



### ***In Her Own Words: Miani***

My life has been a constant balance of hardships and achievements. I lived with my biological parents for a total of zero years. Since birth, my mother struggled from a drug addiction. My father was incarcerated with a life sentence a few days after my birth. A few months later, my mother was also incarcerated, leaving me and my two older siblings in the care of her boyfriend, who abused drugs and suffered from a perverted attraction to children. After dealing with numerous traumatizing ordeals while in his care, family services finally removed us from his home and placed us with my uncle and aunt. Living with my uncle and aunt for a few years was a pleasant and healthy experience. However, I painfully remember the day we had to leave their home. At the time, I did not understand why we had to go; all I knew was that my aunt was very sick. Later, I learned that my aunt was suffering from fibromyalgia and severe suicidal thoughts, my uncle clearly needed to dedicate all his time to caring for my sick aunt.



That day, a strange woman drove us to the County of Los Angeles, and we lived in an orphanage home for a few weeks and several temporary foster homes thereafter. In all honesty, I was one of the lucky ones. I say this because in 1999 I moved in with a lovely African-American couple. I lived with them in South Central Los Angeles until the day I emancipated foster care. Honestly, they are the only family I have. The last time I saw any of my biological family members was in 2003 at my aunt's funeral. Since then, I have dealt with the death of many loved ones due to disease and gang violence. These are the facts of my reality. I manage to keep depression and heartache at bay by constantly occupying myself with constructive activities such as volunteer work and academics.

School and volunteerism became safe outlets for me. Attending school was a source of stability for me. I attended a total of four primary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, all within the Los Angeles Unified School District. These are schools that are under-resourced, over-crowded, and comprised of Latino and African-American students. Throughout K-12

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### ***In Her Own Words: Ebony***



I have been a part of Journey House for two years. I have received much support here. But my life has not been a very easy one. I was first placed in foster care at age 5. My mother and father were both heavy heroin users and were unable to take care of me and my siblings. They couldn't even provide us with the basic necessities of life. They were eventually charged with child endangerment. The county placed me with my grandmother along with two younger cousins. But that only lasted a short period after my grandma was also found to be incapable of taking care of us. All of us kids were separated and placed into different homes. From ages 7-10, I

moved around to different foster homes from LA to San Bernardino to Palmdale due to my poor behavioral issues. The only time I was doing good was when I was in school, where I constantly maintain A's and B's despite the negative experiences going on at home. At age 10 I was placed in another foster home where I stayed for 2 ½ years until my foster mother had a miscarriage as a result of me stressing her out, - at least that's what the County Social Worker reported. In 2004, I was placed in yet another foster home. This time I felt accepted, and found a stable family with other kids to be around and enjoy. At 15, the family adopted me and I took on their

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## Beyond Foster Care

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continuum of care beyond the age of 21, to **advocate** for policies that increase statewide resources, and to **empower** youth to take a proactive stance on the issues which impact their lives by using their personal experiences to inform best practice and policy.

**BFC** provides “aged-out” foster youth, whose desire is to see changes made to the foster care system, opportunities to participate in advocacy, mentorship, leadership development, research. So far, 30 youth have joined our speakers panel. Jesse and Gabby continue to receive invitations to speak to civic groups about foster care issues. Jesse was recently invited to be keynote speaker at a Los Angeles County event. As Gabby puts it, “We laugh, we cry, we create a safe

space to talk about the realities of leaving foster care, homelessness, trauma, and overcoming the odds with the help of those who chose to invest in our lives.”

In 2016, Jesse and Gabby plan on gathering 1,000 responses to the survey they created on what issues youth face after leaving the foster care system, especially the barriers they encounter trying to receive a college diploma or trade certification. According to Gabby, “we hope to increase our social media following (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to 1,000 by June, and expand our research efforts and speaking events through increased community engagement.”

