

**The Incarcerated Mothers of Bedford,
and
Their Children Advocate in Support
of
The ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill**

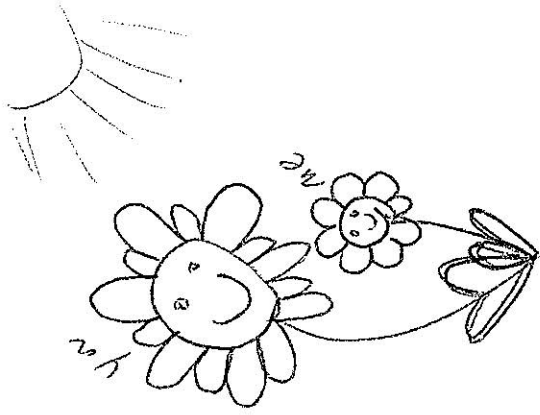
Dear mom-

Happy mothers day!

I hope you know that I
am thinking about you
on this very special day!

This card reminded me
of us and I hope it
does the same for you.

I love you very much,
and I am very proud of
you and your undomaine
strength. I wouldnt want
to call anyone else my mother.



...but you
were always
the world's
best mother.

(Isn't it great the way
everything evens out?)

Happy Mother's Day

LOVE YOU!

Christina



Long Termers Committee

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1000/247 Harris Road
Bedford Hills, New York 10507

Legislature Sub-Committee

Civilian Advocate
Wendy Cushman

Core Members

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF ASFA EXPANDED DISCRETION BILL

Bill No. A.5462-A/S.2233-A

Title: An act to amend the Social Services Law, in relation to the guardianship and custody of destitute or dependant children who have a parent or parents incarcerated or in a residential substance abuse treatment program.

Summary: This bill seeks to enhance permanency for children by allowing a foster care agency to delay the filing of a petition to terminate the parental rights of a parent who is incarcerated or participating in a residential substance abuse treatment program when such agency believes that filing a termination petition is not in the best interests of the child.

Reason for Support:

We, the incarcerated mother's of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, join hundreds of organizations across New York State in urging you to support the ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill, A.5462-A/S.2233-A.

It is the public mandate of New York State's Department of Corrections to "rehabilitate" individuals to become better members of American society upon their release from prison. This taxpayer-funded mandate is best served when behind bars mothers participate in "rehabilitative parent programs", which better equips them to guide their children away from the criminal justice system.

As our annexed letters prove, children who have consistent contact (letters, visits, telephone calls) with their incarcerated mothers positively benefit. These mothers offer their children powerful guidance and effective reinforcement of core values such as: Speak honestly, behave with a good conscience, act with integrity, and contribute positively to society.



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin-



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Susan M. Cobaugh,
Chair

Hence, the letters from our children prove that they benefit from their continued bond with us, as we serve our prison term. Our incarceration has not diminished but, in fact, *increased* our effectiveness as mothers. Thus, we implore this tribunal to enact legislation, which protects a child's right to know, love and learn from their incarcerated mother.

Please Protect The Mother- Child Bond

VOTE For legislation that *legally enforces* the binding stipulations of an incarcerated mother's conditional surrender agreement, so that, incarcerated mothers and their children may continue their bond through pictures, phone calls, letters, and visits.

VOTE For legislation, which applies *retroactively* to conditional surrender agreements; many incarcerated mothers trusted their appointed family court lawyers promises regarding stipulations, then suddenly those mothers lost complete contact with their children, without *any* legal path of redress.

VOTE That Family Court judges be *compelled* to invoke their discretion when terminating of incarcerated mothers.

Therefore, we strongly urge you to support A.5462-A/S.2233-A; a critical step toward ensuring that children with incarcerated parents have the opportunity to maintain those relationships by giving agencies a necessary discretion to delay the filing of TPR proceedings.



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other.... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin--



**Incarcerated Mothers of BHCF
And
Their Daughters Advocate
To Protect
The Mother-Child Bond**

**Judith Clark, Din#83-G-0313, (2pg.)
*Harriet Clark, Daughter (2pg.)***

**S. Bobbi Cobaugh, Din#05-G-0129, (2pg.)
*Christina Mary Cobaugh, Daughter (1pg.)***

**Deborah Pretlow, Din#99-G-0758, (2pg.)
*Danielle Autumn Pretlow, Daughter (2pg.)***



Please Protect the Mother-Child Bond!



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Maryanne Voorhees
Carolyn Warmus



Clark, Judith (Mother)
Din # 83-G-0313

Clark, Harriet (Daughter)
Kinship Care
(1 year old when mother arrested; 29 years old today)

I LOVE MY MOM!

The Story of Us



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin--

December 18, 2009

Dear Legislator,

I am writing in regards to pending legislation to revise the Safe Families and Adoption law. In considering such legislation I know that your aim is to provide children with the safest and healthiest homelife possible; to this end, I want to urge you to support the ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill. I am twenty-nine years old and my mother has been incarcerated since I was eleven months old. Growing up I visited her every weekend from 8:30 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon in the Children's Center of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Every few days we spoke on the phone and sometimes at night my grandmother would hold the phone up in the air while I played the piano so that my mother could hear me practicing.

I was a terrible piano player and when I knew my mother was listening I attempted to compensate for this by playing very loudly—I slammed down on the keys extra hard and made a racket that surely sounded more like a thunderstorm than like music. It didn't matter. What mattered was that my mother could hear me. She could not come to my recitals or see me practicing every night but when my grandmother held the phone up and I rumbled away on our old piano, I felt like my mother was able to hear and understand that part of my life. More importantly, it made the various parts of my life—my mother, my grandmother, my short-lived musical career—feel like they were all part of one life, which was my life.

Like many of the kids I grew up with at Bedford, I have felt abandoned and angry, and like those kids I have needed my mother to see and respond to that hurt in me. There are questions I've had that only she could answer, things I've needed to say that could only be said to her. There has always been a hole in my life where my mother was supposed to be and no one understands this more than my mother because there is the hole in her life where I was meant to be.

When I entered grade school it became particularly bewildering to me to be away from my mother. I wanted to know where she lived, what her room looked like, whether she knew what my room looked like. I wanted to know what it looked like where my mother lived long before I wanted to know what she had done to be in prison or why she had done it. Every weekend when I was younger, my grandfather drove me to visit my mom and at some point in each visit I asked to see her room. Every week my mother sent me a letter filled with drawings and stories and each time I received her letter, I tried to imagine what it looked like at the desk where she had written it. As I requested, she drew me pictures of her room and described over and over what was on her walls, what her window looked onto, what she saw when she was lying in bed. "I paste watercolors all around me," she wrote. "Blue skies, rust red deserts, endless turquoise seas." On the phone I told her, "At night I lie in bed and try to hear grandma's TV."

One summer my mother asked my grandfather to buy matching birdbooks for us. During our visits or over the phone, my mom described to me the birds she saw from the window of her cell. At home each night my grandfather and I paged through my book and imagined the birds my mother had seen that day. In the visiting room of the Children's Center, there

were various arts and crafts materials and one Saturday my mother and I built a birdhouse out of cardboard and popsicle sticks. "You put this up at home and tell me about the birds that come," my mother suggested. That weekend my grandfather and I made a place at our window for the makeshift feeder.

At the age of twenty-nine I understand now how those books and the birdhouse were early steps of repair and reconnection within my family; I can understand how my mother and grandfather both worked to take those steps. As a child, though, I knew only that they did work, that I leafed through those books each night and believed very much that I could see what my mother saw. I watched the birds collect around our feeder and I could not wait to tell my mom about them. In the midst of missing my mother and worrying about her, the books and birdhouse were very real to me. They were solid comforts in the face of what was then and is still now painful and confusing.

What I am trying to say here is that I need my mother, I've always needed her, and in this way I am no different than any other child. Living away from her—having to live away from her because of something she did—has not changed how much I want her mothering. As you consider legislation that affects families like mine, please keep in mind that children who can't be with their mother still need their mother. I've seen this over and over during my time visiting Bedford: kids reach out, despite everything, for their mom. Please let our mothers continue to reach out to us.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harriet Clark', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Harriet Clark

Judith Clark
83G0313 E.W.
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
Box 1000
Bedford Hills, NY 10507

Senator Montgomery
LOB 711
Albany, NY 12247

December 14, 2009

Dear Senator Montgomery,

I am writing to support the ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill (A.5462/S.3438) which you are sponsoring. My daughter, Harriet was a year old when I was arrested. She is now 29 years old, a writer and teacher, currently writing on a fellowship at Stanford University. Her relationship to me throughout her entire life has been from a distance. And yet, we have a vibrant, close mother-daughter relationship that has benefited both of us enormously.

It could have been different. When Harriet was four years old, my parents sued me for custody of her. While they wanted her to live permanently with them, they had no intention of keeping her away from me. But the Family Court Judge who presided over the case, when learning of my crime and sentence, initially intended to include in his order that I not be allowed any contact with her. Luckily, the court appointed law guardian, who had carefully spoken to all of us while the case was pending, spoke strongly of the bond Harriet had already formed with me and succeeded in convincing the Judge to allow my parents total discretion. The result is that Harriet visited me weekly, spoke with me on the phone and received my weekly letters. She spoke of the Children's Center playroom as her "second home." She got to know the regular officers so well that one of them was the first to know her SAT scores; she became friends with other children who shared her burden of separation. Most importantly, she got to know me, to experience my love and focused attention toward her. She was able to question me about how I felt about leaving her and about my crime and she witnessed my sincere remorse and efforts toward change, which she knows was largely motivated by my efforts to be the mother she needed.

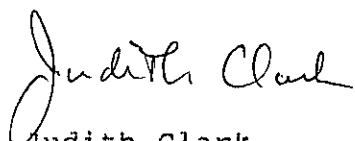
We celebrated our joint birthdays together and while I could not be at Harriet's graduation, she saw me receive my Bachelors and

Masters Degrees and we were able to hold a celebration for her high school graduation. She met women I counseled and cared for as a founding staff member of ACE--AIDS Counseling and Education--and mothers I taught in pre-natal and parenting classes. She built a deep relationship with then Director of the Children's Center, Sister Elaine Roulet, which sparked her own spiritual journey, as she witnessed mine. Recently, for my 60th birthday, she wrote me a list of "60 things I love about my mother." It included funny quirks--like my waking up in the middle of the night to have a second helping of dessert--which she knows because we go on trailer visits, and her appreciation that I "let her be grumpy on the phone, not talk when she doesn't feel like it, and talk and talk and talk" when she needs to. In other words, she has been able to experience me as her mother. And that has helped her cope with the losses and difficulties she has faced because of my terrible choices many years ago.

I have spent time with many mothers who were not as fortunate as me, who lost custody and contact with their children. Sadly, I have come to know some of those children who have ended up incarcerated themselves. I will never forget one of them who said to me, "I guess I just had to do something to come to that place my mother disappeared into when I was young." Children who lose all contact with their mothers often are left with so many unanswered questions and grief and may end up blaming themselves for what happened to their mothers, or acting out in order to identify with their mothers. The right to sustained contact with our children does not automatically address these problems. But it is the first step in enabling us to take responsibility as parents, to address the harm we have caused to our children through our incarceration.

For these and many other reasons, I want to thank you for sponsoring this bill and for your continued care and concern for our families.

Respectfully,


Judith Clark

Please Protect the Mother-Child Bond!



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Cobaugh, Susan (Mother)

Din # 05-G-0129

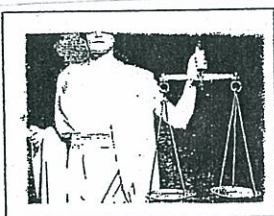
Cobaugh, Christina (Daughter)

Kinship Care

(16 years old when mother arrested; 21 years old today)

I LOVE MY MOM!

