

The Road Ahead

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### The Road Ahead

This book is designed to inform and educate children involved in the child in need of care system. It should be used as a bridge to facilitate open and honest communication between adults and children

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Kansas Legal Services Children's Advocacy Resource Center

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**Kansas Legal Services** 

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Sometimes things happen that aren't your fault. This happened to Alex. He is starting a trip down a road he did not want to take. But there are people along the road who will help him along the way.

Alex is like a lot of children who are in foster care. As you go along the road with Alex, you may find that you learn a lot about what is happening in your life.



Here is a place for you to write down people who you meet.

When you see a U-turn sign like this come back to this page and write down the person's name, address and phone number. Then you will have a list of people who can help you.

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Name and Address			Telephone Number & e-mail
	Foster Parent Social Worker My Lawyer Friend Other		
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Alex's first stop in foster care is at his foster home. His foster parents are Jennifer and Aaron. There are other children at the home – some are Jennifer and Aaron's children and some are other foster children.

It is a law that parents must take good care of their children. When a child is no longer safe or healthy in their family home, people who have the job of watching out for children can take over. They may move the child from the unhealthy or unsafe home and place the child in a safe and healthy home, for a while. This is called foster care.

Go back to your address book and write down your foster parents' names, address and phone numbers.

Draw a picture of your foster home and your foster family.



Alex feels strange around Jennifer and Aaron. They have new rules and eat weird food. Alex now has an early bedtime and has to make his own bed every morning. Alex forgot to make his bed today at his foster home. Aaron said it was okay. He knew that things were different here and it would take Alex some time to get the hang of it.

Alex wants to like Aaron and Jennifer. They are nice to him and try to make him feel welcome in their home. But he still misses his mom. Alex is scared his mom will be mad if he has fun. Jennifer says she understands and she is not trying to replace his mother. She is sure that his Mom wants Alex to have fun. Alex is still nervous. He wonders why anyone would want him? Why would people let kids like him come into their homes?

Jennifer says that foster parents are people who see all children as special. They want to help them have good lives. Some foster parents were once foster children and know what it is like. Some foster parents were not. All foster parents want very much to hear your feelings and offer help in your life.

Alex wants to let his foster parents know things about him. He filled out a sheet that tells Jennifer and Aaron about him. Fill out the All About Me sheet on the next page and give it to your foster parents.



## All About \_\_\_\_\_

I am	years old and I am in	grade.	My birthday	is		·
My favoi	rite thing to do in school is		,			·
My least	favorite thing in school is			:		
	eyes and					
	lescribe myself as					
	rite foods are					
My least	favorite foods are					
My favor	rite games to play are					
My favo	rite movie is					
My favo	rite kind of music is		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·			
My favo	rite book is					
The thin	gs I like to do are		·			
Someday	y, I want to				***************************************	
I'm very	good at					
I need he	elp with					
Other thi	ings I'd like you to know abou	t me			-	
						····



Yesterday at dinner, Jennifer made Alex eat all of his peas. PEAS!!! Two whole spoonfuls!!! Alex said, "I have rights! And I don't have to eat peas." Jennifer told Alex that he did have rights, but he still had to eat the peas.

Jennifer is right. All children have rights. Children in foster care have rights too.

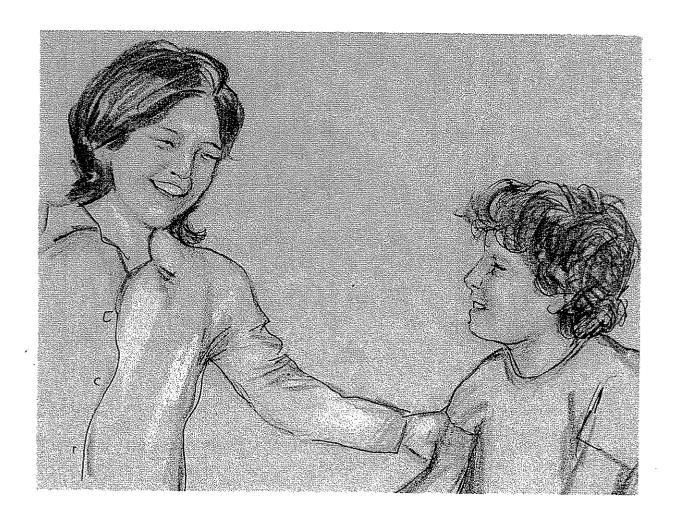
#### Here is a list of some of the rights of foster children:

- 1. The right to know what is going on in their case -like going to the court hearing, having a lawyer, and telling the Judge what the he or she thinks about where they are living.
- 2. The right to be in a home that is safe, healthy and comfortable. No one should ever hurt you in a foster home.
- 3. The right to have their own religion and cannot be forced to be in the religion of the foster family.
- 4. The right to go to school and get special help if it is needed.
- 5. The right to see a doctor and stay healthy.

Alex listened very closely to his rights. He was sad to hear that the right to refuse peas was not listed.

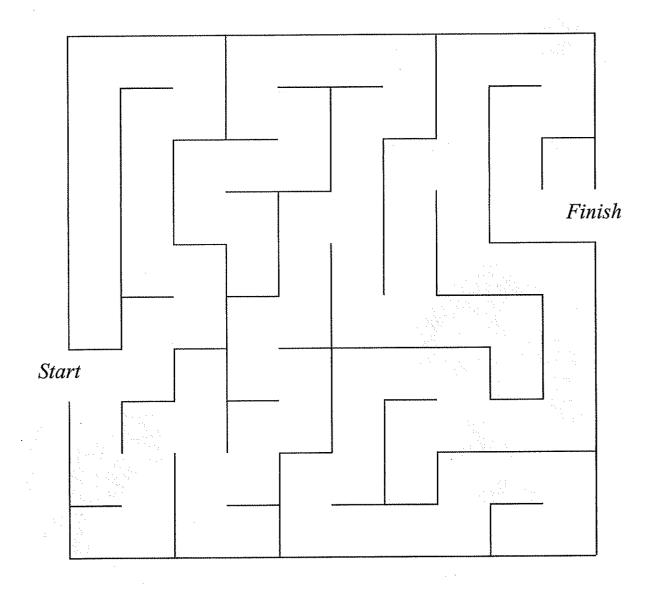
What rights do you do you think kids should have in foster care?						
If you were a foster parent, what rules would you have and what would you never do?						

Alex's caseworker is coming for a visit. Her name is Martha. The caseworker's job is to keep the foster child safe. A caseworker is also called a social worker. His or her job is to help design a plan for the child. The plan says what kind of help the family needs before they can be together again. The caseworker also checks on how everyone is doing and sets up visits. If a child has problem, he or she should talk with the caseworker.



Martha has been down this road before and will guide Alex through the court system maze.

Can you get through the maze?



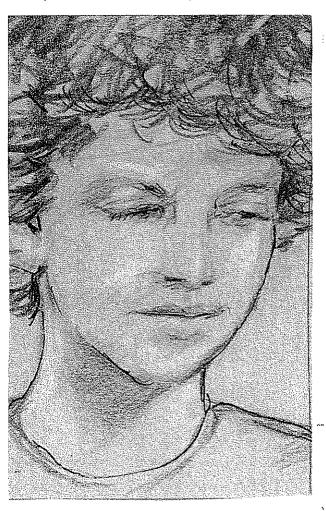


Go back and write your caseworker's name, address and phone number in your address book.



Alex has a problem. His foster parents have grounded him from the phone. He can't talk to his Grandma on the day she calls. What does Alex do? Who does he talk to if he has a problem? Who would you talk to if you had a problem?

If you have a problem with someone who makes decisions about your life, fill out the form on the next page. Take the form to an adult you trust. You can call the foster care Helpline at 877-298-2674 and they will help you. Remember, there are people who care about what happens to you and want to know if you have a problem. It's okay to tell someone about it.