Since Journey House started Beyond Foster Care (**BFC**) last year, the youth-led advocacy initiative has developed into a program which offers over 80 former foster youth a platform to share their stories about life in and out of the foster care system. The mission of **BFC** is to “impact policy that will improve the outcomes for former foster youth,” through a three-fold approach: to **educate** the local community, and those who serve current or former foster youth on the importance of having a

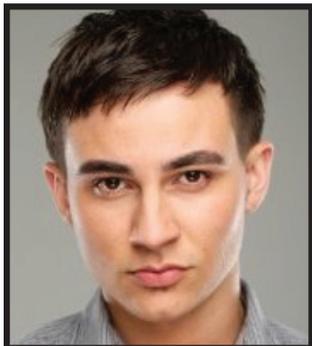
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### **Ebony - Continued from Page 1**

family name. Things at the house seemed to be going very well. I was doing well in school and enrolled in various extracurricular activities. I even got along with the other girls in the family - for the most part. I stayed there and graduated high school. I enrolled into the University of La Verne. But after my first semester things got rough because my financial aid ran out. I had to quit school and move back into my adopted family’s home. I started attending Pasadena City College. But soon the county forced my adopted family to kick me out of their home because I was 18, not finger printed when younger foster kids were living in



the home I stopped attending school that next semester. From 2011-2013, I spent a lot of time sleeping on friends’ couches, working minimum wage jobs and roaming the streets without a care. I ended up in a Pasadena shelter for 6 months hoping to save some money so I could go back to school. By the beginning of 2015 I found a room to rent, was working 2 jobs and was enrolling in school. I will finish a Paralegal Certificate program in May 2017 and hope to return to the University of La Verne and pursue my law degree. Currently, I continue to look for a suitable place to call home so I can be stable and keep my job.



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### **Zarkhi**

Zarkhi is a senior at the University of Southern California graduating this May with a Bachelor

of Science in Music Industry. Born in the majority of his life before college in the foster care system. Zarkhi is an advocate for foster youth in the local community and has represented his story on multiple news outlets such as NBC, ABC, and Fox Sports. While attending USC, he completed two consecutive summer internships with Warner Bros Studios, first in the creative department of Consumer Products and second in the music department of W.B. Television. Zarkhi has eight years of combined

experience as a graphic designer and brand conceptualist. In addition, he has over ten years of combined experience in the performing arts as a vocalist, songwriter, trumpet player and live performer. As a multi-faceted entrepreneur with musical talent, Zarkhi uses these skills interchangeably and plans to launch his official graphic design and branding firm this summer. He also continues to write, perform and release music under the stage name EYE.

of Science in Music Industry. Born in Manhattan, NY and raised throughout the south and west coasts. He spent

- Zarkhi, Vocalist, Songwriter, Designer, Entrepreneur, [zpalmer@usc.edu](mailto:zpalmer@usc.edu)

# Spring Fiesta

In April, Journey House held Spring Fiesta for over 30 youth and their families and friends. The day was full of games, food, and laughs. The attendees experienced an afternoon of belonging and happiness that they don't often get to feel. As one college student put it, "It feels like a regular family party, not a program. I can't believe that I am getting so much love from people who I barely know."



Former foster youth often feel alone and isolated, because of the stigma attached to having been in foster care and, also, for not having blood relatives they can attach themselves to. They try to better themselves by continuing their education, but sometimes feel like everyone can see their emotional scars. Journey House does create a supportive community for friendship, companionship and encouragement. Our next social event will celebrate our 12 college graduates, and is tentatively planned for July 9th.

## ***Miani - Continued from Page 1***

(and in my neighborhood) racial diversity was scarce and gang activity, drug use, homelessness, sexually transmitted infections, and riots were common features. The schools I attended did not possess ideal learning environments, but I managed to gain competence in my required subjects and gain meaningful life and volunteer experiences through after-school clubs and activities.

In my neighborhood, it is often safer to go straight home after school and stay indoors. These circumstances allowed me to dedicate my spare time to search for college scholarships. By the time I graduated from high school, I managed to earn several prestigious merit and leadership-based scholarships, in addition to the County's financial assistance specifically created for foster youth.

I was accepted into Syracuse University on a full-ride scholarship. This fully funded education created the opportunity for me to adequately study and be involved on campus without the constant worry of debt-accumulation and tuition bills; this facet of my education has truly been a privilege.

