

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/it-wasnt-me-who-needed-to-be-changed/>

Campaign and Advocacy

By Jimmy Vaughn



My mother spent time in foster care and promised herself she wouldn't let it happen to me. I know she loved me. But addiction is a hard battle to fight. I saw my first drug deal when I was five I was 14 before it clicked what was in that lunch sack. When I was seven my mother threatened to kill herself and me. I remember the Disney Channel was on when they took her away. No one paid any attention to me.

There are so many things I want to say about what happened after that. About how I was robbed of my childhood and traumatized, but how eventually I found my way out and somehow figured out to have the most amazing and rewarding life but more about that in a minute.

My father rejected me after a DNA test proved I wasn't really his son. He loved me for 8 years. And then said goodbye to me. After that I grew up in foster homes and respite facilities and shelters. Sometimes someone cared or tried to care. But more often I was mistreated or just ignored.

At one point I risked the worst beating of my life because it was the only way I could think to get CPS to investigate. Later I wound up on a working farm with other kids. We carried bricks in subfreezing temperatures. We were a labor source. At 14 I was the oldest kid in the house. When I complained and acted out, a psychiatrist saw me. After five minutes he was done. He only asked about my behavior, not about me.

I was put on seven different drugs. You're not human when you're that high. You can't do anything. It wasn't me who needed to be changed. I ran away and eventually landed in a shelter where I met my 40th or 50th CPS worker. I had truly stopped counting. A lawyer saved my life by getting me out of that shelter. When I went off the meds the withdrawal was so bad that they put me on a morphine pump for three days to detox. To this day I have liver damage.

College had been my dream since seventh grade, and with some pretty big bumps along the way, I achieved that. In fact, I got two undergrad degrees. But law school? That seemed pretty much unachievable. Until it didn't. Through dumb luck, I met some wonderful people at Texas Lawyers for Children, which works to protect the legal rights of abused children. I have my issues, but talking isn't one of them and once I started talking to Barbara at TLC I couldn't stop.

I told her what it is like to suffer from Foster Syndrome. I have a tough time trusting people, forming relationships, coping with PTSD. Children in foster care particularly in group homes, are isolated, removed from their communities, told they are no good. What do we expect? Move them constantly and expect good grades? Drug them without oversight and expect their brains to function normally? Regiment their lives in the name of structure and expect them to know how to lead independent adult lives?

Through TLC I started sharing my story with audiences of caring people and for the first time I felt heard. The experience confirmed how I wanted to make my mark. I was just about to speak before a Texas Legislative Session on child welfare in 2019 calling for the need for attorneys to represent children in court when I got the email on my phone that I had been awarded a scholarship to attend law school.

Today I am a second year law student at Texas Tech School of Law, poised to be able to help kids like me get justice and change a system that is hurting innocent children. I graduate in 2022. I cannot wait to get started.

Visit our [Tales of Strength & Love](#) page for more stories like Jimmys.

Thousands of children are trapped in systems they do not understand. These systems fail to understand that children need time and space to be children and develop the foundations that allow them to be who they truly are.

Help us build a better childhood for kids everywhere and [donate to our Childhood is Our First Right](#) campaign today.

Make sure to follow our Childhood is Our First Right campaign on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) for stories, news, events, and actions you can take to help build a brighter future for children.

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First Name	Last Name
Email Address	

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