The Story of Us



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other.... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin--

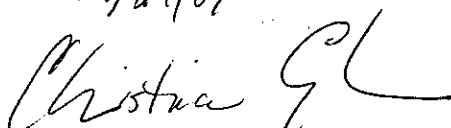
We never know when we wake if in the morning, if the events of that day will merely mimic those of yesterday or if the events of that day will ultimately change the course of our lives. For us, the children of incarcerated parents, we all can recall one day that we vividly remember. One day that some children chose to tuck away, only denying its existence, while others wear it on their sleeve for all to see. One day that forever jaded our childhood. For me, this day was in February of 2004. This day started off like any other day. I woke to the sounds and smells of coffee brewing, the usual sign of life in the Cobaugh household. As I laid in bed, postponing the arrival of this new day, my mother kissed me on the cheek and said, "I'm going out, I'll be back before lunch." Being the 15 year old I was, I pretended to sleep until I heard the door open and close. My mother never made it back to the apartment that day. As she was getting out of her car, the Washington D.C. police arrested her, as I stood there powerless to stop them. Had I known that would be the last morning I spent with my mother, I would have acted differently. I would have watched her, interacted with her, learned from her. I would have tried to soak up every lesson, every piece of wisdom, and token of advice that a mother can give a daughter. It was eight months after that day that my mother was sentenced to serve 20-to-Life. Images of memories not yet made passed through my mind, high school graduation, 21st birthday, college graduation, all days that I would have to face without her. The task seemed daunting, but one-trait children of incarcerated parents master is that of adaptability. Although this one-day may define my darkest hour, it has also transformed my relationship with my mother in indescribable ways.

My mother, Susan Cobaugh, is one a kind. She is brilliant, funny, strong, and selfless. She has the ability to command the attention of a room, yet captivate the imagination of a child. Through her letters and phone calls, she has been able to motivate me and empower me in ways that only a mother can. There is an irreplaceable bond between a mother and a child. A bond that transcends age, race, and social class. It is a bond made purely from unconditional love. My personal relationship with my mother is one that I could never replace or replicate. Over the past seven years she has been able to guide me through adulthood by celebrating my accomplishments, offering me tokens of advice, and mending my broken heart.

I have numerous stories of festive holiday cards and thoughtful birthday presents that my mother has sent me, but one memory that I cherish is a visit that took place on my 18th birthday. While we celebrated my birthday in a very non-traditional way, it was our way and that is all that mattered. I remember sitting outside on a bench on that warm June day, and for those few minutes that we were sitting there, talking about college and reminiscing over the past 18 years, I felt whole. I didn't feel the constant surveillance of security guards and I didn't hear the distracting sounds of the surrounding visitors. For that moment in time, it was just my mom and I, a mother and a daughter celebrating a life full of happiness and love and looking forward to a future of promise and success.

I do not agree with the actions that have placed my mother behind bars, but by not allowing contact between a mother and a child, is hindering the child's growth and healing process. Children are the unheard victims of incarceration. We are the ones left behind to hear the whispers of our mothers transgressions, and to read the tabloids dehumanizing the women that raised us, but most importantly we are left to brave this world without the daily love and support of our mothers. If we, as children, chose to reach out to our mothers, whether it is for love, support, guidance, or reconciliation, we should have that opportunity. Grant us this one request. The lives of children with incarcerated mothers are very unique therefore the State of New York should have laws that reflect this fragile bond. To you, Susan Cobaugh is inmate number 05-G-0129, but to me she is my mother, she is part of me and I am proud to call her Mom.

12/24/09


CHRISTINA MARY COBAUGH

To: Senator Montgorey
Assembly member Jefferson Aubry
Senator Tom Duane
Senator Eric Schneiderman

From: Inmate S. COBAXON, Din# 05-6-0029, BNCF

RE: Amendment(s) to ASFA Bill

Date: December 10, 2009.

In 1966, when I opened my eyes I was not the beloved daughter of anyone, I was a bastard child assigned the New Jersey foster #14468. Eventually, I was adopted; I was raised by strangers. Was I lucky? I was feed, clothed and sheltered. Was I nurtured? No. Was I abused? Yes. As an adopted child my development as a soul was forever altered. I am lost; I am marginalized; I have no family who cares for me; I pine for the truth of my biological history, which the State of New Jersey has hidden from me for forty-four years.

At twenty-one my only child was born, and I named her my originally intended name before my adoptive parents changed it: *Christina*. When, she opened her eyes, she saw me—her blood mother. Against all odds, I kept my daughter because I *never* wanted to inflict the pain of “abandonment” upon another human being. Hence, my daughter’s truth became that she knew me. She knew all of her truths: that her mother had a child out of wedlock; that I only had a high- school education, etc; essentially, she knew the good, bad and ugly of me, of her history. She knew her truths; as a result, she concentrated on more important mental activities than regret, loss, the unknowing, which is the debilitating mystery hinged to adoption.

After my arrest, our mother-daughter bond was stretched. I immediately moved to place my daughter with her aunt to be raised in the unimaginable event I was found guilty. However, my kinship care relationship quickly turned into a nightmare. My adopted family members decided that eventhough I had been a stellar single-mother to my daughter for the prior sixteen years, my relationship had to be severed; my family placed me on a negative-correspondence list with my daughter from Bedford. (Note: My alleged crime is not family, or child related)

There were no tearful good-byes; just silence; a void. I decided to start a journal to my daughter with the hope that at some unknown point in the future, she would return to me, and, when she did, she would know (from the volume and time-stamps of the journal) that I had loved and thought of her constantly---that not one day had passed that I didn’t think of her and pray for her safe return to me. No lip service; the journal would *prove* my incontrovertible truth: that she

was my beloved. Unbeknownst to me, my daughter also thought of me; daily, she worked an after-school job to save enough money to, one day, feel my arms wrap her up, as I had done since her birth.

Twenty-four months *after* my family's heartless attempt to break the bonds of a mother and daughter, my eighteen year old daughter, bought a plane ticket, bus ticket, train ticket and paid cab fare to arrive at Bedford's visiting room on the morning of her 18th birthday; we spent the entire day together. Bliss. As I was wiping my daughter's flood of tears, our family was waking to Christina's cell phone message: "I am in my mother's arms...where I belong!" Then, she sang "Happy Birthday to me, I have my mother with me!"; that year, and every year thereafter, I have been my daughter's birthday gift to herself. I ask: Even in the best homes, how many American parents experience this degree of love and commitment from their teenage children?

All children of incarcerated mothers know the void of a parent's absence. As an abandoned child, brought up by strangers, I intimately know this void; hence, I have shared my first hand truths with you, hoping you will see the wisdom to 1) enact legislation that protects an incarcerated mother's right to be a mother to her child from a distance, from behind prison walls; and, 2) to enact legislation that protects a mother's rights, who is forced to relinquish her rights in a surrender agreement (as a result of her prison sentence). Please enact legislation to guarantee that incarcerated mothers are legally entitled to move the court to enforce the "stipulations" that were used to coerce them into their surrender agreement (To wit: that she be permitted the visits, school pictures, phone calls that *she was promised*). I recognize children need homes, and that many foster families do a fantastic job; but, that said, you will never convince me that to withhold the truth of a family's heritage from any child is the healthiest, and wisest alternative. As a society, we can do better. The truth is never easy; but to live a lie, and pretend to be a child (a daughter in my case) of a family who does not want you is hell!

In closing, I want to share an experience from Bedford. One of my jobs as an inmate at Bedford was to be the photographer in our visiting room. IF, (for one moment) you believe that incarcerated mother's have nothing to contribute to their children, then you MUST spend a Saturday afternoon, or any day of the week, in the BHCF visiting room, to observe children of all ages, races, and sizes (infant to 40+) glow with a sigh of relief as their hearts reunite with their mothers, mommies, and mamas.

With Respect,

S. S. C.

Din # 0560129.



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Please Protect the Mother-Child Bond!

Pretlow, Deborah (Mother)

Din # 99-G-0758

Pretlow, Danielle (Daughter)

Kinship Care

(8 years old when mother arrested; 20 years old today)

I LOVE MY MOM!

The Story of Us



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin--

December 12, 2009

Dear Senator Montgomery,

My name is Danielle Autumn Pretlow and my mother is Deborah D. Pretlow. She was taken from out of out home and my life was shattered in a split second, at the tender age of 8 years' old. Although this is unfortunate, I was one of the more fortunate children in this. There are mothers and their children being split up for a lifetime, never getting the opportunity to know one another. There is a law called ASFA that states after 15 months the parental rights are to be terminated for the abandonment of children whose mothers are serving a term of imprisonment for 3 years' or longer. This truly saddens me to hear because I couldn't imagine never getting to receive the love, support and inspiration to do great things with my life that my mother has encouraged me to do.

Some children are merely infants in desperate need of nutrients from the mothers' body; some are toddlers who are at a critical stage of brain and emotional development. Stability is what all children and teens need, even adults, and many mothers want to give all they can while away from their kids.

There are women taking great care of their infants in a program called the Infant Center-Nursery in BHCF, where more fortunate children get the care they need under lawful supervision in secure housing units of their prisons and their babies really benefit from this program but, this is only for these who enter the prison pregnant and are approved or become pregnant while incarcerated on trailer visits with their husbands. The courts and DOCS, must have seen this to be vital and it has turned out great. Now, what about those women who have just given birth before their arrest and were on their own, no supporting relative, no other supporting parent and now, thinking about it fathers in other correctional facilities have it bad too, especially if they have custody of their children, but I am here

speaking on behalf of women and joining my voice with that of my mother for BHCF.

I am writing for all incarcerated mothers who have had their children taken lawfully away just after 15 months of incarceration. If these mothers don't find a home or permanent guardians for their children within the given time, they can lose and are losing touch of their children for a month, a year, and in some cases forever.

I am writing to ask for the help of someone in power to look into this. Finding residential support is of great importance, Please Help.

When my mother first explained to me that if it had not been for my grandmother being able to take care of me when she went to prison, I would have been put into foster care, my world just stopped... for a brief moment in time the wonderful home and family I was born into was threatened. At such a young age one should never have to worry about being taken away from their mother and everything they know. Now, some may dismiss this and say, "Well they should have thought about these things before becoming a criminal." Many may not have made good decisions but why does the children have to suffer? They did not ask to be brought into a daunting situation and the law named ASFA isn't helping them, 15 months is not enough time.

I only ask that while reading this, think about your own children and family, although you may have not committed a crime, people such as my mother, get dragged into bad circumstances everyday, even at a supermarket...wrong place, wrong time...it can be your story, but it doesn't have to be as bad as it is now.

This one positive/productive movement means big help for millions of family's in need of government support.

Thank you for your time and your help in this important matter.

Danielle A. Pretlow
Danielle Autumn Pretlow

December 8, 2009

Dear Senator Montgomery,

I still see my sweet 8 year olds face on the bus ride home from school on June 10, 1997, leaning over to kiss my forehead, each of my cheeks, my nose, and my lips before telling me about her day—oh! What sweet bliss—then I wake up. Life is my nightmare and memories are my torturer. I did not know that within hours I would be separated from my beautiful Butterfly.

Wasn't it just this morning that I woke her up for school with out traditional kiss to the forehead, each cheek, nose and lips, I think to myself. No Deborah, reality check, twelve and a half years has passed since that long ago bus ride. My daughters name is Danielle Autumn and she is no 20 years old. In just a few short months, she will be 21 years old, but although I was not there physically everyday, I did not miss those years of blessings while I watched her grow into the beautiful person she is today, not just outside but inside and that in itself is a blessing. She says to me, "Mommy, I would not be who I am if you were not who you are." Our bond is stronger than ever because it is held together by phone calls, through visits and letters, Family reunion trailers, and we often meet in my dreams.

I do not have any experience with Family Court or Forster Care thanks to the love, support, and dedication of my family. My sister D. Kearse took care of my baby girl for the two years I fought my case and my beautiful and tremendously wonderful mother retired just to care for her. I wish that for all mothers and their children. My voice and the voice of my daughter are for those mothers and children who have not been blessed as I have. Nevertheless, I have been locked in prison for twelve and a half years and if I don't win my post-conviction appeals, WE, Autumn and me, will be locked up for another twelve and a half years before I appear in front of a board. I will be 52 years old and Autumn will be 32 years old. These thoughts occupy my mind daily but what keeps me strong is my freedom to love and nurture my daughter and my freedom to love my Mom and be her child; they are my focus and my reason for sanity.

HEAR US PLEASE! I have witnesses so many women, many of them friends, crushed and destroyed—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually—returning from Court to say to me, "Deborah, I lost my baby. I'll never see their faces again. I'll never hear their voice. I'll never again, feel the soft skin of his cheek against mine and breathe in his scent."