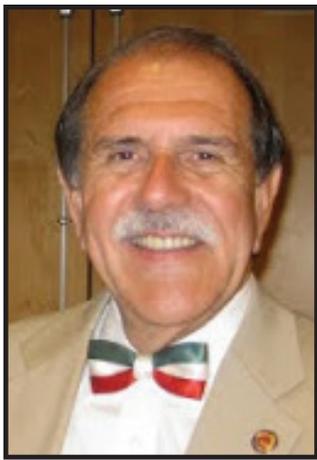
My freshman year was uniquely challenging for me. The academic side of college was a breeze for me. However, I was being challenged by culture shock, life outside of Los Angeles for the first time, extreme Upstate New York weather conditions, and a social pressure to drink and party. I overcame these challenges by getting involved with campus sponsored events and took on

student leadership roles. At an early age I witnessed the destructive nature of alcohol and drug abuse and how it destroys families, and how casual sex can lead to sexually transmitted diseases which can lead to an unhealthy life. These experiences dramatically influenced my lack of interest in university parties and drinking culture.



Every day I work diligently to demonstrate my appreciation for the opportunities and scholarship support many organizations, such as Journey House, have created for me. My goal is to become a doctor to address the critical health issues that are intimately linked to poverty, drug addiction, poor health education, high rates of STDs, obesity, etc. I believe that I can have an impact in Los Angeles by returning to serve as a physician. There is a long road that lies ahead before the health disparities in disadvantaged communities will be eradicated, but I do believe they can be significantly reduced via constant dedication by aspiring physicians to actively serve and provide accessible, quality healthcare for the members of these communities.

Miani joined Journey House during her senior year at Syracuse University in 2015. Most of her moral and financial support has been exhausted because of her age and Journey House has been able to help her pay for lodging and transportation to her medical school interviews at UC San Diego, UC Riverside, and UCLA. We are proud and privileged to be able to help Miani in her pursuit of a medical degree and will continue to support her during medical school.



## Remembering a dear friend:

### Juan Lara, Ph.D.

Juan entered heaven in February after a very short, but courageous battle with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Juan was a long-time friend, donor, past member of the Board of Directors, and an

influential advisor in setting up our Endowment Fund. His influence and friendship will be dearly missed. As an educator, Juan was deeply concerned that all our participants reach their maxim academic ability. He cherished each student's graduation as a major victory for foster youth, especially because of the difficult road they faced with limited financial and emotional support after they aged-out of the foster care system. Last year he raised funds for one of our students studying at St. Mary's.

Juan was more than a high school and college instructor, he was a mentor and model to many students with his nurturing personality and strong desire to see minority students have access and equal opportunities in pursuing higher education. He was a great encourager and pusher. He was a remarkable man. Academia lost a champion. Thankfully, his physical suffering was limited to a few months, and now he enjoys eternal happiness and peace as a feisty angel. Saint Juan – watch over us.

## Foster the Future 5K Run

By: Erzhan Smith

Over a year ago, I approached my parents about starting a 5K to raise funds and awareness for aged out foster youth. My family had run a lot of races that support various charities. I noticed, however, that there were not any events that supported foster youth. I thought that a 5K run/walk would provide an excellent opportunity to get the word out and raise some funds for this deserving group. I partnered with Aztlan Athletics Foundation to help organize the event, and I would like to see Foster the Future 5K Run/Walk turn into one of Los Angeles's largest events. The inaugural event took place on January 9, 2016, at Woodley Park in Van Nuys.

I nominated Journey House to be the primary beneficiary for this past year's event. What I liked about Journey House is how Tim, Jorge, and the staff are willing to help anyone who is ready to accept the help. Also, I really like how the staff becomes a family for the emancipated foster youth as they work on their transition to self-reliance.



## Journey House Endowment

In August 2015, Journey House established the Brother Tim Journey House Endowment with the Pasadena Community Foundation. At the end of 2015, the fund grew to \$57,000 - a humble, but meaningful start. The goal of the endowment is to provide a permanent source of financial support for college education or vocational training which leads to self-sufficiency and independence for former foster youth. If you would like to contribute to this Endowment Fund, please send a check payable to Journey House with "Endowment" written on the subject line.

### LIFE CHANGING Donors (\$5000 AND UP)

Daniel and Shirley Mayworm  
Douglas and Barbara Stephen  
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Journey House

1232 N. Los Robles Ave.  
Pasadena, CA 91104  
[www.JourneyHouseYouth.org](http://www.JourneyHouseYouth.org)

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## Mission Statement

Journey House supports former foster and probation youth to live fully independent, successful lives. Founded in 1983, Journey House provides emotional support and guidance, as well as financial aid to help them with the cost of attending college and vocational schools.