



Keep Moving Forward

By Michael Schwiertert

Alone. Confused. Unorganized. These are words that describe my time in the foster care system. I was placed in foster care at the age of 3 and reunited with my mother at the age of 5 for only a year.

During the time away from my mother, I was able to see things from a different point of view, from an unstable point of view. I was able to see many different homes from many different standpoints, and it was from then on that I realized I was truly my own best friend.

When I was placed back with my mother, things were different — but they were also the same. The care needed for a young son to grow was not present, and, aside from some teachers, there were no other adults to see me for who I was. Most of the time, I felt like another mouth to feed. But, my wheels kept turning in my expanding mind. I was always very eager to go to sleep when I was younger. I felt like my dreams were the only way to escape from the unstable life I was living.

I was with my mother for a year's time before her old habits returned and I was placed back into the state's custody. This is when I began to see a pattern. The pattern that told me that the stable environment, which would be key in shaping a young man for the future, was never going to happen. So, I decided to create the man I saw fit for the future. My patience and perseverance were the keys to my foundation. Since I was sometimes placed to the side in families' homes, I decided to absorb as much as I could from my surroundings. I did this to remind myself of the type of person I wanted to be. I did this to remind myself of how I would treat my future children. Soon, television became my new best friend, as well as movies. The characters on screen would never change despite the new homes I was placed in. I adored the characters that made me laugh and retained the characters that encouraged me to keep believing. Those childhood movies — linked to my patience — gave me hope that one day I would find a loving home. My motivation to keep moving forward was always with me and I knew my day of victory would come.

I was later adopted into a terrific home. The family was great and more than I could have hoped for. The room for a young man to grow was present, but the push to flourish was not intact, so I kept my ambitious drive. I understood I would have to shape myself and push myself to my fullest potential. My family could show me attention, but overall I knew I would be the only one holding myself back.

I knew my knowledge and understanding would take me to the places I had dreamt about, so school was always my high priority. I graduated in December with my degree in business marketing and I am ready to see the world. Helping at home with my brothers and sisters is very important to me. I feel my support will help them to realize their potential and instill in them the drive to move forward.

Even when all seemed lost and like no one would throw me a rope, I kept moving forward. I encourage you to push yourself to your dreams with the hopes of one day being able to reach out and touch them.

Michael Schwiertert, 23, is a member of Facing Foster Care in Alaska. He lives in Fairbanks and has shared his experiences in foster care on panels across the nation. This essay was published in "Frontline" an internal publication of the Office of Children's Services. Reprinted with permission.