

# Diary

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## **Abstract**

I discuss the excessive toys and presents that were expected to make up for the lack of affection in my first foster home. I compare life at home to life in care using money and love as a theme. My foster parents at the time spend a year continuously reading my diary and sharing its contents around their family. I share my feelings of alienation into the diary as the family continues to pull away from me. I am then asked to leave with two days' notice.

## **Keywords**

Foster care, trust, love, affection

When I first went into care, I had arrived with nothing. I didn't even have a change of clothes. The house I arrived in was clean and stylish. The colour of the wallpaper matched the candles, which matched the rug and the cushions. There were things in excess. Decorations and designs, and things, all for the sake of aesthetics. It fascinated me but it all felt short term. The things were plastic and seemed unsustainable. Not like the royal stone fireplace in our old house that would be around forever and ever. These things looked as though they could all be removed and replaced and that they would expire one day. I was right and the house had a new style and colour scheme every six months or so.

When I woke up my first morning as a foster child, I got breakfast straight away. I was allowed to choose what cereal to eat and what piece of fruit I would like. The other kids were nice to me and knew what kind of questions I had and what I needed to know to feel better. I was taken shopping at a nearby kids clothing shop. My foster mum asked me my opinion on the t-shirts she bought me and even the colour of pants I'd like. She got me matching top and bottom pyjamas and I was even allowed a magazine, sweet and bottle of juice for when we got home. It seemed too good to be true. It was like on the rare occasion I'd get to stay with my friend or with my grandmother but this would be my life now. Once my foster mum came in from buying food shopping and she had bought my foster sister and me matching pink personal CD players and a CD each. My birthday was magical too. We went for dinner, then to a science centre — I got perfectly wrapped presents and a cake. Everyone's attention was on me all day. It was surreal. I don't remember feeling much of anything around this time though and the adults noticed this. I was put on the waiting list for cognitive behavioural therapy but in the meantime, my social worker gifted me a diary. I guess she hoped I could trust it and vent some of my worries in it. It took me a while, but I did eventually. I wrote about the boys I liked at school. I wrote about not understanding how sex works. I wrote about falling out with friends and missing mum and wondering when she would come and get me.

My older foster sister had been staying in the house for six years when I was living there. So she was kind of the favourite. The family would talk with her about old times a lot and I'd listen and wonder if I'd be doing the same one day

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to another young girl. I thought that maybe you can't have things and have love. We had nothing when I was with mum but when she kissed me or hugged me or tickled me I felt full up with love. When I slept beside my sister, I felt safe and when we wrestled and played, I felt like we were made for each other. I belonged to her and she to me. I didn't feel that here. There was obviously very little touching allowed. No one needed to say it for me to notice. You could ask for a cuddle or just take one but it felt forced and one sided. I wasn't allowed to be naked and suddenly my body became something I should hide. People didn't act ashamed or embarrassed around nudity, they would act scared. My body wasn't simply something to be ashamed of, it was something to fear. I had things though. I had dinner every single night, and sometimes we'd even go to restaurants and get take away food. They bought me clothes and let me choose my own stuff. I thought this was just how the world worked. You either had things or you felt loved, but you couldn't have both.

One night my older foster sister came in past her curfew in a bad mood, a fight erupted and the police were called. That girl never came back. My foster mum packed her bag the next morning and I never saw her again. A relationship of six years was gone because of one fight. Another girl had been removed before then but she was violent and I assumed there was a zero tolerance policy for foster care just like there was for people who worked in shops or post offices. But my older sister was just shouting, just an angry teenager, and she was punished so severely. I was the only young person in the house after this and things started to feel odd. My best friend was my foster mum's granddaughter, but suddenly she didn't want to talk to me anymore. We used to walk to the subway to go to school together but she started to leave early so she'd miss me. Then I stopped being invited to families' houses. I would stay inside and someone would pull the short straw and stay in with me while the rest of the aunts, uncles and grandkids had lunch somewhere else. I started eating dinner alone, too. My foster mum and dad would have their dinner later when I was in my room. By that time, I had a TV, DVD player, portable DVD player, stereo, a CD player and a keyboard. So I had no excuse to want to sit downstairs. I came downstairs on New Year's Eve once just before midnight, assuming I could at least watch the celebration with my foster parents. They told me to go back upstairs and I did.