With each story, I rush to the phone to call Autumn, just so I can hear her voice and know that she is real—even if she's asleep and grumpy—to tell her how much I love her and what a

beautiful person she is or that I am proud of her. It destroys me a little more because I cannot see her everyday. I cannot get my miss grumpy up for work, or watch her sleep. I look forward to my trailer visits with my baby and my Mom so I can give each one the love I have inside of me and watch both of them sleep, yes, I watch my Mom sleep because when I go back into the prison I take her to sleep with me.

I fall on my knees and say thank you, please keep them safe and keep the children who are denied this blessing safe and strong. I know when I face these women again after two days with my mother and daughter; I will see the dejection in their eyes and/or in their body movements, the lack of hope, and the overwhelming despair. I want so bad to share with them my happiness and joy but I don't because it is not fair to them and will only cause them more hurt than what they already feel. So instead, I hurt for them, for what they don't have, because I can do nothing for them except listen when they need to talk.

Now I have the opportunity to be a voice of hope in telling my story and through it, hope that someone will hear and listen to it—WE NEED OUR CHILDREN—but more important than that—OUR CHILDREN NEED US. A letter once a month is like winning the Olympic Gold. A phone call is like a rare and precious gem. A visit is freedom in itself. They need to know that even though Mommy is not there with them physically, they have access to Mommy and ***“NO, she did not abandon me.”***

We mothers, as human beings, made mistakes but we did not abandon our children. PLEASE help the mothers and the children. HEAR OUR CRIES for help and please don't take us away!!!

Without Autumn and my terrific Mom, I would cease to exist and be a mere shell of a person doing daily functions. I am 40 years old today, and I need and crave my mother, we are a unit. PLEASE, don't break units up.

Thank you so much for caring enough to sponsor this important legislation, which will affect so many women and children, as well as me and my daughter.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Pretlow, 99G0758




Bedford Hills CF Mother's Voices
(Presented Alphabetically)

- ❖ LeeAnn Armanini, Din#04-G-0447 (4pg)
- ❖ Pamela Chandler, Din#08-G-0614
- ❖ Stacy DeBeer, Din#04-G-0701 (2pg)
- ❖ Ruth Denis, Din#06-G-1166
- ❖ Tanika Dickson, Din#00-G-1158
- ❖ Tracy Doyle, Din#08-G-0276
- ❖ Edwards Bliss, Din # 01-G-0126
- ❖ Alicia Garrett, Din#05-G-0360
- ❖ Nyasha Gibson, Din#09-G-0003
- ❖ Nicole Hamilton, Din#01-G-1298 (4pg)
- ❖ Deb McCabe, Din#98-G-0917 (2pg) (*Rise Article*)
- ❖ Annette Montstreaan, Din#01-G-0823 (2pg)
- ❖ Deborah Pretlow, Din # 99-G-0758
- ❖ Mickey Pryor, Din #07-G-0399 (7pg)
- ❖ Brenda Rabideau, Din # 09-G-1054
- ❖ Christina Sanabria, Din # 07-G-0646
- ❖ Anonymous

11
DECEMBER 10, 2009

My name is LeeAnn Armanini, and I am the mother of three sons (15 mos, 3 yrs., 17 when I was arrested) who are now Zachary 8, Nicholas 10, Christopher who is 23 years old. I have been incarcerated since 2003. My sons are in kinship homes (family members) however, my middle son (Nicholas) resides with his father and I have not seen him since 2003, because my ex-husband refuses to bring him to the prison for visits. For the past six years I have fought (hard) to have visitation, phone calls ANYTHING with my son; I sent mail every day for the first 5 years of my sentence. Today, I continue to send mail (gifts) which ~~at~~ my ex-husband refuses to give to Nicholas. During my family court proceedings, it was decided

2) that it would be in Nicholas's best interest because of my lengthy prison sentence, for Nicholas to have NO contact with me. However, the Court never terminated my parental RIGHTS, however, I do have in my Divorce Agreement the RIGHT to phone calls & mail, which is never enforced by a Court. (Note: My crime is not child related).

In contrast, I do have visitation with my youngest son Zachary (who is now 8). ZACH has been visiting me regularly since he was ~~10~~ 15 MONTHS OLD. Zach & I have the most AMAZING BOND. And, he has a sense of security because he KNOWS how much I  love him, and that I did NOT abandon him. Whereas, Nicholas has had to go through therapy because he suffered abandonment issues, believing that I was with my other sons, and that I didn't love him; he did not understand why his father would not bring him

2)

to see me. Nicholas is suffering because he does not know why I left, or where I am!

However, Zach is excellent. He knows his truth, which is that he is loved very much by his mother, who would be home with him if I could. Until then we visit, speak on the phone, send mail and do trailer visits every six weeks. We have an amazing bond that these prison walls cannot break.

Unfortunately, the Courts have denied me a chance to give Nicholas his security, to love him as he deserves. Nicholas's Court believes it's in his best interest to not see me, but, Zach is a living example that the Court's position to separate a mother from a child is flawed — especially in my case. Please VOTE to support the bond between incarcerated mothers and their children.

7)

And, just for the record, my oldest son, Christopher who is a police officer in Florida has just been to Bedford to visit me ~ we also share a beautiful bond, that was able to grow and strengthen while I was behind bars.

In short, please think about the children. Let them decide.

With respect,
Lee Ann Armanini

0460447

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

Please Protect the Mother-Child Bond!



Long Termers Committee

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1000/247 Harris Road
Bedford Hills, New York 10507

Legislature Sub-Committee

Civilian Advocate
Wendy Cushman

Core Members

Susan M. Cobaugh,
Chair
Sharon Mabry,
Co-Chair
Christina Sanabria,
Pre-School Voices Liaison
Deborah D. Pretlow,
Teen and Young Adult Voices Liaison
Tami Eldrige,
Foster Care Liaison
Judith Clark,
Infant Center Liaison
Lee Ann Armanini-Riedel,
Nursery Liaison



BHCF Long-Term Legal Education

Research Committee Members

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Donna Arroyo
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Glennis Robinson
Roberta Root
Natasha Sedunova
Assia Serrano
Maryanne Voorhees
Carolyn Warmus

Armanini, Lee Ann (Mother)
Din # 04-G-0447

Zachary, Nicholas and Christopher (Sons)
(15 months, 3 years, and 17 years old when arrested;
8 years, 10 years and 23 years old now)

The Story of Us



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bedell and Kathy Boudin--

Dear Senator Montgomery,

I would like to share my story and express my support for the ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill (A 5462 / S. 3438) that you are sponsoring.

As an incarcerated mother and prior Nursery mother, before my daughter, Miley Chanla, who is two years old now, was sent home when she turned one. Although I had family to send her home to, I can't help but feel guilty and sad instead of blessed because other mothers had no choice when their baby turned one, to be sent to Foster Care, while they finish off their sentence. Most mothers exceed 36+ months sentences, which forfeited their standard 15 months time line before they lose their parental Rights. It's very painful and heartbreaking to see and experience any separation between mother and child. The loving bond that a mother have for their child is bona fide, unbreakable and irreplaceable.

For this reason, I am asking for all incarcerated mothers be given the opportunity to be a good mother to their child(ren).

Extending my deepest gratitude for your continuing sponsorship and devotion.

Respectfully,

Paul Cleale DIN0860614

My children are in Junior High School. They are in that awkward stage that thankfully only comes in the early teen years. Their world's revolve around school dances and lunch room antics. With all that comes with being a teenager my children have managed to stay on the honor roll and have flourished into two beautiful, thoughtful human beings.

Which considering that I am six years into a thirty to life prison bid is beyond amazing. I was a stay at home mom, Culyn and Shelby's security blanket. They had always known where I was and usually it was not far from them. Then I was arrested.

My children were thrown into a hell I will never fully know. They were two broken and confused little people. With lots of love and support they persevered.

It was not always easy, as they were denied access to me when I was first incarcerated. My daughter and son became severely depressed. All involved knew something needed to be done. A Psychiatrist was consulted and he recommended that Culyn and Shelby have access to me, he felt I was the corner stone of their lives. To keep them from their mom was a mistake.

There is no greater joy than my weekly phone calls. I never get a "hello"

I get immediate conversation. My kids share the half-an-hour phone call. They have an egg timer now to make sure nobody gets cheated. Arguments haven't broken out over three minutes. Three minutes are precious to us all. Two years ago my son came up with a game, when the warning comes over the phone that there is only fifteen seconds left we need to say "I love you, I love you, and the last person to say it wins. As a parent I am so lucky, as an incarcerated parent I am blessed, my son plays the I love you game still with me. He believes he's winning, and I always say I am. But we both are the winners, even though they are a five hour drive from me, I am still apart of their lives.

Society should recognize the immense benefits there are for children to be able to be included in the lives of their mothers even if they're incarcerated.

Sincerely,

Tracy DeBevoise

Please Protect the Mother-Child Bond!



Long Termers Committee

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 1000/247 Harris Road
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Brenda Rabideau
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Glennis Robinson
Robert Root
Natasha Sedunova
Assia Serrano
Maryanne Voorhees
Carolyn Warmus



Debeer, Stacy (Mother)

Din # 04-G-0701

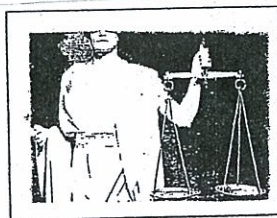
Debeer, Culyn (Son)

(10 years old when mother arrested; 14 years old today)

Debeer, Shelby (Daughter)

(8 years old when mother arrested; 12 years old today)

The Story of Us



"We do not believe that incarcerated mothers and their children were sentenced to lose each other.... To profoundly disrupt family relations during the mother's imprisonment is to sentence the children to [a] life-long injury." --Precious Bebell and Kathy Boudin--

12/29/09

To: Long Termers Committee

From: Ruth N. Dentis - Obligate
Nurse - 54A

Re: Longer time allowance for Babies

To whom it may concern -

I'm writing in hopes of changing the Nursery time limit. Currently it's a year with a six month extension, of your leaving within that six months.

I feel this time limit should be raised. It's very beneficial to the child to be able to bond as much as possible with the mother. And while 18 months is nice, even 24 months would be better. Especially for the child involved.

I hope this request can be looked into.

Thank-you for your time.

Sincerely

Ruth N. Dentis

Ruth N. Dentis

I am writing to advocate for the maternal rights for incarcerated women to maintain an active role in the lives of their children who are adopted. I would first like to thank Senator Montegomery for her endless support, especially for the enactment of laws that benefit the incarcerated women. Furthermore, I am thankful for all of the individuals that become our voices to echo our grievances.

Secondly, I'd like to express the importance of a mother's involvement in the lives of her children, no matter the circumstances. To retract, outside of circumstances and offenses that render one unfit and counteractive to a child's healthy growing process; a mother, biological, is key to a healthy child. Speaking from a mother's perspective, I believe my influence, although from a distance, has been instrumental in the lives of my children. To be able to remain involved in my children's schooling, extra curricular activities, and childhood phases has enabled our bond to strengthen. It has given me a sense of purpose and a sense of self

because I am a PROUD MOTHER.

The relationship that I have at this present time with my children could not have become what it is without contact through letters, telephone calls, trailer visits, and contact visits.

In a hostile environment such as prison, you permeate warmth. Personally speaking, I am open and willing to assist those in need through giving suggestions or listening. I am compassionate and empathetic because that are elements required to be a mother. To be a mother is to be in a continuous learning and growing cycle.

Lastly, to rehabilitate is to allow one to take responsibility. To be a mother, you have to be held accountable, and this enforces growth. It is time to break deviant patterns and allow mothers who have made poor decisions to parent their broken children. There is a healing process that is unavoidable when a mother parents from a distance. To not allow this process to take

place may be detrimental to both child and mother. It's time to bring healing to the children broken by the poor decisions of those responsible. The responsibility is the child's mother, so why ^{not} enforce her to be accountable?

The truth of the story is there is no love like a mother's love. If prison is for rehabilitation, why not incorporate parenting, especially if that is apart of the individual. To leave that element untouched in the process of rehabilitation is senseless. It'll prove to empower both child and mother for her to have an active role in the life of her child. Thus, a healthy child growing up to be a responsible adult. To take away a mother's rights totally is unfair to both mother and child. Give meaning to the mother and life to the child.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Janika Dickson
Janura Dieben

Incarcerated Mothers

I feel that it is unrighteous, unlawful and unjust to incarcerate mothers.

