scared and lost without it
My future awaits me out on the other side
But I can't get there
No matter how hard I've tried,
I'm locked inside and locked away
Waiting for the fateful day
When someone finds the key, to open the door
And free me!

Antoinette, age 14



***My Future* – Kayla, age 15**

WONDERS

Sometimes I just wonder
I wonder why, Why I just can't fly
Into that beautiful blue sky
I wonder why I am misunderstood,
Like an old piece of wood.

Why I can't be as free as a bird
Without even saying a word
I wonder what God's purpose is for me,
But my life has only touched the surface
Of what it's going to be

Michael, age 18

"About 19,000 older youth 'age out' of foster care each year without a family to support them."

US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2003

MY WILL

A dark cloud settles over my mind
Causing me to lose my train of thought
Hoping that it would be memories I'd find
To face the demons I so long had sought
Since I found a loving place
There hasn't been a tear upon my face
I can be who I want to be
A girl with a huge grin
I don't have to be sad, just me
I want to be rid of all my sins
So I listen to my heart, soul, and will
And go on my own path down
To get where I want to be, still
With every little sound.

Mistee, age 16

HOUSE OR HOME

Strength is shrinking
When trapped seeking
For the way out
Of this house about
Chaos like no kind
That'll eat through a once sane mind
With girls, you think you know
Until they hit you when you're low
But staff are even worse
Wanting to mute becomes a thirst
They try to tell you how to be
And influence forgetting your family tree
But be strong, stand your ground
Don't please their hunger with a frown
And don't forget you're not alone
Until you make this house a home.

Nadine, age 17

Family Forever
– James, age 16

I CAN'T BREATHE

I can't breathe.
I cry tears every day,
because children are being beaten to death.
Children have no homes and I can't breathe.
I cry because children
are being used for sexual playthings,
and I can't breathe.
I cry because children need someone to love
and be safe from criminals,
and I can't breathe.
I cry because
young teens are having babies
by someone that is older than them
that they think they love,
and I can't breathe.
This is all the stuff that takes my breath away,
and I still can't breathe.

Alysia, age 17

MOVIE SCREENS

As she has grown
She has reaped what she has sown
And because of this
Her voice has become louder

As she has lived her life
Many have learned to doubt her

She would have a child by the age of 16, they said
And her husband would beat her
She knew she would be someone else
But no one believed her

She suffered in her childhood
And struggled in her teens

But in the depth of her heart
And in the back of her mind
Played movie screens

Scenes of pain
And a hard life
Seemed ingrained
Out of spite
But why complain
When I can make it right

I graduated from high school
Which was a feat in itself
I'm still living
And I have my health

It doesn't seem that hard
But it's a big accomplishment where I'm from
In in college now
And I'm still surviving in the slums

I've quit smoking
And revisited the Lord
What seems so difficult
Really isn't that hard.

***Poem and Photography* – Kathy, age 20**

What Comes Next

Moving away, graduating, becoming a poet, growing up with a better life, getting good grades, becoming a lawyer, achieving goals, reuniting with someone I miss, loving someone, afraid, losing my parents, making money, being a mom, making it through college, praising God.

Antoinette, age 14

In five years I see myself married to my boyfriend. I'll still be doing cosmetology! We will be living in a nice house away from a rough neighborhood.

Krystal, age 16

I want to be able to do things on my own without someone telling me what I can or can't do. Everybody makes my choices for me. I want to go to a four year university and get married when I am twenty-three years old. I want to go to college and live in an apartment with a friend close by the college.

K.C., age 15

▲ ***Freedom of Power* – Jonathan, age 16**

When I was growing up, I was told by my own parents and family that I would be a bum on the street, so now, to prove them wrong I work at [several jobs]. I have been attending University for about two years for a degree in Criminal Justice and may become a social worker to help others like me.

Terrance, age 20

I plan to get married to my boyfriend when I emancipate, become a graphic designer, and a part time author. There is nothing that doesn't seem to fascinate me enough that I don't enjoy life. I can't wait to grow older and experience new things. So, to end this essay, all I have to say now is that this is my voice, my life, and my future!

Michelle, age 16

"Our children and our families are our future. How we treat them says much about us as a society—and will determine what our society will look like in the future ..."

Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of California