## **Problem/Complaint Form**

To:	Date:	
My name is:		
My foster parent(s) is:		
My phone number is:		
My Caseworker is:		
This is my problem:		
My problems is:	Very Urgent – someone is going to get hurt Very Important Important Just something I want put in my file	
Talk to me:	At the phone number I gave you At school Write me a letter Other	
Please don't discuss this p	problem with	
Signed:	Date:	

Alex's case may take him down many roads. Sometimes he feels like he is on a water slide, twisting, turning and not being able to see where he is going. But this is not fun like a waterslide.

#### Sometimes good things are hidden in bad situations.

Look at the picture below and see if you can find the hidden animals.

Find: a deer, a rabbit, a frog, a bear, a duck, a snake, a bird, an owl and a fish!



Part of a caseworker's job is to help Alex's Mom learn to make a home that is safe and happy. If she does, Alex can go back to his Mom's home. Sometimes that does not happen very fast and Alex may have to go to Court. He may stay in a foster home for a long time, go to live with someone else in his family, go to a different foster home or be adopted.

Some parents, even when they want to very badly, cannot make the changes they need to make their home safe. It is not because they do not love their children or want to be with them. There are many reasons why the parent cannot complete their plan. It is **NEVER** the child's fault.

#### **Break the Code!**

A=1 B=2 C=3		,									
D=4 E=5	9	<del>20</del>	<del>19</del>	$\overline{14}$	5	$\overline{22}$	5	18	$\overline{20}$	8	5
F=6 G=7											
H=8 I=9	3	8	9	$\overline{12}$	4	$\overline{19}$	6	1	$\overline{21}$	12	$\overline{20}$
J=10											
K=11 L=12											
M=13											
N=14	•										
O=15 P=16											-
Q=17											
R=18											
S=19 T=20											
U=21											
V=22											
W=23					•						
X=24 Y=25											
Z=26											

On the next pages, you will find different places Alex's case may take him.

Go down these roads with Alex – back to live with his Mom; to Court; to a new foster home; going to live with a relative and being adopted. You may be going through the same thing.

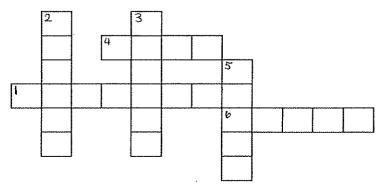
#### 1. Alex returns to live with his Mom:

Alex has found out that he is going back to live with his Mom. Alex thought he was going home because he was being good. But being bad wasn't the reason he was in foster care so being good isn't the way to go back home. We all make mistakes and bad decisions. It is important to learn from them and do better. Martha said that Alex's Mom learned from her mistakes and bad decisions and did better by finishing her plan to make their home safe. Some of the things Alex's Mom may have done are to find a new place to live, take classes to help her learn to be a better parent, get a job and go to a place to make sure she doesn't use alcohol or drugs.

Even though Alex is home, Martha will still check on him to make sure everything is going okay. Alex's Mom may need some extra help to keep up her good work.

Sometimes it takes some work to put everything together. Solve the puzzle below by making the words fit together.

#### **Puzzle**



- 1. Someone in your family
- Mother or Father
- 3. To keep a child safe in your home for a while
- 4. Where you live
- 5. To find out something new
- 6. To make someone a part of your family forever

#### 2. Alex is going to Court

Alex's case is going to Court today. Alex is nervous because he has never been to Court before. Going to Court is scary for anyone. There's no need to be worried. The people helping Alex will be with him. Some of the people in Court will be people he knows. Some people he will not know.

Here are some of the people who may be in Court and why they are important to Alex and to you:

#### **Guardian ad Litem:**

This is a big name for the lawyer who looks out for the best interests of the child in court. The Guardian ad Litem helps decide the best place for you to live. He or she also makes sure that your needs and wishes are heard in court. You should meet with your lawyer before you go to court. You can also call your lawyer if you have questions, if you need something or you have a problem. Your lawyer will speak for you in Court.

Write down your Guardian ad Litem's name, address and phone number in your address book.