Women get slammed beyond the realm of justice and taken away from their kids. The criminal justice system never understands how they are destroying not just the mothers, but her children. Also destroyed are the children and the parents who are mothers and fathers of the forgotten.

It's unrighteous for our children to be treated differently and not get the help that every child of an incarcerated parent needs.

Think about the tears, sleepless night, fear, nightmares, and headaches that our powerless children have to go through. Incarcerated mothers get less than 8 hours with their children. How do you fit weeks/months/years into 8 hours and then just watch it rip your children apart as they leave you again. We have so much love for our children that they are missing out on seeing and feeling everyday.

I think it is unrighteous, unlawful, and unjust to incarcerate mothers. The end result is that everybody suffers.

by: Tracy E. Doyle

'I'll Never Give Up'

I lost my rights but not my girls.

BY BLISS EDWARDS

After I'd been in prison for two years, my two daughters were placed in foster care. They had been shifting back and forth between my aunt and sister. My aunt suffered from some medical issues and my sister had three children of her own. Eventually, they could no longer take care of my daughters, especially since I still had nine years to do. They contacted social services because we had no other family to take the girls.

Heartbroken and Helpless

Once the child welfare system got involved, I was so stressed out. My girls were shipped around and split up. I wasn't allowed to have their addresses or phone numbers. I was also served with court papers stating I had 15 months to get my children out of foster care or else I would be charged with neglect and would permanently lose my rights.

There was nothing I could do. I had no family or friends who could take them and I had time to do. My heart was broken and I felt helpless.

I kept going back and forth to court, hoping for a miracle. I dragged out my court case for almost a year. Unfortunately, I was stuck between having my rights taken away or

voluntarily giving up my rights with conditions. I felt like my world was crumbling down and I was defeated.

One Hour a Month

I decided to give up my rights with the condition that my sister or their father still would be able to bring them to visit me. Unfortunately, my sister got ill and their father has not come. However, I have been fortunate enough to continue seeing my children. The caseworker arranged it so that if I call and schedule a visit, she will bring them once a month for an hour. Although an hour is not much time it is better than not seeing them at all.

It is important to never give up hope and to take advantage of every opportunity. I make the best out of that one hour a month and I maintain my relationship with my daughters through mail that is scanned by the caseworker. I want my children to know I love them. I also want to teach them to be the best that they can be.

I hope that, although I've lost my rights, we will never be too old to be a family together. I will never give up hope or the fight to see and know my two beautiful daughters.

Nov 29, 2009

I, Alicia Garrett, 0590360
mother of three lovely children
feel that my children are being
condemn because of my imprison-
ment my children are my life
and I was the only one there to
care for them. My sentence, sentence
my children because of a serious
error I made. I just want
to continue to have guidance ^{over}
for my children. I Love them
dearly. The best interest for my
children would be for my
children to have every opportunity
to spend bonding with their
mother (ME).

Dec. 30, 2009

I am a 18 year old mom. I am currently on the nursery here at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. I was sentenced to 8 years. I am currently in the process of going to court for an appeal. And because of this program, I am fortunate enough to have the chance to bond with my son from birth. The first year of your child is the most important time. your sense of smell, touch, sight, texture and color is all learned within the first year. My son leaves in 6 more months. and me as an parent would love to still have a relationship with my only son. So I think for me and many other incarcerated parents it is so important to further our relationship outside of prison. And it is important to make sure we keep the bond. And it should not be taken away in a few months because the time limit expired. or the system should not be allowed to take actions without our permission even if we are incarcerated.

Nyeshia Gibson
Nursery Mom - BNCF

12/8

Dear Senator Montgomery:

My name's Nicole Hamilton, and I'm currently serving time in Bedford Hills C.F. I am also a mother of 4. For the first 6 years here, I was blessed with receiving visits, and retaining my rights as a parent. I had the pleasure of watching my children go from infancy to 12, two 8yr olds and a 7 year old. Due to the current A.S.F.A laws, I was among the lucky ones. Most mothers don't have the luxury of getting away with that. Being that my children stayed in foster care for so long, the current laws state that ~~they~~ they had 17 months to be in that kind of care. As a result, my parental rights were taken from me. Like I stated before, I was one of the lucky ones, I had 4 more years to go. Some mothers here have less than 36 months, and they lose all rights in 17. Most women do not understand what their rights are until it's too late. I hope that you can convince the Senate to reform the current A.S.F.A laws to help these women. Thank you so much for caring enough to sponsor this important legislation, which will affect not only the incarcerated mothers, but their children as well.

Sincerely yours
Nicole Hamilton

12/8

Dear Assemblymember Jefferson Aubrey:

My name is Nicole Hamilton, and I'm currently serving time in B.H.C.F. I am also a mother of 4 very beautiful children. For the first 6 years, I was blessed with receiving visits, and retaining my rights as a parent. I had the pleasure of watching my children go from infants and a toddler to a 12 year old, twin 8 year olds and a 7 year old. Due to the current A.S.F.A. laws, I was among the lucky ones. Most mothers do not have the luxury of getting away with that. Being that my children stayed in foster care for so long, the current law state that they had only 17 months to be in foster care. As a result, my parental rights were taken from me, and I had only 4 more years to go. Some mothers are serving less than 36 months, but they still lose their children in 17 months on abandonment. Because we are in prison, we are considered being neglectful of our children. Most women don't realize this until it's too late. Now, I'm not writing for myself, but for the mothers who are in danger of losing their children forever. We need your help, thank you so much for caring enough to sponsor this important legislation which will affect the incarcerated mothers and the children who suffer as an end result.

Sincerely - Nicole Hamilton

12/8

Dear Senator Tom Duane

My name is Nicole Hamilton and I'm currently serving time in B.H.C.F. I am also a mother of 4 beautiful children. For the first 6 yrs here, I was blessed to have a full and loving relationship with them. I watched them grow into intelligent individuals, who will be productive people. My children were in foster care while they were coming to see me. But due to the current A.S.F.A laws, I was not suppose to have them that long. I was one of the lucky ones. Eventually, I lost my parental rights, with only having 4 yrs left into my time. Most of the mothers here do not have that kind of luck. The average time is 36 months, but due to A.S.F.A laws, a child (or children) can be put up for adoption in 17 months after the mother's arrest. Being in prison, the social service agency considers this abandonment. This is not fair at all. By the time some make it here, it's either too late or almost too late. I know for me, it's too late, but I'm advocating for these mothers who don't have a lot of time. We need your help. Thank you for co-sponsoring this important legislation which will benefit so many people.

Sincerely
Nicole Hamilton

12/8

Dear Senator Eric Schneiderman,

My name is Nicole Hamilton, and I'm currently serving time at B.N.C.F. I am also a mother of 4, who had the great pleasure of watching them grow up. I was blessed to have a full and loving relationship while I served half of my time. But, by them being in the foster care system, my rights were terminated. Even though I was not suppose to have them that long, but I feel it was well worth it, not only for myself but for my children as well. Current A.S.F.A laws only allow 15-22 months for a child to be in foster care. Most incarcerated women have an average time of 24-36 months. By the time a women reaches Bedford, it usually too late. Please, help reform the A.S.F.A laws, so the mothers and children do not be separated. Thank you so much for co-sponsoring this important legislation which will benefit so many mothers in prison and their children

Sincerely,
Nicole Hamilton

To Whom it may concern,

12/09

I wrote the Rise article because I wanted to share my story with others who may find themselves in similar situations. The law is not fair, not to the moms, but its even worse for the kids. They don't understand why they cant see their parents - their mothers. They suffer every day as if we have died yet we are alive, we are still human, we still love them + need them as much as they need us. They are our children, I havent seen my son in 6 years, yet two months ago, he snuck a phone call to my best friend to see if she could sneak him up here. He was 3 when I got here. He'll be 16 next year and, as per that conversation he feels as if he's disappointed me by not coming here to see me.

We are being punished for our crimes, why are the legislators punishing our children as well. They are hurting for us and for people like myself who was 20 and a first time offender. I have no way of undoing the 13 years Ive already lost here and the 6 ^{last} Ive lost with him. Please change this law, if not for

~~the children~~ my son I don't know who ~~he~~
I would have survived and thrived for, but he
was left all alone and had to take on a burden
that wasn't his to carry. Please consider these
stolen children. Stolen/~~kidnapped~~ kidnapped, taken
and never to be returned - legally. ~~It's not~~
~~right~~ ~~I appreciate~~ ~~It's~~ ^{That law has been} never right and
it will never be right for us who have
endured it, but there is hope that others
may be spared. Thank you

Deborah McCabe

Rise is a magazine by and for parents involved in the child welfare system. Its mission is to help parents advocate for themselves and their children.

Rise

ISSUE NUMBER 10, SUMMER 2008

BY AND FOR
PARENTS IN THE
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Parenting from Prison

Incarcerated parents with children in foster care face many challenges staying connected. It can be difficult to access services, set up visits and reunite after release. Parents with sentences longer than 15 months are at risk of permanently losing their rights to their children.

In this issue, parents in prison write about their efforts to stay connected to their children in foster care despite their incarceration and to reunify after release.

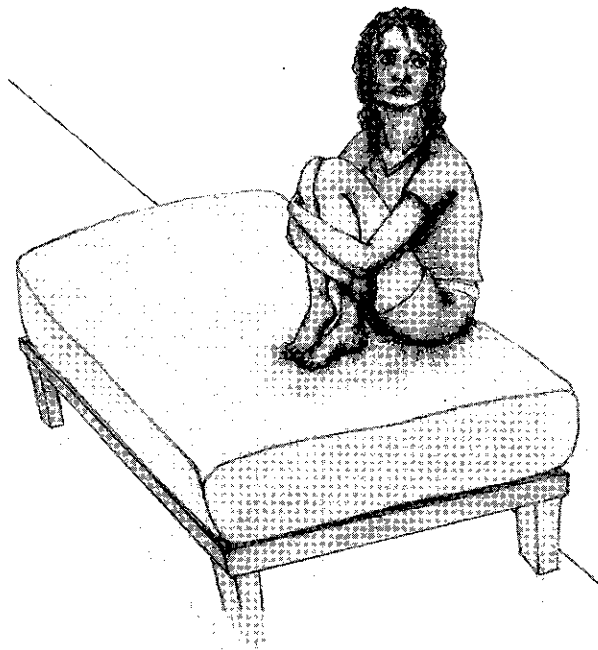


ILLUSTRATION BY CODESSA STRAUB

IN THIS ISSUE

3 A SECOND CHANCE
Supports for parents

4 RELEASED BUT NOT REUNITED

Getting my son home has been more stressful than I imagined.

5 YOU CAN TURN THIS AROUND

Reuniting with my daughter

6 STOPPING THE CLOCK
Parents in prison are at risk of losing their rights

7 RAISING MY VOICE

Advocating to change a law's impact on prisoners

8 STAYING CONNECTED

Fathers write about visits

10 BONDING FROM BEHIND BARS

How to stay connected despite incarceration

11 PEN PALS

My dad got locked up. Our letters keep us close.

11 TRYING TO FORGIVE

I'm angry at my dad for spending my childhood behind bars.

Signing Away My Son

I had to give up my rights because I'm incarcerated.

BY DEBORAH McCABE

I came to court that morning with my heart and my mind racing in time with one another. I was handcuffed as we traveled from the bowels of Bronx criminal court, arriving at a phonebooth-sized room where I was told to wait for my lawyer.

It was the day for me to sign those papers.

My son, Justin, was 8 then. For the first three years of his life, Justin had slept in my bed, curled up beside me. When I got locked up, my devastation at having to leave him was palpable to anyone I came in contact with. I could not speak his name without feeling a gut wrenching pain. Even to this day, almost 12 years later, I must mentally detach myself to cope with the pain of his absence in my life.

Five years into my sentence, I had to go to court to surrender my rights so Justin could be adopted. I still

had years to go and there was no one else to take him. Besides, I felt it would have been selfish to fight. He was with a family that loved him. I grew up in foster care and know how rare that can be.

