

## Finding Our Way Home

It was hard to reconnect with my mom.

### By Janelle

When I was young, life with my mother was good. I used to love going to her old job, playing with whatever I could play with and watching her at work. I remember playing little hand games with her like "thumb war" and "boom-boom clap-clap." I remember going to day care and not wanting her to leave me, because I just wanted her to stay with me all day long. No matter how I was feeling, I was always glad to see my mom because she always made me feel good.

But as I got a little older, it seemed like my mom was always stressed out. My brother was getting into trouble at school and his teachers would call her almost every day. My mother became very depressed and tired of having to deal with the same problems all the time.

It wasn't hard to notice because she would complain about whatever made her angry and upset—her job, her kids, or the landlord who wasn't doing his job fixing up the apartment. My mother wasn't happy anymore. She always looked sad, like a big cloud was over her shoulder that could rain on her any day.

I didn't understand why she was feeling this way or why she was starting to hate her life so much. All I remember is that things were not good and that I felt like my life would probably never be the same.

## Too Many Problems

I always knew she loved us, but she just had a lot of problems that brought her spirit down. She was having so many problems with my brother, and having to go pick him up at school all the time, that she quit her job. My dad wasn't around, and there is only so much a person can handle. My mother didn't stop doing her duties as a parent, but she basically didn't seem to care anymore about having fun with us and making us laugh. As the days went on, my mom started getting worse. She'd tell us that she was not doing her best with us and not giving us enough. She thought we needed a better life than what we had and the only person she felt could give that to us was my aunt Gina, her closest sister.

One day a worker from ACS (child welfare) showed up. She had dark skin and hair and she always wore black. My mother didn't like her at all. Later, I found out that a counselor at my brother's school had called ACS after my mother said she was fed up and couldn't take it anymore.

## In Care, with Questions

Even though my mom had been talking about us going to live with Aunt Gina, I wasn't prepared for the social worker to take us away. The day we left, my mother wasn't

around, and I had no clue what was going on. I was just scared and wanted this whole thing to be over.

I remember being put in a car that was very uncomfortable. It was a long drive, and I thought that when we came out of the car I would be in front of my aunt's building. That's where I wanted to be. But I was in front of someone else's building. Luckily, the foster mother was nice, and my brother and I stayed at her home for about a month with no problems. I would get phone calls from my mother from time to time. She'd ask me how I was doing, tell me how much she missed me and how she couldn't wait to see me.

I missed my mom a lot, too. I really wondered what she was doing and where she was and what exactly had happened to her that day we got taken away. But I never asked her any of those questions.

### **A New Life**

After a month, we moved to my aunt's house. Life with my aunt was great. I started going to a new Catholic school and I loved it. My aunt worked there and everyone knew her name.

My mother would call sometimes and ask me if I wanted to see her and come home. Of course I said yes, but I really didn't mean it at all. I enjoyed being at my aunt's and wanted to stay there forever. I just didn't want to tell my mom that and make her feel bad.

The first time I went to visit my mother I thought I would be happy to see her, but it was kind of weird. I acted like everything was fine, but I didn't really feel comfortable talking to my own mother and I wasn't sure why. My mom was so happy to see us and she couldn't stop smiling. We stayed for a little while, then hugged each other and said our good-byes and that was it.

My mother got the chance to visit us on holidays and birthdays, which was great, but I felt more distant towards her, like I didn't want to see her at all. I knew it wasn't right, but that's how I felt at the time. I didn't show it or tell anyone. I just left it alone.

### **Back to the Past**

After three years at my aunt's house she told us it was time for us to leave. I couldn't accept the fact that I was going to be coming home to my mother and living in the life I'd once left behind. Going back to my past was a slap in the face. I had my life here—my friends, my school and everything else—and now I had to leave it. This hurt me so much.

It was very hard readjusting to my mother and my new life. My mother seemed so happy to finally have us back. She'd made many changes in her life while my brother and I were gone. I think one of the biggest changes she made was with her anger.

My mother used to get so angry whenever someone would give her attitude. She would yell at the top of her lungs while cussing them out. But since we'd left it seemed like she'd learned how to control that. She seemed calmer, like she was at peace with herself.

### Talking Back

Another change was my mom's new boyfriend. When I met him I didn't like him at all. I knew it was wrong to judge a book by its cover, but there was just something about him that convinced me not to trust him.

My mother liked him a lot, though, I could tell, and so did my brother. I felt like an outcast because I was the only one who didn't. My mother noticed and talked to me about it, but I just didn't care. I started not to care about a lot of things that my mother told me to do or not do.

I didn't listen to her or give her any respect. I started talking back and arguing with her all the time. I guess since I'd been gone for a while I thought the only person I should be listening to was my aunt. I knew my mother had the right to give me rules, but I just felt like, "Why should I listen to them?"

My mother didn't know what to do with my brother and me because we were both being so disrespectful toward her all the time. She said she wasn't going to give up on us again; she was going to find some way to solve this problem. And she did.

She took all of us to family counseling, which I thought was stupid at first. I didn't think it would work.

### Learning to Listen

When we got to our first session I was nervous. I hated being there and I just wanted to leave and go home, but I couldn't. So I sat there and listened to my mother talk to the therapist. Everything she was saying was true. My mom seemed not at all uncomfortable telling her business, but I was. I didn't know the therapist at all and I really didn't feel like telling her anything.

But each day we went there I felt more comfortable and open. The therapist was really nice and we each got a chance to say what we were feeling out loud to one another. It took me a while, but once I got to talking I couldn't stop. I told the therapist how I was feeling, the problems I was having with my mom and everything else about myself. We talked for hours, but I always felt like we didn't really have enough time.

As the years went by I started noticing a change in myself as well as my mother. We were getting along much better and talking to each other. And it didn't hurt that she'd gotten rid of that boyfriend.

In therapy, my mother was getting a better understanding of how my brother and I felt and I got a better understanding of how she felt. Being able to talk out our problems

without yelling at one another made a big difference in our lives. We started really listening to each other and I felt that we were gaining back the bond we once had.

### **Appreciating Each Other**

It's been seven years now since I came home, and my mother and I have a fun relationship. We play around with one another all the time, making jokes and laughing so loud and hard at whatever we think is funny. I love my mother a lot and I feel like the older I'm getting the more I'm starting to appreciate her (even though she doesn't think that).

I love talking to her and I feel she understands me in so many ways, although she still has doubts about me because I don't tell her every little thing. I don't feel comfortable telling her every detail of my social life, but I do feel like I have a better connection with her than I did before.

My mother is a strong woman who has dealt with a lot of hard times in her life and somehow gotten through them. I see her as a good person to look up to, even though she doesn't think she is. She tells me all the time that she's made so many mistakes in her life and that I should learn from them.

My mom thinks I don't listen to her when she tells me things, but I am listening in my own little way. I know when I get older I'll look back and know exactly what she meant. I don't always show my appreciation, but I know I'm lucky to have a mother like her. In the past I felt like I would never be able to forgive my mother for putting me through all this. But now that that I'm older I feel like I can accept the fact that it happened and move on with my life, one day at a time.