

Who Am I Now?

By Shameka

A few weeks had passed since my dad's release from jail and my family's eviction from our home, and nothing had improved. My 10 brothers and sisters and I were still crashing out with my dad at his girlfriend's tiny apartment, along with her two children. We were not attending school, barely eating, sleeping on hard floors and working like slaves in her house. We cooked, we cleaned and we took care of her baby.

After about a month, my dad decided to opt out. He said he couldn't take care of us anymore, not that he ever really did. He said we had the option of either going into a shelter together or being split up amongst the family. We chose the shelter, but he chose the split, so off we went to live with different family members. I, along with one of my sisters and three of my brothers, went to live with our uncle, who we barely knew.

I didn't really feel the pain and anger of the separation until about a week in. I missed my other brothers and sisters and was tired of this foreign home, where I didn't feel much like family. I even began to miss those annoying days in a crowded house with no privacy.

Everything Changed

Then one day my uncle, a man of lectures who was big on family meetings, sat us all down in the basement with his own children for a discussion. That's when he told us we were becoming his foster children.

It all changed that very second. My cousins started calling me their sister (sometimes with 'foster' in front of it). My aunt and uncle started calling me their daughter and setting rules down for me to follow. Rules? I'd never once encountered them with my own mother or father. The way of the house stayed the same, but in my mind the whole dynamic changed.

I was now a foster child. The term was loaded with meaning and unleashed so many different feelings in me. For the rest of my life, I thought I'd have to deal with people looking down on or pitying us as the family no one really cared about. I'd have to deny and try to hide my identity, all because of him. My father had already done so much wrong to me and my family. Now he had abandoned us.