An Unbreakable Bond

When I was first incarcerated, Justin's adoptive parents had reminded me of the unbreakable bond my son and I shared. I warned them that I wouldn't be home for a very long time. I told them to keep my son away from me. After all, he was only 3. I thought his memory of me would fade and his life might even turn out normal. Despite my protests, they allowed me to talk on the phone with Justin weekly and brought him to visit often.

Our visits during those initial years were painful but wondrous. When he saw me walk through the visiting room door, Justin would fly across the room and leap into my arms. His

face would light up and he would shower my face with kisses and wipe away my tears with his little hands. Each time it seemed as if he had grown a little bit, or changed in some small, almost imperceptible way. I still remember the sound of his voice when "mommy" changed to "mom."

Close Enough to Cry

Justin and I participated in the Summer Program and Family Reunion Program (FRP) at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. God, how I lived for those visits. With the Summer Program, Justin came to the facility every day for five days. During those days, our relationship blossomed into something truly untouchable.

With FRP, we were able to spend two days and nights in a trailer within the bounds of the facility. We were a real family again. One day a basketball bounced and knocked out his natural-loosened two front teeth. Another

time I held his scrawny 6-year-old body in my arms and sang to him. He watched me sing so intently, staring up at me as if I was the sun, moon and stars all rolled in one.

It was at the end of one of those trailer visits that I finally got a glimpse of all the pain my baby felt. I asked him if he was ready to go and he actually stopped being strong for me and cried. I had not seen him cry until then, almost three years after my incarceration.

Missing Visits

But as Justin grew older, things between his foster family and me began to change. What once seemed an ideal relationship between a mother and surrogate mother slowly turned sour. I felt like his foster mother became jealous of our relationship.

Justin began missing every other visit. They made the excuse that Justin was impressionable and they didn't want him to visit prison. Then they told me that Justin had school or appointments. They didn't send him even when I arranged transportation.

On more than one occasion, Justin's foster mother told me that Justin got depressed after visits and acted out by being disrespectful or breaking his possessions. Those were little signs, she told me, that "maybe the visits aren't such a good idea." I felt that if he were allowed to see me more often, then it would not be so devastating to say goodbye. They told me they knew what was best for him and I was being selfish.

A Promise of Contact

In 2001, there was an order from the court for me to attend a hearing that would determine whether I would retain my rights to my son. By then, the law had changed. Children couldn't stay in care for years and years. A federal law called ASFA had been passed, saying that you can't have a child in placement for more than 15 out of 22 months. I had no family that could take Justin out of the system. My choices were: fight and have my rights terminated, or sign a post-adoption contact agreement and pray they'd keep bringing him to visit. I chose to sign.

During the adoption proceeding, we agreed that he would visit me seven times a year. Three visits were supposed to be trailer visits, plus I'd get phone calls, pictures, and letters. The lawyer made it sound so simple. She quickly handed me the papers to sign.

What I didn't know was that his family would soon disregard the promises they made in court, and at that time, post-adoption contact agreements were not legally binding in New York.

I have had only two visits with my son since I signed the adoption papers five years ago.

No Longer a Mother

I tried my best to hold my emotions in check that day, but I could feel the weight of what I was about to do bearing down on me. When I finally walked out those courtroom doors, my eyes were blinded by tears. I turned to say, "Maybe I'm not sure, maybe I'm making a mistake." My lawyer was already gone.

I felt like nothing, as if I allowed them to take away my reason for breathing. I was no longer a mother, because I no longer had the legal right to claim my own child. I was just a criminal now.

Shortly after the hearing, I realized what a mistake I had made. Justin's family stood me up for the next two visits that we had arranged. They also stopped calling.

I contacted the lawyer about undoing the adoption, but she told me it was too late. She said it was up to the adoptive parents to arrange visits and that she was sorry they hadn't brought Justin. "Yeah, I'm sorry too," I said.

Devastated

I was devastated. Visits with my son were what I looked forward to, what I lived for. How could I give up being his mommy? I became so depressed that I had to go on anti-depressants just to get myself out of bed in the morning.

I have had two visits since I signed the adoption papers five years ago. I have spoken to my son only five times on the phone. His family put a block on the phone so it couldn't accept collect calls. I offered to pay for calls but his adoptive mother wouldn't allow me to do so.

His adoptive father told me once that I shouldn't complain because I wouldn't be able to be his mother again until my release. Once they sent a letter telling me I was lucky

that they didn't send him back. I remember being in foster care and being "sent back" and I hope he never knows what that feels like.

The last time I saw Justin was in 2003. He was 9 years old. Two weeks ago he turned 14.

Still Trying

I call my son once a month. My advocate is able to place the call for me. It is rare for the woman who answers not to hang up when she hears my voice on the other end. If I am blessed to reach my son by

phone, my advocate allows me extra time because she knows I only get to parent him for an about an hour each year.

I used to write him but he said he never got one letter. I used to send him things for his birthday but the store would refund my money after they sent it back.

I have two pictures of Justin, taken after the two trailers we had together. His smile is big and bright. The happiness he experienced just being with me shows.

I keep a journal for him. I have made him a scrapbook. And I am faithful in disappointing myself monthly with my phone calls. I hope he feels my love.

Does He Know Love?

When I do talk to Justin on the phone, I tell him to be respectful and grateful to all the people who love him.

The last time I spoke to him was more than a year ago. He was turning 13. In the first few minutes of our conversation he sounded apprehensive. I reminded him that I love him and that we may not have the opportunity to speak or see each other for a while.



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A Second Chance

New guidelines for supporting incarcerated parents.

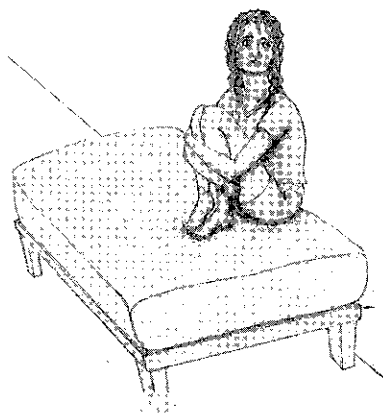


ILLUSTRATION BY OCESSA STRAUS

He tries not to hurt my feelings by speaking too fondly of his adoptive family but I want to know if he knows love and affection. At 13 he sounded like he was still a very innocent teenager, much more so than I was.

My son's adoptive parents don't seem to realize how much they have hurt us both by keeping us apart. Still, I am very grateful to his adoptive parents for loving him, taking him when there was no one else, giving him the life I couldn't give, instilling good values in him, allowing him to have a childhood and protecting him.

Hoping to Reconnect

I hope to have the chance to be a mom to Justin again. I might go home in 9 months or 18 months, and when I do, I hope to reestablish a relationship with my son. I believe that no matter how old you are, you always need a mother's love.

I can hear how much he misses me when I talk to him. He always asks me when I am coming for him. Justin told me that he calls the toys he received from me his "special toys." He said he doesn't play with them but saves them so they won't break. My little brother did the same thing with toys from my mom when he was in foster care.

Two years ago, my sister was allowed to see my son and made a video. In it, Justin said he loved me, missed me and couldn't wait for me to get out. He asked if I was saving him that birthday cake he never came to get. (The Children's Center here provides cake if your child is coming for a birthday.) Mind you, it had been years since I told him about the cake. I felt like he was asking me if I still loved him and was saving my love for him.

Last time we spoke, Justin told me that he was going to arrange a way to see me the following week. I gave him numbers to call and my address, but I haven't heard from him yet.

Most child welfare agencies want to see that a parent is connected to her child, working to improve her parenting abilities and active in advocating for her family. However, the circumstances of prison life make it very difficult for incarcerated parents to show caseworkers that they are committed to reunifying with their children.

Barriers to Connection

Prisons are often located far from where the child is living, and caregivers find it difficult or expensive to make the trip. When they get to prison, the search process and visiting rooms are not child friendly.

Most incarcerated parents can only make collect calls, so it's hard for incarcerated parents to talk to their children or the caseworker. Some agencies do not accept collect calls, and many children are living with caregivers who cannot afford to accept those expensive phone calls.

Many times parents are unable to attend court dates or case conferences because they are not transported from prison. Finally, the parent is often required by the court to take parenting classes or drug treatment, but the waiting lists may be long.

Because of these barriers, the court or the caseworker may see the parent as not trying to reunify, even though the parent may be unable to comply with the service plan because of her circumstances.

What Is "Reasonable"?

Child welfare agencies are required by federal law to make "reasonable efforts" to help parents reunify with their children. In 1980, in the federal Child Welfare Act, there was a provision that child welfare agencies had to help families reunify and had to show the courts proof that they'd made "reasonable efforts" to reunify the family before filing for a termination of parental rights (TPR). But that law did not specify what constitutes "reasonable efforts."

In 1997, Congress passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which said that child welfare agencies must file to terminate parents' rights if a child has been in care 15 of the past 22 months. Again, Congress did not define "reasonable efforts."

That leaves parents, especially incarcerated parents,

vulnerable. Some agencies will say, "We tried but we couldn't" or "We provided assistance." Caseworkers have gone to court and said, for example, that the parent failed to find adequate housing, so the agency is filing for TPR. But the parent didn't find housing because she's in prison!

Guidance to the States

The good news is that the federal government recently passed the Second Chance Act, which provides funding and guidance to states around re-entry for prisoners. The bill calls on the Department of Justice to collaborate with the Department of Health and Human Services to define the best practices for supporting connections between children and their parents while the parents are in prison.



ILLUSTRATION BY ASHLEY FRANCIS

Three elements seem to constitute "reasonable efforts": 1) Efforts to support a parent-child bond, such as visiting and phone contact. 2) Opportunities for parental self-improvement, such as parenting

classes. 3) Efforts to support parent involvement in the child's well-being, such as participation in court dates or case planning conferences. I'm working with state advocates now on recommendations to guide these agencies in developing a set of best practices.

Best Practices

One successful effort has been New York City's Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPP), which is run by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). It brings children in foster care to visit their parents in prison. The number one factor in TPR is that the parent-child bond is nonexistent because staying connected is so difficult. CHIPP makes the visit free and less complicated.

Another state that's interesting is Vermont, which recently introduced state bills that would require agencies to establish policies and procedures at every step of process, from arrest to release, that take into account the needs of children.

When we say to policymakers, "Poor children are being punished for their parents' mistakes," they listen. There's now a strong willingness in Congress to recognize that families affected by incarceration need support, and the Second Chance Act's focus on parents and children is a monumental opportunity to change how the child welfare and prison systems treat families.

December 11, 2009

DEAR SENATORS,

I have two daughters, Christie and Lindsey. My daughters are my life. There were ages 6 and 9 when I was arrested and today they are eighteen and twenty-one.

When I listen to the stories of women at Bedford who have lost all contact with their children my chest actually hurts! I fall to my knees to God, because I know he has blessed me!

Christie and Lindsey were in the care of their grandparents. Life is not perfect, and I only saw my daughters for once a year but regularly we write and discuss issues on the phone.

I have seen my daughters through their difficult teenage years (drinking, dating, more dating) and all of us can never imagine being separated.

My daughters have forgiven me and I believe this is a very important lesson for all children. We are not perfect, and the redeeming qualities of forgiveness and love must be experienced, truly tried by experience to become real.

As mentioned, no situation is perfect. I wanted to see my girls more than once a year. Their grandparents would take them out of school for trips, -but not to visit me. That hurt me, and it hurt my girls, but, we endured and today our relationship is unbreakable.

When I learned of my fellow inmates, and more importantly their children who were denied their family bond because of incarceration, I was so hurt. Children must know they are loved. They must learn that bad and good both happen in this world, but strong families stay together and weather any storm.

My daughters are better girls because of seeing me through my incarceration, than being isolated, abandoned.

Please vote to guarantee that incarcerated mothers are not completely removed from their children. Children, as mine, represent that all children need their mothers - wherever they live!

With Respect

Arnold Montano
0160823

"My son held onto my memory for almost 2 years".

I am an incarcerated mother of a 5 year old boy. He was 4 months of turning 2 when I was incarcerated. He is in the custody of his father and his father's live in girlfriend helps raise him. Before my first visit with my son, almost 2 years had passed. The courts gave my son's father a court order to bring my son to see me once a month and to send monthly pictures, medical and school updates etc.... It never happened. I wrote to the courts about the situation and I received no response. I was sentenced to 10 years in prison so I did not want to cause too much trouble for my son's father so I stopped writing the courts. Instead I asked my mother to bring him.

