

JOHN BORGSTEDT: BIG MAN, BIG VOICE, BIG MESSAGE.

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Social media is such an amazing 21st century technological miracle! And as a Criminal Justice & Sociology professional I stepped into the experience with the greatest of caution! And what I found was this phenomenon called FaceBook which has allowed Foster Care Alumni across America to connect and network at amazing speeds, as the national alumni movement continues to grow.

So when I was approached this past April on FaceBook by John Borgstedt with a friend request, as usual, I proceeded with caution and researched him, just a little bit, before accepting his request. As he thanked me for accepting his request, and informed me of whom he was, his book, his movie. I informed him of Foster Care Alumni of America and how to join!

As our conversation continued we exchanged emails, and continued our introductory discussion with one another about our lives as children from foster care, alumni and the continued trauma that we deal with, such as hearing a song on the radio that reminds us of an event in care while we were children. But isn't that the same for every individual, reminders of childhood memories? Why are we as alumni any different? John informed me about his work with Texas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), and I thought to myself great, we are from the same great state of Texas! He speaks for CASA events and I sit on the Texas CASA board of directors.

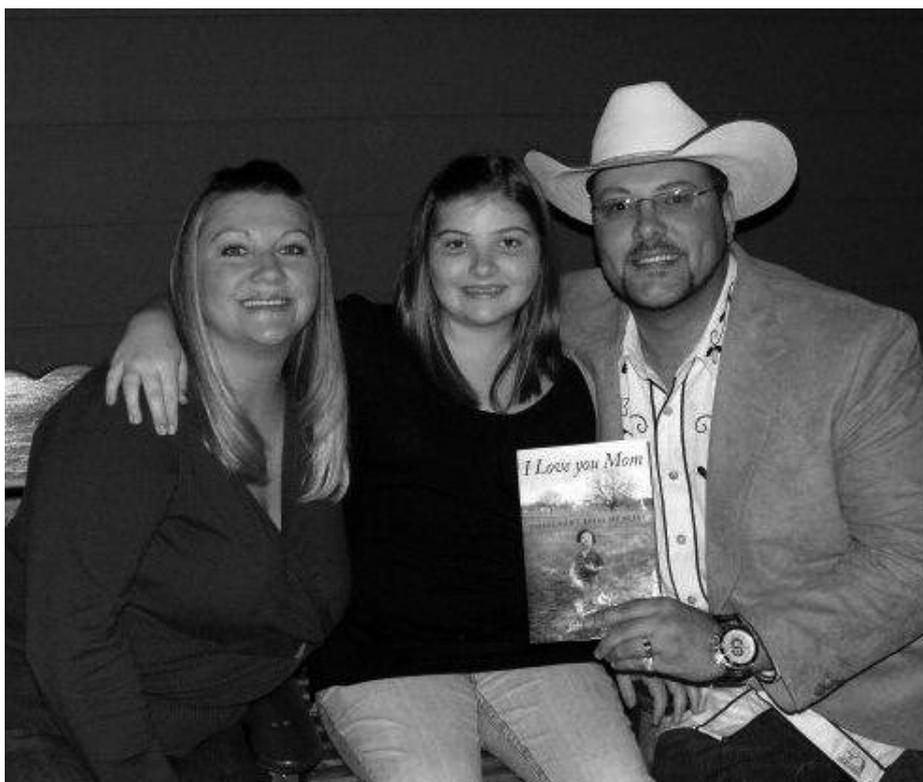
Our alumni worlds are so small!

John sent me his book, *I Love You Mom, Please Don't Break My heart!* Before I read it, I had to prepare myself, being the President of the Texas Chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America, I speak to so many young adults, professionals and hear the saddest stories. I was in care for 16 years until I aged out in 1982, but through my more recent involvement with FCAA have come to realize my childhood traumatic experience in faith based child welfare system was nothing compared to the experiences of the stories and alumni I have met and spoken with in the last five years.

Reading John's book confirmed to me that my life was a cake walk! For John's book is filled with the sorrow of a little boy, who wanted nothing more than his mother to love him, instead she tried to kill him. I read his book on a trip as I flew to Washington D.C. for a foster care policy council meeting. Completed the book on my way back, it wasn't a very long book, however the content so amazingly sad and traumatic for any child, youth or adult to have to contend with was an easy read literally, but a painful read emotionally. Before reading, I tried to prepare myself for the experience to realize what I was about to get myself into, emotionally. After attempted murder by his mother, foster homes, group homes, juvenile detention, and several suicide attempts and incarceration, it is a wonder this man is still alive, and I'm so glad and honored to have met him and requested to interview him by Chris Chmielewski, founder of **Foster Focus** magazine.

As I interviewed John, I asked him what led you to write a book? At one point in this life he was at a children's psych unit and he would look in to the mirror and sing Michael Jackson's song *Man in the Mirror* and the lyric "make the change" made him think about himself and his purpose. His five years being incarcerated the thought about writing a book about himself that could help others like him. He knew he had a story but didn't know what direction to take the book and then he met his wife, Virginia. She helped him finance and produce the book which he began marketing himself. John stated he wrote the book "to help others and despite everything I've been through the book shows people they can succeed if they have the will to succeed. It helps people realize there are others with worse situations than you". John felt that even people that haven't experienced foster care can be helped





by reading his book. His original thought was to help kids, but realized that his book helps adults too.

What can people take from the book: "Life lessons, its relevant to all of us and our lives. Many of the stories in the book happened to other people. It gives the reader the idea of what these kids go through, whether you adopt children, or just have foster children and have high expectations of them. After reading the book maybe you don't 'expect' so much from these kids."

What advice for adults as to why children aren't adapting to all the adopted or foster parent has to give to them? "Its not working because foster children feel adults are going to give up on us.

Sometimes their too nice giving all the material things a child could want, but the self sabotage the relationship anyway. A local celebrity asked me about a boy she adopted and asked my opinion on the behavior issues. I said the young boy self sabotage, it's not really always

the parents fault, these children don't trust and sabotage the relationships because others have let them down. Parents question themselves and ask why we (foster children) do this, and the parents don't adopt the foster child out of self preservation. People try to adopt teens, but teen don't have the love connection like the biological child does.

Some people ask "Why to some foster children make it"? The successful foster care child pushes above the standards of society becoming an over achiever and is very successful.

As I wrapped up the conversation with John, he told me he put a "dent" in success, but is not where he wants to be. He's going to die trying to help people along the way. And I agreed with John about those of us that are from foster care and me being an over achiever myself, that even if we reach our goals, it is still not good enough! John stated, "we set the bar higher to achieve, my next goal in life is to win an *Oscar*!"



About the Contributor

Dr. Vivian Dorsett and her 5 older siblings were raised in faith based foster care and group homes. Upon aging out she couched surfed as she worked her way through cosmetology school. Her transition into adulthood was tumultuous to say the least. After a suicide attempt, 2 divorces, several relationships, homeless living on welfare as a single mother with 2 sons she started college at 32 years old. Remaining on welfare, raising her children and working her way through college, Dr. Dorsett earned her B.S. and M.S. from Texas A&M University-Commerce, and her PhD from Prairie View A&M University. Additional to being an educator and private practitioner she is a state and national advocate, working on policy and non profits with fellow alumni to bring awareness, affect legislation and bring positive change to the world of child welfare and the need of alumni from care. Dr. Dorsett is President of Foster Care Alumni of America-Tx chapter and proud re single mother of three sons in Hockley, Texas.

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