

U.S. IMMIGRATION RELEASES HAITIAN TEEN HELD FOR YEAR

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Body

An orphaned **Haitian** teenager who spent more than a year in **U.S. immigration** custody was freed to go live with a relative, but she still could face deportation when she turns 18.

Rose Thermitus, 17, was among more than 200 Haitians who arrived on an overcrowded wooden freighter that ran aground in Miami in October 2002. She was freed from a Miami shelter Tuesday and flew to New York, where she will live with a cousin.

"I am very happy," Thermitus told The Miami Herald. "I didn't believe they would **release** me."

Her request for asylum had been rejected, but she couldn't be deported because Haiti refused to issue a travel visa to a child traveling alone with nowhere to go when she arrived. Her parents are believed dead, and federal officials had failed to find anyone in Haiti willing to take her in.

"I am convinced that **releasing** Rose today was the right and proper thing to do," said Wade Horn, assistant secretary for children and families at the **U.S.** Department of Health and Human Services.

U.S. officials could still seek to deport her when she turns 18, an official at an immigrant advocacy agency says.

Officials with the Homeland Security Department, which had sought to deport her, had no immediate comment Wednesday.

Thermitus and her older brother left Haiti after the family's home was burned down by a mob. Her brother was deported to Haiti after his asylum request was denied. She does not know where he is now.

Thermitus' case and those of other children like her have cast a spotlight on the **U.S.** policy of detaining Haitians indefinitely.

Haitians seeking asylum generally used to be **released** on bond, free to live with family members while they pursued their claims. But in April, Attorney General John Ashcroft, citing national security concerns and a possible mass migration from Haiti, stated that Haitians must remain in custody while their cases are considered.

Notes

FOCUS ON HAITI

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