After a long while, being that my mother does not drive and knows nothing about how to visit people in prison or how to get here, she did eventually make it. I was scared because I thought he would reject me and not remember me especially since he had already started calling someone else mommy. When I walked into the visiting room he was kneeling in his chair looking at me and he started

to come off the chair, I assume to come to me, but he knelt back down as if he was not sure I would reject him. I think we both felt the same way. I went to him after signing myself in and as I got close, he stood up and jumped into my arms and laid his head on my shoulders and he said "mommy". For a while he said nothing else and just laid there. I was so relieved that he never forgot me.

The visit was wonderful. He told me, he loved me and that he wanted to stay. At the end of our visit when it was time to go, he cried so bad and held onto me.

He even ran back after my mom and him left the visiting room. I tried to tell him his father would miss him, he said he didn't care.

Even though he was to come back the very next day, I decided I couldn't hurt him anymore and that he shouldn't come back. Other women who has been through my same experience talked to me and told me that was a bad decision. They told me to let him come and that he will eventually stop crying and you can have a relationship with your child even though you are (me) incarcerated.

Some of the women I talked to had the most close and beautiful relationships with their children, that I had thought these women hadn't been incarcerated that long. Not only had I found out they were here for a very long time, but that when they had gotten incarcerated their children were babies too, and now most of them were teenagers. These children although being raised by someone else are happy to be with their mothers, and to know that their mothers still love them. It is hurtful as a child to never know who your mother is or if she just abandoned them or not.

Lawmakers involved in child cases feel that it's best to just cut off the relationship, but that only hurts the child more. Just because a mother makes a mistake and goes to prison does not mean she doesn't love her children. We are all imperfect and while lawmakers may see incarcerated mothers as bad and undeserving of contact with their children, the children don't, and isn't this about what's best for the children? Then listen to them. Taking away a mother's rights to her children, basically without even giving her a choice or a way to fight for her rights is wrong. Breaking up families

only creates a child who will possibly become bitter and angry because he or she will feel that something is always missing. What's even more wrong is after a mother is incarcerated the system allows the mother and child contact and then after a short while, the system allows the child to be adopted. The mother's rights are terminated and then there is no more contact. That is devastating. One minute the child has his mother and the next he or she doesn't. Who hurts more.

The lawmakers also say that if we cared about contact with our children, we would not have gotten incarcerated in the first place. That is an unfair statement. Again we are imperfect and we did not wake up one morning and say "hey I think I am going to commit a crime today and have my parental rights taken away". My son and I are so close and happy. He does not cry anymore and everyone here adores him. Thank God I did ~~not~~ have my rights terminated. His father has custody and he is wonderful as far as letting me see my son. My son has held onto my memory for almost 2 years after I left. I can tell because the second day he came to visit he started to do things that my mom said

he hasn't done in years since I left. Things he had only done with me. For instance, he would not feed himself. When I left I fed him, so he wanted me to feed him. My mom said to him "you're three, you know you feed yourself". He smiled and turned to me and said mommy and opened his mouth. He wanted me to carry him everywhere and when he couldn't have his way he laid on the ground, so I can pick him up. My mother was shocked, she said she hasn't seen him do that since I left. His father agreed.

I thought it was cute and I played right along, but then eventually he stopped, but he's 5 and still he thinks I should baby him. My son is much happier now, because he knows I'm not far away and that he will see me. Before my mom used to say that she would show him my pictures and he would yell at my picture and call me as if I could hear him and he would cry. Not anymore. There are many other ways of keeping families together through incarceration. Look at all these shows where children become adults and still they search for their parents. All through their lives this bothered them, affected them in school.

Don't you think it's better for the children to know that their mothers didn't leave them by choice and to know that they are loved.

A foster parent can't tell me where my green or brown eyes come from. She can't tell me how much I kicked her in the womb, how I opened my eyes as soon as I was born. My first words, my first steps. Why my hair is red. True, there are foster parents who are sincere and care about these children. But then why do they receive money? I never did for my child. And why do these foster parents want to only adopt children who are wanted by their parents and who are fighting the system for their children? There are so many children whose mothers really did abandon them and who have no one fighting for them and yet they are still in waiting for someone to adopt them. If I truly love a child and can afford to have one, why do I need someone to pay me for my love?

When my son was born, no one came to the hospital and said "Here's \$500 a month for taking care of him." Why would I want it?

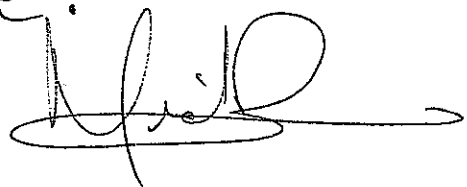
Incarcerated women are being unfairly treated when it comes to their children. They are asked to make decisions

by the courts as if they mean anything anyway. For example: You (the courts) tell a mother that you have given the caretaker of her child a court order to let the mother see and speak to the child, but the caretaker doesn't do it. The mother complains to the courts and the courts basically tells the mother there is nothing they can do. "You're incarcerated".

Another example: The courts asks a mother if she wants to adopt her child, the mother says no and the courts do it anyway.

If a mother did not abuse or hurt her child in anyway then why should her parental rights be terminated for that same child or children?

They say, its better for the children, but its not. Its better for everyone else, so they can move on to the next case and on with their own lives, but the children never move on. They will always wonder and remember that there was a different touch than the one they are feeling now from their adoptive mother. A different smell, a different voice. They are always going to wonder where are the arms of that person that made me feel completely safe.



Here I am sitting in Bedford Mills Correctional Facility at the age of 52. A former church board member and a New York State employee. I have adult children with children whom I'm able to call and be connected with. I can not even begin to imagine the pain the moms with young children are going through. The trauma of their crime, the trauma of the reality of incarceration and the trauma of being separated from their children. My youngest adult son was denied visitation to me in county jail, he had to be physically removed from the premises, the anguish, the bewilderment, and not being able to comprehend all that had and was happening was overwhelming for him. Later, that week being reunited with my children, my son was able to adjust and acknowledge what had happened and where that put him in reference to the situation. My son is an adult so how can young children being torn apart from their moms even begin to understand the how and whys of this dilemma.

Our children young and old need contact and connections with their moms. Every individual case needs to be researched for "what's best" in future needs of the children, separation should not be the

first answer.

Thank you for your interest.

Brenda J. Rabideau

Dear Senators,

My name Christina Sanabria, I have been in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for 3 years. As a mother myself, who is unable to keep in contact with my children, for other reasons or because of adoption. I feel compelled to write on behalf of the mothers of Bedford, and their children. These family's rights to stay connected and not be torn apart are violated. Taking these Women's Parental Rights simply because they have no family willing or able to care for their children, while they serve their sentences, destroys families, however more importantly damages the children who are consistently being moved and removed from home to home that is strength to the children. I see the children on the visiting floor who run to their mother's arms with such joy before being adopted. How do you think this feels for a parent who has to explain to their children, that they will be permanently with another family, or that they have to be separated from not only their mother but their other siblings as well. Put yourself in those mothers position, or think of that child being yours. Please vote for legislation that protects the mother/child bond.

With Respect,

Christina Sanabria

I was still breastfeeding my 5-week-old son when I was remanded for sentencing to state prison. Ultimately, I lost custody of two sons (one 5 weeks the other 2 years old), as a result of the ASFA law, pursuant to the sentence I am currently serving in the New York Prison System.

I knew what the ASFA law demanded, that I relinquish my rights to my child because I became incarcerated, but, how was I to prepare my sons to deal with our permanent separation? I was not prepared for our separation myself. As the clock ticked away, I remained in constant fear wondering which monthly visit would be our last. My children knew me as “mommy”, but, today, I regret that I never discussed my real name with them (or, instilled it in them), so they might remember it and choose to find me one day. How will they ever find me now? They don't know my legal name---I'm just mommy.

My boys were totally oblivious to our pending fate. I was powerless, and I needed to separate emotionally from them, so that I could clearly see the options in front of us. I chose a “conditional surrender agreement” that would secure them together in the same home, by the same foster parents, who had treated both me, and my children, with a great deal of compassion and respect leading up to the agreement.

I was told that if I agreed to a conditional surrender agreement then I would be allowed limited communication, (cards, letters and photos) with my sons. Sadly, these stipulations were *never* honored. The foster parents who I trusted with my sons never upheld any of our pre-agreement understandings.

Since signing my conditional surrender agreement, *I have not seen or communicated with my children again. I have no legal redress.* Why is this agreement called a “conditional” agreement if the conditions are not upheld? Not, legally binding on the foster parents? If possible, I would request this body enact legislation to help mother's like me re-connect with our children; that a law be enacted to apply retroactively to conditional surrender agreements, whereas, if the conditions are not met, a mother can move the court for enforcement of the visits, photos, and communication conditions, that were originally promised. I love my sons! I want what I was promised, when I, acted in good faith, and signed my agreement! After review of the issue, please consider applying the law retroactively, so I may be given a chance to motion the courts to receive the phone calls, visits and letters I was promised.

Anonymously, I submit this letter, as the current ASFA law has made me anonymous to my darling sons.

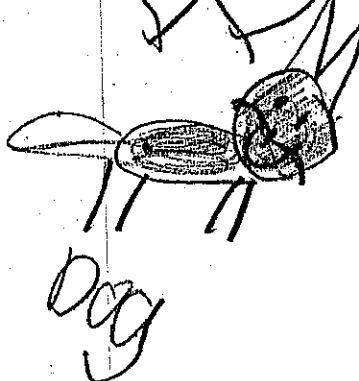
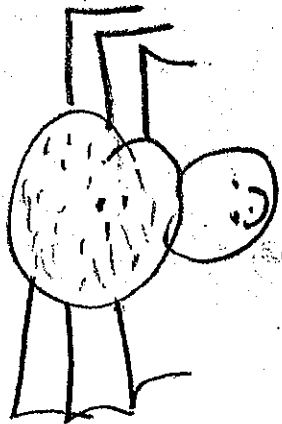
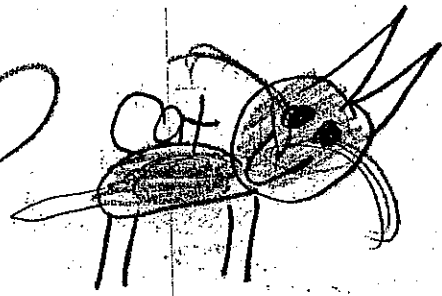
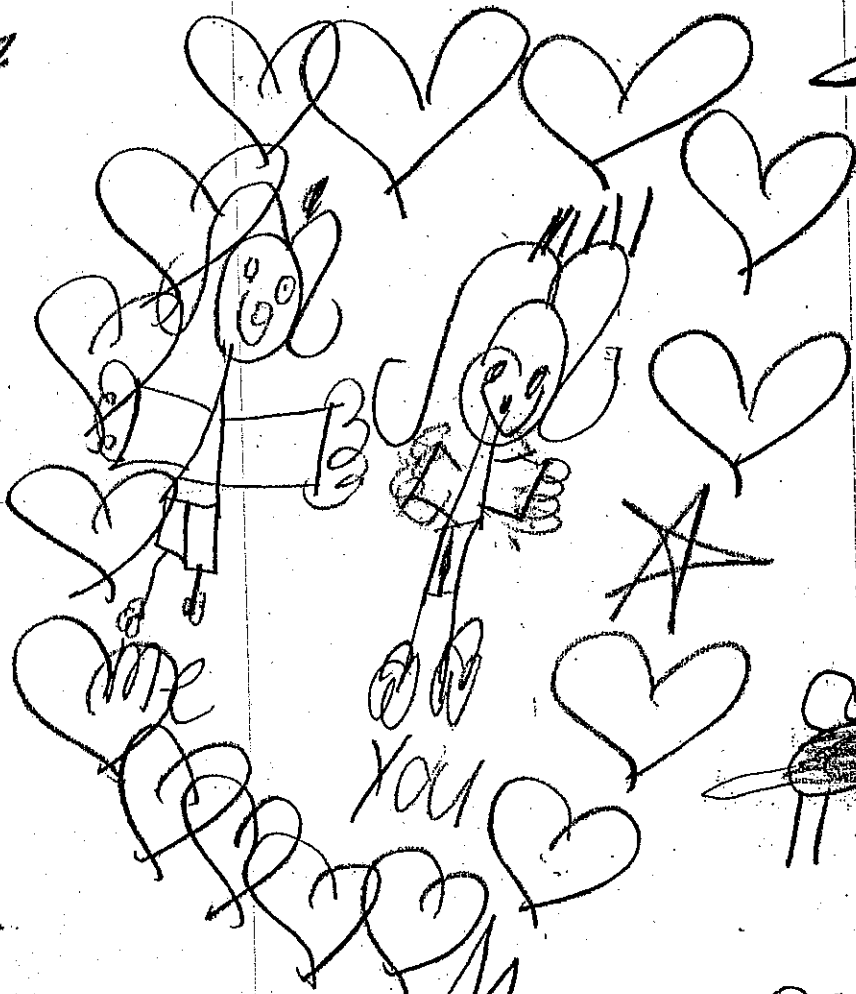
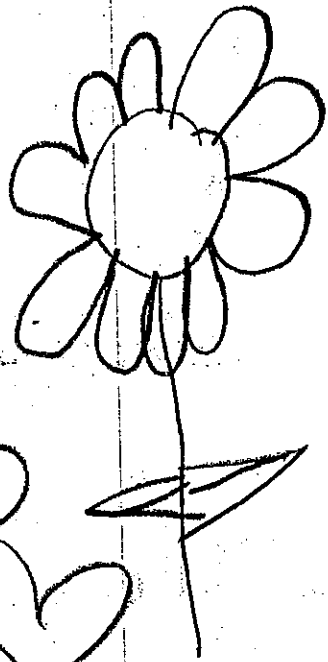
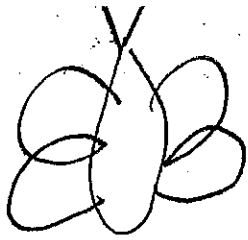
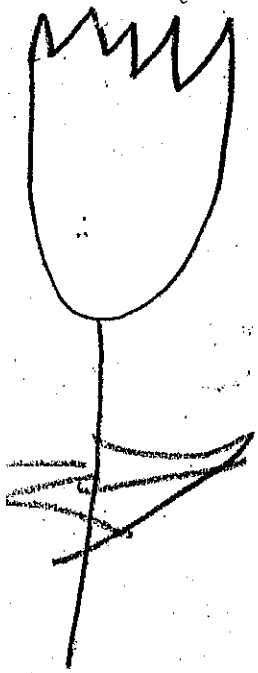
Bedford's