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One Monday in January, I sat on my bed with my laptop open on my knee. It was just after the winter holiday season and I had received a bright pink laptop for Christmas. School wasn't back yet so the days were long. I must have been writing or drawing because I wasn't allowed to be connected to the internet. I started to have my usual fantasy of mum pulling up outside in a red convertible with the top down. In the driver seat was a man that looked like Prince because I knew mum liked having a man around so had imagined her with a boyfriend. She would get out the car, call up to me and I'd escape out of the window and be with her forever. I remember stopping and tears started flowing down my face as I realised that she was never coming back. All of the excuses I had made for her over the past year and a half that I had been in care fell away and I realised that she didn't want me. I think I even said the words out aloud.

'Mum doesn't want me anymore, she's not coming back'.

I picked myself up after a long and therapeutic cry and told myself I was going to make the most of my new life. I knew that this new house and these new people might not love me like mum and my sister do but I'd stay here and get by until I'd be old enough to move out. I was 11 years old so it was only five more years until I could get my own flat. I'd just be here. This would be fine. I'd be fine. I felt pretty okay after that and I returned to playing on my offline laptop. Soon after my foster mum knocked lightly on my door and came into my room. She was making herself look very small and she practically tiptoed over to me, head tilted to one side apologetically. I wondered if she had heard me crying, I wondered if she'd finally hug me and this would be the start of our new life together now that I had accepted my fate.

She sat beside me and carefully explained how someone had come across my diary. She went on to say that what was in the diary was unacceptable and that on Wednesday, in two days, I'd have to leave. I nodded, she hugged me with a foot between both our bodies and left my room. I was numb. I didn't eat for the rest of my time there, I barely remember thinking. I wasn't sad or relieved or angry. I was just so full of nothing. She left me crisps and sweets, and juice at my door but I touched none of it. It felt tainted. These empty gestures. I couldn't bear to read over what I had written in the diary. I looked at the first

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page and I was filled with shame as I remembered questioning a sex scene I'd seen in a film. I disposed of the diary in an outdoor, public bin near the house. I squeezed a cartridge of pen ink on the pages and threw it away.

I remember thinking back to all of the treatment I had received over the previous months. I remembered my foster mum's granddaughter avoiding me. I remembered the family not wanting me at celebrations and events. I had vague memories of writing about her granddaughter when we had fallen out. I didn't hold back because I didn't think I needed to. I thought diaries were places you could be completely honest and not have to worry about judgement. I wondered if they all read the diary and discussed it like at a book club. I imagined that what I must have written must have been so important or interesting that it would have been a waste not to share. I started to remember coming home on a few occasions and thinking that the diary wasn't in the place I had left it. I realised that that was so long ago and they must have been checking it every day or so to catch up. I felt violated.

My social worker, 'Elizabeth' (name changed), picked me up on Wednesday and I could see how angry she was. We loaded up the car with all my clothes but I left the TV, the stereos and the DVD players. My foster mum hugged me once and told me to keep in touch. She looked sad to see me go. She put on a whole show of standing at the door with her arms wrapped around herself, consoling herself as we drove away. Why would she even pretend to be sad? She was literally the one who decided that I was to go. I sat in the car and rested my head on the window, empty and lost.

'Elizabeth' had been my social worker for just over a year now. She supported my two sisters, too. We all had contact together every month or so. Mum hated 'Elizabeth', so I did, too. She was the one who split us up. I thought about how I imagined I'd leave this place. In mum's red convertible, but now here I was with 'Elizabeth' in her car, going in the opposite direction, going deeper into the care system. I looked at 'Elizabeth' and saw her for the first time. I saw how she tried to control her anger for me. I saw how hard it was for her to see me like this, I saw worry in her that I never saw in mum. It made me feel like I could relax and let her think about everything for me for a while.

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## **About the author**

Olivia is a Rural Business student in her final year of study. She works as a freelance consultant for a number of organisations focused around care and for events throughout Europe and Asia. Following this series of events Olivia spent 9 years living with her wonderful new foster parents in the countryside. She has been living independently for 4 years now and is still very close with her foster family.