#### Social Worker:

1

Martha, Alex's social worker, will be in Court with Alex. She knows what happens in court because she goes there with kids a lot. It's good to have someone you know with you. Martha will make sure that Alex is going to live in the place she thinks is best.

#### **CASA Worker:**

Alex has a Casa worker. Not every child has one. A Casa is someone who wants to help children and does it without getting paid. The Casa worker and Alex have talked a lot. She wants to know how Alex is doing and what he wants to do. It is her job to tell the Judge what Alex wants and how he is getting along.



If you have a CASA worker, go back and write down his or her name, address and phone number in your address book.

#### Judge:

The Judge usually wears a black robe and sits at a big desk in the courtroom. Everyone stands up when the Judge walks into the courtroom. The judge does many things. He is like a referee at a ball game and makes sure everyone plays by the rules. He is also the person who makes the final decision in cases like Alex's. If you have something you want or need to tell the Judge, tell your attorney (the Guardian ad Litem) and he or she will tell the Judge.

#### **Bailiff:**

You will know the bailiff when you see him or her. The bailiff makes sure people who go to court obey the rules. The bailiff usually wears a uniform like a police officer. The bailiff is a special police officer just for the Court.

#### **Court Reporter:**

Sometimes a court reporter will be in the courtroom. This is a person who writes down every word that is said. The court reporter usually sits near the judge and types on a small machine. People in court have to speak slowly and clearly so the court reporter can hear all of the words.

#### Witnesses:

People who come to court to tell what they have seen or heard are called witnesses. When a witness comes to court, they have to raise their hand and make a special promise, called an oath, that they will tell the truth. They take a special seat in the courtroom and the lawyers ask them questions.

## See how many people you remember from the Courtroom and what their job is. Match the person to their job:

CASA Worker	A. People who come to Court to tell what they have seen or heard
Judge	B. Writes down every word that is said in Court.
Guardian ad Litem	C. Someone who wants to help children and does not get paid
Witness	D. Makes sure the child is going to live in the best place.
Court Reporter	E. The person who makes the final decision in a case
Bailiff	F. Makes sure that your needs and wishes are heard in court
Social Worker	G. Makes sure people who go to court obey the rules

Alex wants to know how he should act in Court. Martha tells him:

- Show respect to the people who are there
- ca Don't eat or drink in the courtroom
- □ Don't listen to headphones
- Be quiet if you have to wait
- If you have to speak to the Judge, be sure to call him "Your Honor"
- □ Don't talk unless the Judge or a lawyer asks you to.
- If you don't understand something, say that you don't understand and someone will explain it again for you.

The Judge has a very important job. He or she hears lots of people argue all day long. The Judge then has to decide what should happen. Even though all the people who come to Court for Alex let the Judge know where Alex should live, they may have different ideas. It's up to the Judge to decide.

#### You be the Judge.

Read the following cases and then make a decision:

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1. John finds a kitten in his yard. The kitten has no collar or tags. John feeds the kitten and brings him into his house because it's cold outside. John asks around the neighborhood to see if anyone lost a kitten and no one has. He calls the local newspaper and places an advertisement that says he found a kitten and to call him. No one calls. John names the kitten and takes care of it. Two months later, the kitten is playing in his front yard. A lady, Mary, is walking by. She says what a cute kitten it is and that she had one that looked just like it but ran away over two months ago. She said that she was on vacation and the girl who was looking after the kitten let it out of the house. John admitted that he found the kitten and had asked everyone in the neighborhood about it. Mary said she was on vacation at that time. She didn't read the newspaper and didn't see the ad. John thinks she should have looked for the kitten before now and made more of an effort to find the kitten. He has taken care of the kitten for two months and feels it is his. Mary said the kitten is hers and she has a picture of it when she brought it home. She wants the kitten back.  If you were the Judge, who would you give the kitten to and why?
2. Daisy is in a store looking at books. She picks up a book that she is thinking of buying. She starts looking at other books, loses track of time and is late to catch her ride. She runs out of the store and then realizes she still has the book and forgot to pay for it. She says she was going back into the store to return the book, but the security guard catches her outside and says she was stealing it. She was headed back towards the store when he caught her. He calls the police. They say she stole the book. Daisy has stolen things from stores before, but not for a long time. She learned her lesson and doesn't steal anymore. Do you think she was going to take the book back to the store or was she stealing it? What would you do to her if you were the Judge?