Youngest

Voices

Speak...





So So

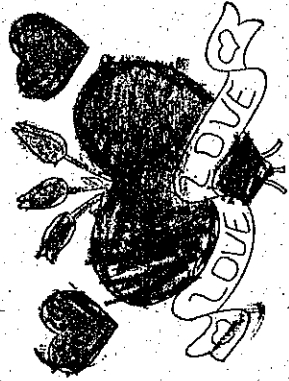
Much

Love Alexa

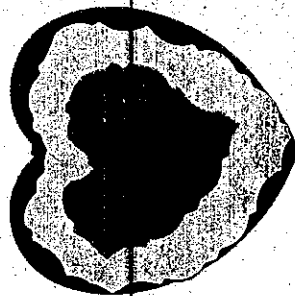
Dear mummy

I can't wait

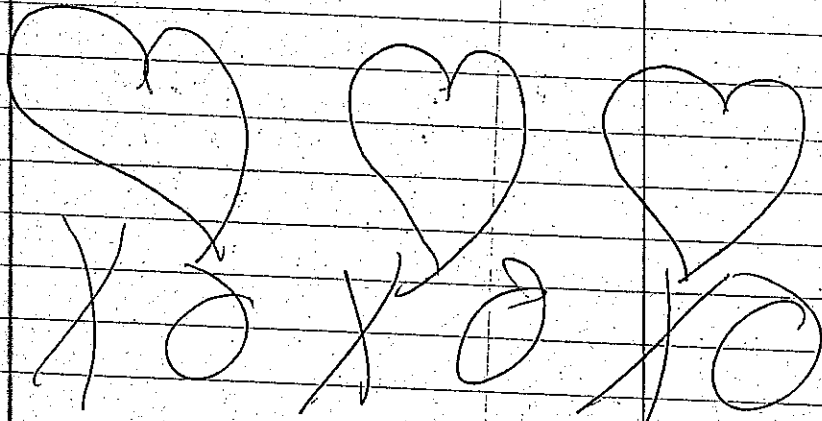
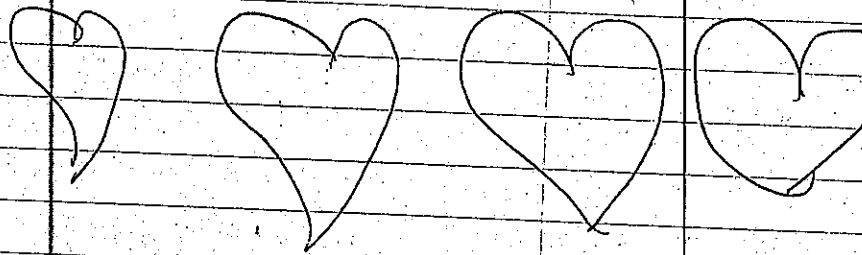
to see you



LONG ZACHARY



Dear mommy.
how are you doing me not much.
are you being good. I miss
you so much. and I want to
see you so bad every
one miss you. well I
am going to see you
and miss you. xo/xo



Love
to
mommy
from M O M M Y
amber
maker xo/xo/xo

Dear Grandma

How are you? I am doing ok. My report card was good on 13th. Meek is very bad. I saw my mom on Sunday on Saturday my sister had a bowling party I was nice. I am going to Tamara's house on Friday. Take care grandma.

Love

Darlene Thompson

Dear Mom

Aug 18 / 2009

Hey mom You told me to right you a letter so I am. I love to songs Drive by Incubus and 45 by shinedown also Eminem ~~beautiful~~ ^{beautiful}. But I like Drive and 45 more. My favorite movie ~~is~~ ^{is} Moxie goes to jail. I go swimming a lot more. Its like my favorite hobby.

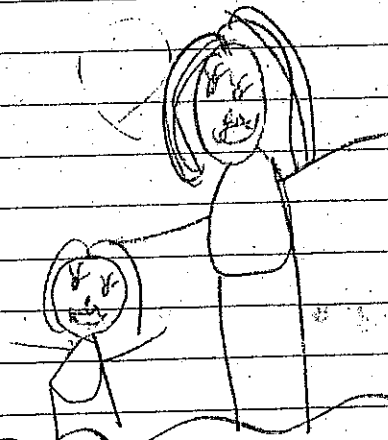
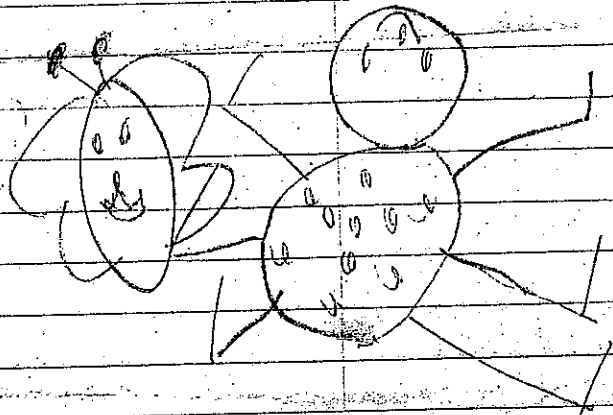
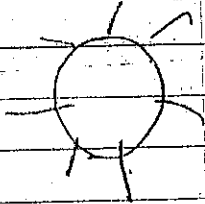
I've been doing fine with every thing. A little sad though. I miss you. I love you I hope your doing ok. How have you been doing? Hope your find how every thing going.

Love Cole

P.s We are going to Maine on Friday.
P.s.s I hope you like the picture

Date 10-28-09

Dear Mommy I love you so so so much In
the whole wide world,
I love all your pictures and your
cards and all of your letters.
I can't wait until you come home,
because when we get a new house I am
going to put my Hannah Montana
sticker on over bed room wall
and tomorrow I am going to be
Hannah Montana. Hannah Montana
is my favorite. I love
Hannah Montana's Family.
Love Alexa.



Dear, MOM 8/5/09

~~mom~~ I know we haven't
spoken in a while but I hope
this pays off, I miss you like
crazy. My dad cut my hair, I'm
glad because it gets hot up
here. love U XOXOXOXOXOXOX
OOXX. Yes, your right I about
bobby but we haven't ~~talked~~
talked in a while either

I love U ~~me~~ me & papa are
no matter what going ~~to~~

Hunting for bear, papa
~~taught~~ taught me where to
shoot. I'm trying to raise
money because Dad said
I have to ~~have~~ have money to
go so I ~~am~~ looking
forward to it, love
U cant wait for ~~you~~
~~mom~~ you to get back

POKE YOU

WRITE

~~scribble~~ ME

BACK XXXX

OOX

Dear Grandma

Hi Grandma! How are you
feeling? I'm feeling o.k. School
was good. I miss you but I
love you and Cee-Cee. I love
you like a big world. When it
will see you when Cee-Cee get
out of jail me and Cee-Cee
we will have fun all the time.

Love Always
Da-Da

Dear MOM

3/4/09

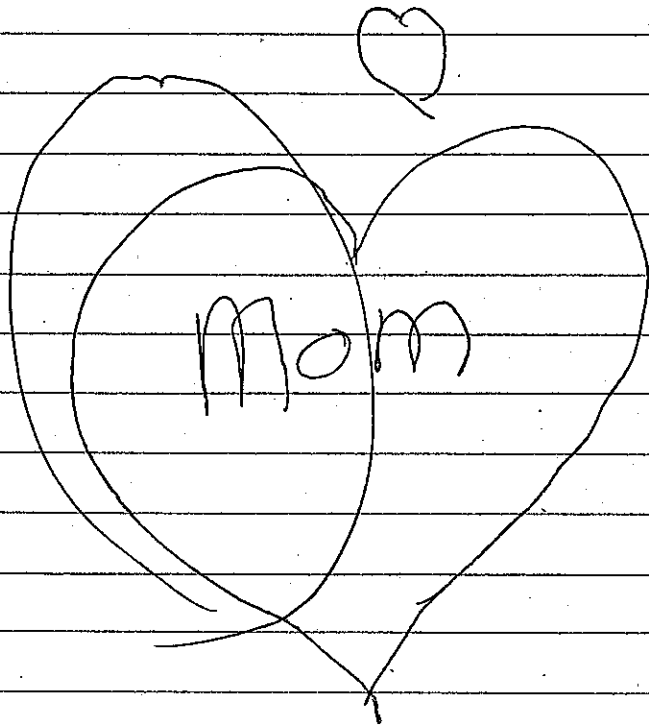
Hey mom how you doing. I'm bored. I'm listening to the song Whisky lullaby I love this song, I so bored but I have bryanna to keep me company. Its really late I'm tired and have a State test tomorrow. Hope you like what I made on the front and I mean what I said. I love and miss you so much. Ya and my b-days on Friday. Schools going great. Well just wanted to say I love you!

From. Cole

LOVE
YOU TELL
I DIT E!



