

Unadoptable, problematic, troublesome, depressed... these were just some of the labels that were attached to my name when I was a child.

Living with my biological mother was dangerous and unstable. I entered the foster care system at age 5 and a half, when my newborn sister tested positive for cocaine. I started in foster care with my little brother, but soon after was separated for him. That devastated me, because my brother was the closest thing I had to feeling somewhat normal.

That is when all my behavioral problems began. I acted out, threw tantrums, and was quickly put on medication and into therapy. I was moved around to other foster homes and group homes, because of my behavioral issues. Assumptions were quickly made about me, because of my difficult behavior. No one really bothered looking into why I behaved a certain way, or why I cried all the time. I was given medication instead of the love and attention I truly needed. I honestly just felt like I didn't fit in anywhere. During all my moving from foster homes to group homes and back, my two younger brothers and sister were adopted by different families. That only added to my feelings of hopelessness. Not only did I feel like I was alone, but now I felt like I was unwanted garbage.

I went back to a foster home and began junior high. Junior high is already an awkward time in a youth's life and I went into it hating myself from the very beginning. I felt left out at school, because it didn't seem like I could relate to any other kid. My foster parents weren't very understanding of my need to express myself for the individual that I was, and I was shunned at home and at church for my black clothing and my dark music. I was teased and bullied by the other girls I lived with, because I never spoke up for myself. It seemed as though everyone wanted to reassure me that I didn't belong anywhere. My living situation was stable, but I was far from happy.

I started high school and it seemed as though nothing was getting any better. My self esteem was worst than ever. My relationship with my foster mother was falling apart to the point that we didn't communicate. I didn't want to pack up all my things and move again, but it progressively was getting worse. I finally made the decision to leave. I really couldn't spend another day there anymore. I moved into my last foster home at age 17. They were brand new foster parents, and they were great. They taught me everything they possibly could in a year about living independently. I graduated high school and emancipated from the foster care system. I now live independently and so far I'm doing pretty well. I still have a lot of emotional issues and I still have to work on loving myself. Despite my challenges, I'm not angry with anyone about how my life turned out. I have gone through some terrible things, but when I reflect on them today, I realize that it's better to go with the flow of a storm, rather than to let it tear you down.

Dominique
Age 19