

TEEN AVOIDS BEING DEPORTED

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Body

A teen-ager facing deportation to his native Africa returned to an all-American life Friday after public outcry led to his release from a Los Angeles jail.

Omotayo Daniel's plight began last week when his foster family said they could no longer afford to raise the 16-year-old Atwater High sophomore.

When social workers discovered Omotayo was an illegal immigrant, they turned him over to U.S. Border Patrol agents. He spent nearly a week in a Los Angeles immigration cell and was beaten by other juvenile inmates.

'I felt helpless'

"I felt helpless because my life was in the hands of people who didn't even know me," Omotayo said in a telephone interview while driving back from Los Angeles to the San Joaquin Valley. "I think they just handled it like it was a normal case."

But his case is anything but normal. The soft-spoken Nigerian teen-ager was brought to New York by his mother when he was 6. She returned to Nigeria and has not been heard from since.

The threat of being deported terrified Omotayo, who speaks only English and remembers little about his native land.

"I don't have anybody there," he said. "I don't know anything about that place. They might as well just put me in Japan. It would be the same thing. How could I survive?"

Just doing their job

Immigration officials said they were just doing their job when they detained him. But they admitted Omotayo's case is different.

"This juvenile is not at all a danger to society," Border Patrol Assistant Chief Alan Dwelley said. "He's obviously not an undesirable type at all."

After he was taken into custody, Omotayo was taken first to Fresno and then to Immigration and Naturalization Service headquarters in Los Angeles. He had to wear a gray jumpsuit and was handcuffed outside his cell.

While in his cell, he was beaten by fellow inmates when he told them he had not committed any crimes. But Omotayo was not allowed to leave because he could not afford his \$2,000 bail.

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Sacramento attorney Glenn Peterson, who read Omotayo's story in a newspaper Wednesday, was outraged.

"What a huge miscarriage of justice that only \$2,000 stands between this kid and his freedom," Peterson said.

It took Peterson two days to arrange Omotayo's release, which Rep. Gary Condit, D-Ceres, helped secure after receiving calls from outraged Atwater High students and other Californians.

Hopes to study medicine

Peterson drove 380 miles from Sacramento to Los Angeles on Thursday to pick up Omotayo, a straight-A student who listens to classical music and hopes to study medicine in college.

Omotayo was released on his own recognizance and must appear at an INS hearing in San Francisco Dec. 4 to determine whether he will be deported.

Meanwhile, he will stay with a foster parent in Atwater. He was looking forward to returning to school and attending a football game and dance.

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