#### 3. Changing Foster Homes:

Alex's Mom is not able to take care of him yet. She is still working on the plan Martha has given her to become a better parent. Martha tells Alex that he will be moving to a new foster home. This upsets Alex. He has just learned the rules and is feeling comfortable at Jennifer and Aaron's house. Now he will have to go through it all again.

Alex gives Martha a "Foster Family Information" Sheet. You can find this form on the next page. The new foster family can fill in all kinds of stuff about their family. This way he knows about the family before he moves.

Martha tells Alex there are many reasons why children have to move to a new foster home. Sometimes the foster parents and foster children don't get along together. Sometimes there is a problem with the foster home. Alex asks why he is moving. Martha says that Jennifer and Aaron have to move to a different state because of Aaron's job. Martha will find Alex a different foster home where she thinks he will be happy.

Alex is sad when he has to move away from Jennifer and Aaron. His new foster family is different. John and Joan have more children in their home and it is noisy. There are good things about his new foster home too. They have a big back yard and a big swing set. Martha tried very hard and found Alex another foster home near his school, so he can still play with his friends. Alex gave John and Joan his "About Me" form, so they know about him. He added to it that he doesn't like to eat peas!

Alex wanted to know something about his new foster family before he moved there. He asked Martha to give his new foster family an Introduction Sheet to fill out so he would know what his new foster family would be like. You can find a Foster Family Introduction Sheet on the next page.

## We Are Your New Foster Family

We are the family.
The address of the home is
And the telephone number is
We have been a foster home for years.
The names and ages of the people who live in this house are:
These are the pets that live at this house:
We like to do these things in our free time:
These things are near our house:
The things we like about our house that you might like too are:
These are the important rules of the house:
1.
2.
3.
We would describe our home as:
We welcome you to our home and would like to tell you

#### 4. Alex goes to live with a relative.

It is part of Martha's job to see if Alex can go live with someone in his family. Alex's Aunt Patty wants him to come and live with her. He likes his new foster home, but he would like to live with someone who knows him and about his family. Alex feels like he has been moving around so much since he left his mother's home. It's hard for him to feel at home anywhere right now. Martha says that Alex will probably stay with Aunt Patty until his Mom finishes her plan. It makes Alex happy to know where he will be for a longer time.

Aunt Patty knows Alex and wants him to live there, but Martha still has to check her home and make sure it is a safe place for Alex to live. Alex has to wait until Martha says it's okay for him to go live there.

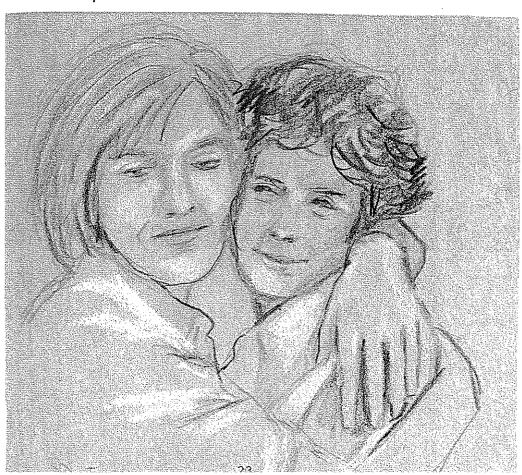
When Alex moves to Aunt Patty's house, he has his own room and lives with his cousins. He still has to see his Mom only at times Martha sets up and he still sees her at Martha's office. Just because he is living with a family member doesn't mean he can see his Mom whenever he wants. Martha says that his Mom is doing well with her plan and soon he may be able to start visiting his Mom at her house.

