

Every Child Deserves a Forever Family

By DANIEL SABB
Times Guest Columnist

I was 14 when I left my home. I wanted to leave, but then again I didn't. But I knew it was for the better if I did.

You see, my mom had been struggling with drugs — fortunately, not for my entire childhood, but at least for the last year or two before it really became a problem and she was unable to care for us. My younger brother and sister and I went to live with an aunt, though eventually my sister was placed with another foster family.

I was aware of my mom's drug use and so in the end was relieved when my aunt came to get us. The next day she called Children & Youth and we became part of the foster-care system.

At first, I thought we'd all go back home to our mom's. I wanted things to be better with my family and I wanted my mom to get off drugs, but after a while I let this hope slip away because I didn't think it would ever happen, or at least not soon enough.

Today, I don't know how my mom is doing.

To tell you the truth, it makes me sad but it also makes me angry because I wish she had been there for me. Does she know how I've been doing in high school? Does she know what sports I play? I don't know. But I decided I couldn't let that hold me back.

Fortunately, my mom's sister agreed to take us in on the spot. I have spent almost four years with her now and I love it. I have no complaints whatsoever. I feel like part of a family and I wouldn't have it any other way.

When kids have to leave their homes and enter foster care, I think the best option is for them to be placed with other relatives.

I felt fortunate to have been placed with my aunt, someone I've known my whole life, someone I can have fun with, laugh with. I felt really blessed when she came and got us that night.

I think it would have been hard for me to get to know strangers in a foster family. I know it wouldn't have been easy adjusting to new people, trusting new people. I'm sure other kids do OK with this, but I'm not sure I would have.

When children are placed in the foster-care system, I hope every effort is made to ensure they are placed with other family members first, people who know you, love you, have your best interests in mind.

I've been very lucky to end my high school years (I graduate soon!) in a stable family and I look forward to going on to college in the fall.

Sure there are some regrets about the way things ended with my mom, but I know things turned out for the best in the end.

Every child needs a safe and stable place to call home.

Daniel Sabb, 18, is a senior at Chester High School. He is engaged in the Porch Light Project, which seeks reform of Pennsylvania's child welfare system to assure a "forever family for every child." Visit the initiative at www.porchlightproject.org