

# Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/?p=12839>

## Campaign and Advocacy

By Travis Schwerin

I talk to my mother about once a month. I know if I don't hear from her that she's not in a good place. She has struggled with mental illness all of my life, in and out of hospitals. She'll be 65 this year. We are not close.

I grew up in Wisconsin. They put me in respite care the first time when I was 3 years old. I entered the foster care system when I was 7. Sometimes I was with my half-sister, who is six years older. But that wasn't an advantage because she didn't like me; she was mean to me and beat me up.

I churned between foster care families and being sent back to be with my mom when she would get better. The cycle went on for years. Sometimes I was with a good family. One time I lived on a farm and milked cows. I loved that family and they loved me, but I was pulled out and sent back to my mom. Then off to another family. Then back to mom. We moved to a town where I knew no one. I had older kids in a family beat me up, I got bullied at school, I tried to kill myself.

I did my best as a child. As I got older I stayed at school as much as I could. It was an escape I played volleyball, basketball, ran track. I didn't want to go home. When I turned 17 I was done. I graduated from high school and they kicked me out. No guidance no advice. A social worker took me to Walmart and bought me a laptop and a cell phone. I was on my own.

I got into a technical college, rented a studio for \$300 a month, got a job washing dishes in a restaurant to keep afloat. I eventually transferred to a private college in another town and got a degree in broadcast journalism. No one came to my graduation.

It was a tumultuous and confusing way to grow up. But I always had an inner knowing, a kind of clairvoyance or super power where I could see a picture of myself clearly, even in the darkest days. But I also had a chip on my shoulder. As a young adult I was lost for a while, in a bad place, doing drugs and alcohol.

And then I had this moment about ten years ago. I threw up my hands. I asked a higher power or the spirits or whoever to just take me where I was supposed to go. And since then I have always known that I had a destiny. The circumstances of my life are not dictating my future. I am.

I've built a great career for myself. I've also been mentoring children and young adults who have spent time in the foster system. I tell them this isn't the end of their lives, but the beginning of their story. They can choose where they want to go and who they want to be. The system does not define them.

I grew up watching Rosie O'Donnell on TV. To see her as a foster mom meant so much to me as a kid. I wanted her to be my mom. And even though she wasn't, she gave me comfort and wisdom, comedy and fun. She also showed me what a loving parent looks like. That's something I aspire to.

For a long time I put up a wall. I didn't want to expose myself, risk having relationships that might fall apart. Now, I see my future as being married and having kids. I want to teach a child to be caring, loving, honest, respectful. I want to raise a good human being who gives back and finds his own voice.

I knew this time would come. The time to tell my story. It's time.

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*Children's Rights met Travis through to our wonderful friends at Culture for One, an organization that for ten years has been bringing the arts and culture of New York City to children in the foster care system. Travis is a Culture for One volunteer mentor, taking children and young adults to museums, art workshops and the theater and introducing them to broader possibilities for their futures.*

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First Name	Last Name
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