#### 5. Alex is going to be adopted.

Alex's Mom tried to finish the plan that would help her be a better parent, but she just could not do it. It isn't that Alex's mom doesn't love him, but she just has some really big problems. Martha says that the next time his case goes to Court, the Judge will decide that he should not go back and live with his mom. This makes Alex very sad, but he is happy in the foster home where he is living. He feels bad that he is happy where he is living. Alex is going to a doctor to talk about how he feels. His doctor tells him that it is okay for him to be happy and miss his Mom at the same time. He knows that his Mom wants him to be happy.

Foster families sometimes adopt a child who is living with them and sometimes the child has to move to a new family that wants to be their forever home. Alex is moving again, this time to a family that doesn't have any children and wants to adopt Alex and he will be their child. Adoption means that Alex won't move to any other foster homes and he will stay with his new family and be their son.

Alex moves to his adoptive foster parent's house. Mark and Jill are happy to have Alex with them. Alex has to go to Court again, but this time he is really happy. The Judge tells Alex that he is now Mark and Jill's son and he will grow up in their house. This doesn't mean that all of his problems are behind him. He will have the same problems as other kids, but Mark and Jill will be there to help him.



Now we have been down different roads with Alex. Each child's case is different and yours will not be just like Alex's. The important thing to remember is that there are people to help you. You can ask questions and you can speak up and let people know what you want. Sometimes it won't be possible, but you are entitled to an answer.



## How many words can you make using the letters in

# My Road Is Ahead

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Did you know that a lot of famous people were once foster children? Read about these former foster children who never lost their dreams or desires.



**Daunte Culpepper** NFT Quarterback – Minnesota Vikings

Daunte's foster mother, Emma Culpepper, raised him. Emma had raised 14 other foster children before Dante came to live with her.

When Daunte was five years old, his mother got out of jail and he went to live with her. He wanted very much to go back and live with his foster mom, Emma, and his biological mother let him go. Daunte says his mom loved him so much she took him back to Emma.

Daunte went to college in Florida and then was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings to play quarterback. Duante Culpepper is the largest quarterback in NFL history. He runs a 4.6 second 40 yard dash and can jump 36 inches into the air and can throw the ball 80 yards. In 2003, Daunte signed a ten year \$102 million dollar with the team, the highest paying contract in team history and one of the highest in NFL history. With all his money, Daunte remembers his life in Emma's home, and how it was filled with love but not much else.

Daunte says about his foster mom: "She's a very, very special lady. Remarkable. Strong. Everything you'd want in a mother – in a parent. I just wish she could have been the difference in more kids' lives. Her love was just always there. I can never repay her for what she's done for me. There's no dollar amount that I could ever give her that would amount to half of what she's done. She gave me those things that money can't buy. But I can try. I'm going to take care of her the best way I can."



Eddie Murphy Actor – Comedian

Eddie Murphy has achieved his dream: "I couldn't' wait to get famous." Starting out as a stand-up comedian, he moved into acting and became a movie star.

Eddie Murphy's experience in foster care was a short, but very important, part of his life. He was just eight years old when and his brother were sent to a foster home because of his mother's illness. Although he stayed in foster care for just about one year, he says the experience with his foster mom helping him develop a sense of humor made him realize how important it is to find something to laugh about in every situation.



Victoria Rowell Dancer – Actress

Born in 1960, Victoria's mother gave her away to foster care at 16 days old. Victoria and her two older sisters moved from foster home to foster home until they ended up together with a couple Victoria considered her real family. "My foster mother was an amazing woman", Victoria said later to the Los Angeles Times. "She was a self-sufficient widow who had already raised ten of her own children. When she had the three of us, she was a senior citizen. She also ran a 60-acre farm. From her foster mother, Victoria received love and support and learned the lessons of hard work that served her well in her growing up years and in her professional career.

At an early age, young Victoria showed an interest in dance, which her foster mother encouraged. While performing onstage, Victoria was spotted and asked to model. From that, she went into acting, which is her profession today.

Ms. Rowell is mother of two children, Maya and Jasper, and is married to jazz great Wynton Marsalis.