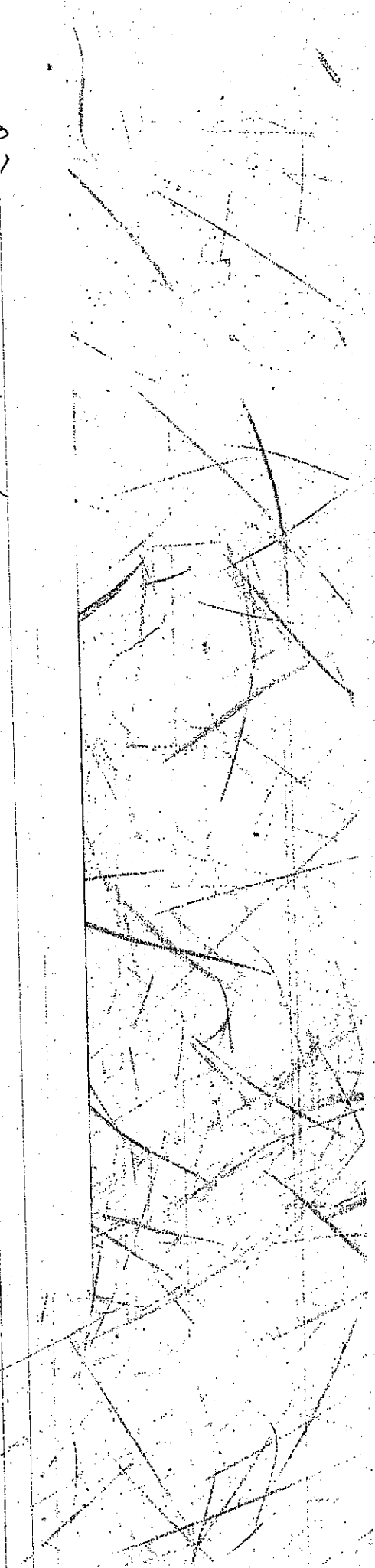
Dear Mom
hi, how are you doing?
I am doing fine. I miss you
and think about you every day
I took pictures and am sharing
It's going to have them
developed this weekend. I will
to send a copy to you.
The dogs are taking a nap
I got to bed with this letter
I'll try to write later.
I love you very much
Yours son Edwin



There's really no special reason
to send this greeting your way.
Just wanted to let you know
you're in my thoughts today.

I LOVE YOU
Th Thi SI GOd O7
LITE FORAY • I
WISH I can see
now • it's nic TO
see you

your sun E & W in



Dear mom

Hey mom how you doing? Hope everything is good. As for me man I'm just stressing alot in here. I thought the longer you have in here like you get more used to it And thats not true. I've been in for going on 3 months. I really don't know what it is for real. Its like people plan on pissing me off. And right now I'm pissed off to the point where I want to leave for real. I can't take this shit ma. Its like people know we cant fight but they always trying to push my buttons but it's whatever I'ma try and be strong for you mom. I'm just really upset with myself for putting me in this predicament. I really miss just being home. Mommy I really miss you alot I really don't know what I would do without you ~~breast~~. But otherwise how you doing have you heard from your appeal? Sorry I couldn't make it to the visit my Request got denied because I went home the weekend before. You won't even believe what one of the counselors said. He ~~said~~ said "I think your using your mother to get out the house like he gotta be crazy or something to say something like that that shit really piss me off for real. He said every other counselor agreed but it was just up to ~~me~~ him to make the decision and he said NO. Something like though

I'm going to see you May 17. Mom
I love you and always will KK
Speak to you later

Love you

From
Your baby boy
One. Anthony Allen

Write back
A.S.A.P to let
me know how
you doing and
if you need
anything.

Dear Mommy

Hey mom how you doing? I'm okay I guess. I think I got like 2 months left in here - hopefully. Ooo mom I passed the practice G.E.D test. I'm schedule to go take my G. test on July 8th. I can't wait till I go home ma forreal. I'm so tired of this shit its CRAZY, I miss everything especially the kids. But hey at least I'm going to get something out of it by time I leave I should have both G.E.D and Learners Permit. Aint really got nothing else to inform you of except that I really miss you. I found a what I might do for training. I think I'm going to major in Automotives. I go talk to the lady tomorrow. Well im about to go to sleep so speak to you soon
Write back A.S.A.P

From
Your loving
Son



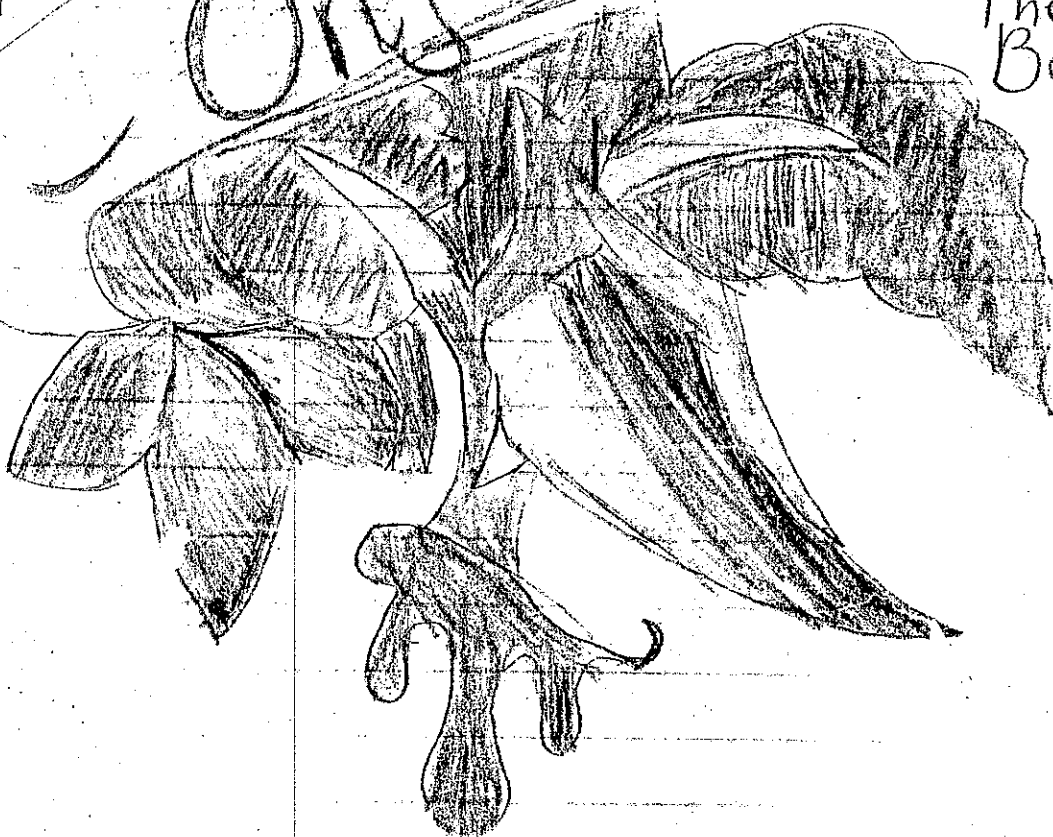
~~A 2~~

A
wonderful
mother



On Old White

Your
The
Best



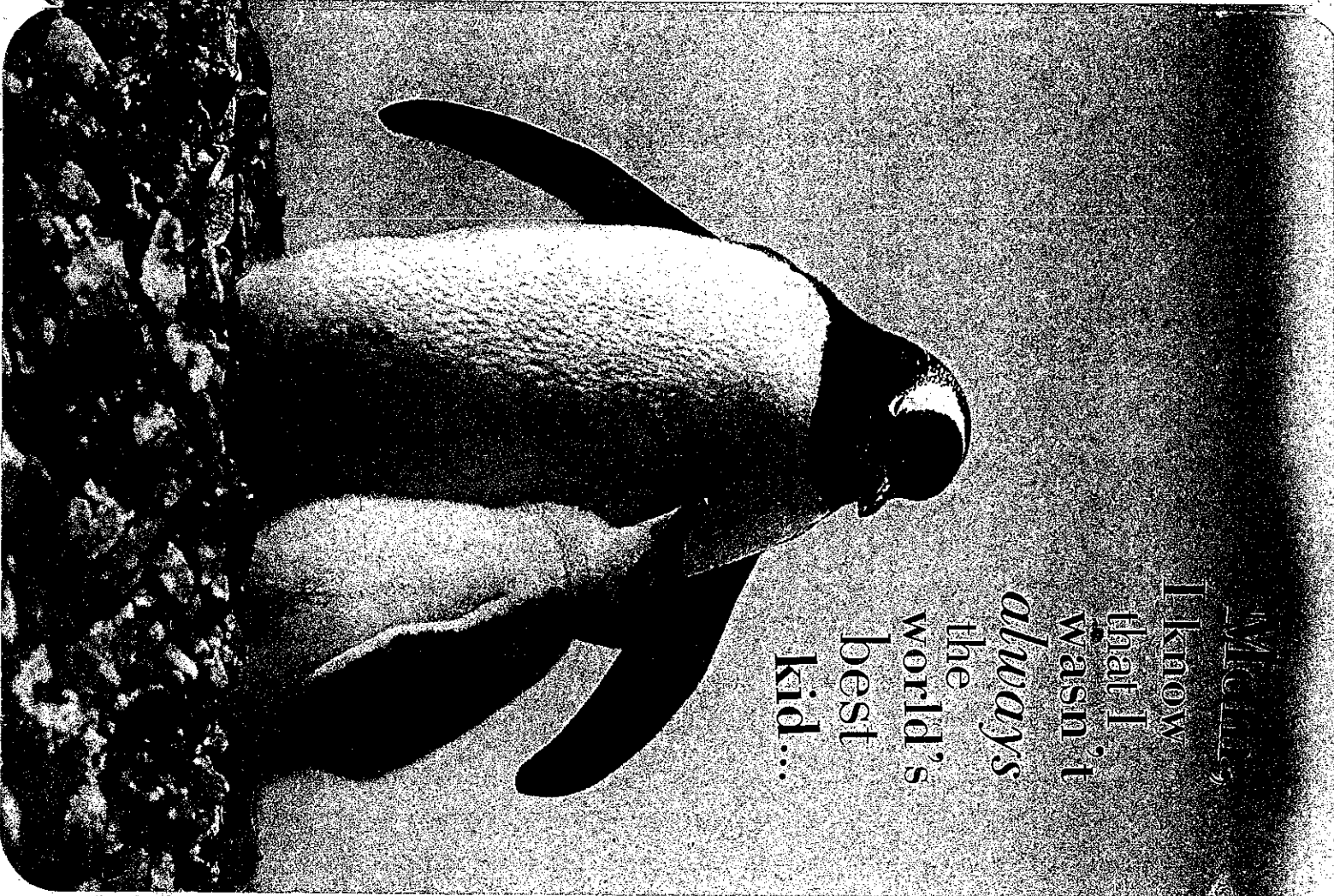
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*I know
that I
wasn't
always
the
world's
best
kid...*

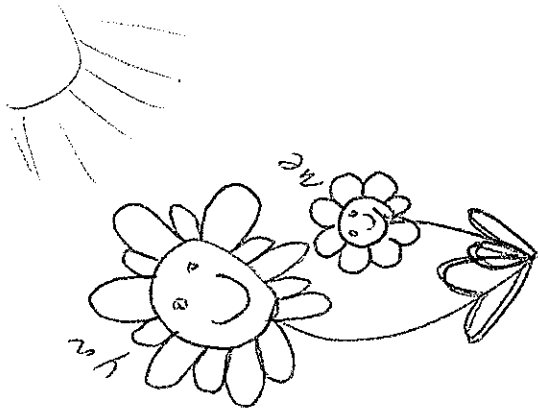
Dear mom-

Happy mothers day!

I hope you know that I
am thinking about you
on this very special day!

This card reminded me
of us and I hope it
does the same for you.

I love you very much,
and I am very proud of
you and your undomaine
strength. I wouldnt want
to call anyone else my mother.



...but you
were always
the world's
best mother.

(Isn't it great the way
everything evens out?)

Happy Mother's Day

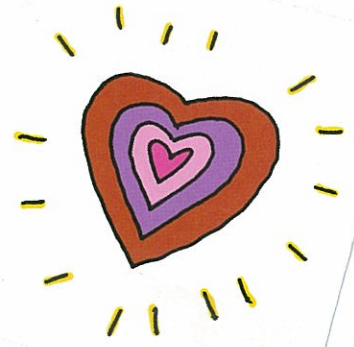
LOVE YOU!

Christina



The angel circled the model
of a mother very slowly.

“It’s too soft,” she sighed.



“But tough!”
said the Lord excitedly.
“You cannot **imagine** what
this mother can do or endure.”

Finally the angel bent over
and ran her finger across the cheek.
“There’s a **leak**,” she pronounced.
“I told you that you were trying to put
too much into this model.”

“It’s not a leak,” said the Lord.
“It’s a **tear**.”

“What’s it for?”

“It’s for **joy**,
sadness,
disappointment,
pain,
loneliness and **pride**.”

“You are a **genius**,” said the angel.

The Lord looked somber.

“I didn’t put it there.”