A Process of Learning

I was in fifth grade and it happened during class when I was brought to the principal's office to be talked to by two cops who told me they needed to ask me questions, get me evaluated by the school nurse, and take me from school to talk to a nice lady. As an 11-year-old girl, I had no idea what any of this meant but I knew cops were scary and that we are supposed to listen to them. So, I did, and that led to me being taken and put in an empty room with my biological siblings who were crying and punching the walls screaming to get out. I sat in the corner of the room watching them. We were all separated and put in different cop cars, driving away in different directions to what would be our "new homes." I don't recall if I was ever asked, "Are you okay?" or "Do you know what is happening?" I just did what the scary cop told me to do.

As the only girl who was raised with five other siblings, I begged to be with my brothers. This was not an option for me. I remember crying myself to sleep that night. At that time, I did not know that this would be the start to a lot of sadness, confusion, and anger.

I spent 8 years in the foster care system, which also meant 8 long years of services, therapy once a week, and having to repeat my trauma every time I met a new worker or service provider. During these years, a lot of changes were happening. I moved in between foster homes, I went through middle and high school, and had to deal with all the normal body changes. I was not the best teenager and, most times, it was because I had to pretend like my pain and trauma did not phase me. This left me with two options: do better or go down a bad road that I was too familiar with. I tried my best to pretend that I was happy and what seemed to be "normal" at the moment. I played high school sports, I played club sports, I went to sleepovers, and I got involved in anything that would fill up my days, but that would not stop me from having negative thoughts and guilt in the back of my mind almost as if it was inevitable to get rid of. My mental health was never a thing I thought about or was ever really talked about. I only started hearing and thinking about the term "mental health" for 2, possibly 3 years now. Through practicing self-care and really learning how to appreciate life, I realized that I would be okay to let the hurt go and that it was not my fault. I learned that I am not alone in trying to strengthen my mental health, and that makes a huge difference. Mental health is all a learning process. I still struggle with trying not to shut myself down, but I am better at stopping myself. With working on my mental health, I am happier, and I have a healthier mind. I wish I worked on my mental health during my time as a foster kid because I spent so much time hating myself and getting mad at other people because of my pain not realizing something as simple as practicing self-care by taking time in nature, going on walks, or learning breathing exercises would've changed that narrative. Now I am 22 years old

and I work as a Youth Partner. I provide youth-peer support, advocacy, and I model healthy behaviors to youth who are in the systems that I was once in.

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