Alonzo "Zo" Mourning NBA – Miami Heat

Alonzo Harding Mourning was born in Chesapeake Virginia on February 8, 1970. When Alonzo began living with his foster parents, the Threets, he was 12 years old and already 6 feet tall.

During the time Alonzo lived with them, there were as many as nine other kids living with his foster parents, but he always felt like part of the family and was treated like one of their own children. Mrs. Threet took personal interest in each of 'her' kids, making sure they were responsible, worked hard (especially in school), and set goals for themselves. Zo lived with Mrs Threet for 8 years until he went to Georgetown, already a basketball star.

Alonzo says of his former foster mother:

"Fannie guided me every step of the way. Her message was always: You can do it. She is very loving, just amazing...She was there when I needed somebody to talk to and lean on. She gave me an opportunity to grow."

Mrs. Threet talks about Alonzo growing up:

"I'm not saying Alonzo was a perfect child. But he was always obedient. And he was a hungry child. For breakfast one box of Cap'n Crunch wouldn't do. You'd have to give him two or three of the larger ones."

Alonzo, who suffers from a rare kidney disease, is one of the most charitable sports stars in the country. He says the main lesson he learned from his foster mother is the importance of giving. Now he's making a difference in the lives of hundreds kids in Florida. "There are a lot of young people out there who, if given the chance, will have successful lives," says Mourning. "You can have an impact not just through dollars, but also through giving love and comfort to kids. I know a little love went a long way with me, I am

trying to use myself and other people to help the less fortunate, especially the young ones."



Charlotte Ayanna Miss Teen USA – Actress

Charlotte's mother struggled with mental illness. "As a child, I had nothing. We lived in cheap hotels and trailer parks. One of my earliest memories is eating macaroni and cheese out of a Wendy's cup. That was a good memory because we were eating."

Charlotte was in the foster care system for 14 years until she was adopted at age 17. She was chosen Miss Teen USA in 1993 wearing a \$37.00 gown.

Charlotte has written: "If you have to be moved out of a home when you're a little kid, you must be told repeatedly and emphatically that it is not your fault that you are being moved, that he people in the home think you're wonderful, that something else has come up which makes it impossible for you to stay there. If you are allowed to blame yourself for your foster-ness as a little kid, it will create a legacy of self-doubt and insecurity that will haunt you your whole life."



Superman Comic Book Hero – Famous Good Guy

Superman is the sole survivor of the planet Krypton. His father, Jor-El, discovered that a nuclear chain reaction within Krypton core would soon shatter the planet. Jor-El had his unborn son put into an experimental star-drive unit. He then launched the star-drive towards the planet Earth where Superman would gain great strength due to Earth's yellow sun. As Jor-El and his wife Lara watched their son take off into space, Krypton began to

crumble around them and within minutes it exploded. Jor-El and Lara loved their son so much, they gave him away so he could live.

The Kents found Superman after his spaceship crashed, and raised him. They named him Clark. Superman has powers from his home planet that make him stronger and faster than humans and he could fly.

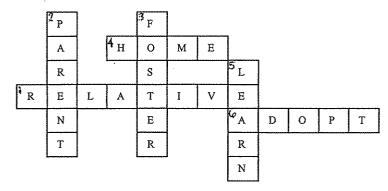
Even though he is not real, Superman is an example that good and caring people can help you achieve your dreams and guide you to become a capable person, even if they are not your biological parents – or even from your neighborhood.

#### **Puzzle Solutions**

#### Break the code:

It's never the childs fault

#### Crossword:



#### Match the person to their job

<u>C</u>	Casa Worker	Someone who wants to help children and does not get paid
E	Judge	The person who makes the final decision in a case
<u>F</u>	Guardian ad Litem	Makes sure that your needs and wishes are heard in court
<u>A</u>	Witness	People who come to Court to tell what they have seen or heard
<u>B</u>	Court Reporter	Writes down every word that is said in Court
<u>G</u>	Bailiff	Makes sure people who go to court obey the rules
$\underline{\mathbf{D}}$	Social Worker	Makes sure the child is going to live in the best place