
FOR PARENTS BY PARENTS

Issue 3

Child Welfare Organizing Project

Summer 2001

By Carmen Caban

My Dearest Son

I love you, son.

You have always been a blessing and an inspiration. I'm giving you security with my love.

I know you are not always going to follow the path that I have chosen. You need to realize how much I wish to save you from the hurt of life, wishing for you to make only wise choices. My pride in you is one of our valued treasures, and when you are disappointed in me, I hurt, too. I want to teach you through love and experience...those things that make us who we are and give us the strength to believe in ourselves. I have shown you the ability to fulfill that potential we all have. You may not always choose the easy path, and I may sometimes be wrong, but you have learned to make your own decisions, based on what you believe is right at the time – realizing that time may change your decision. Though I may not understand your actions or your deeds, please know in my heart and soul that you my dearest son are important to me. I love you son.

I only hope that you can give to others as much of yourself as I have given to you!

You have been loved.

Mom

◆ How Poverty Separates Parents and Children



By Claudia

The following is a speech given by a CWOP parent leader at a Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations.

Hi, my name is Claudia. My mother came to New York City from Guatemala City, Guatemala in 1982. My family was very poor because of political problems in our country. She wanted to help my grandmother by working in New York City and sending money back to Guatemala to buy a house for my family. She did not try to take me with her because it is very dangerous to cross the border and to cross Mexico. I was only seven years old, and she did not want to take this chance with me.

In 1984 my mother was able to bring me to this country by using a different name. She paid \$5000 to bring me over in a plane. She put me in a school with my real name, but she could not take care of me exactly the way she wanted to because she had no papers. When she put me in school she had problems. I did not understand English, and it was very hard for me because she could not help me with my homework. I felt desperate, because in my school some children abused me and laughed at me because I do not understand English. I felt scared to go to school, and I cut classes. My mother did not know I was doing this.

But one day, somebody called my mother to go to Court to explain why I was not going to school. In Court, they told her if she did not take better care of me, she could go to jail. She was mad with me, she was mad about the money she had spent, and she was scared. She had tried to give me a good future, and I had given her nothing but problems. So she sent me back to Guatemala in 1987.

In 1989, I came back to this country with the help of an ex-boyfriend. I loved my mother and I missed her. The trip was very dangerous. I crossed a very fast-moving river in a tire. A man attacked us with a machete. We did not have any family or place to live when we crossed Mexico. We crossed twenty-four immigration stations in different *estados*. I did this not for money, not for work, but because I wanted to be with my mother. I was fifteen years old.

When I had been back in New York for about ten years, I was living with my son Wilson, my baby Sofia, and my baby's father. At first, he abused me, not physically, but mentally; but later, the abuse became physical. He was also beginning to do the same with my son. He kept us in very bad living conditions with no heat, no hot water, and bad plumbing. It was a city-owned building, abandoned by its original landlord.

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A Part of Me, Inside of Me

When I was a young girl
I did not know right from wrong
I had parents who weren't that strong
Living my childhood among them changing,
Never knowing
What games I was playing
I turned into a life of humble
Not knowing if I would stumble
A child full of so much fear
I didn't know how to control my tears
Then, into the streets I wandered
Seeking and seeking, but I couldn't find
The love that was always mine
I have destroyed my body and my soul
Allowing myself to die
I just could not find the reason why
All these years of denial
I had to pause and think
How much my life could stink
Now misery I no longer feel
I have opened my eyes so I can heal.

By Carmen Caban

Upcoming Activities for Parents

• **PLEASE NOTE:
THE CWOP WEEKLY SUPPORT GROUP
THAT WAS MEETING ON TUESDAYS
HAS BEEN SUSPENDED
TEMPORARILY.
WE WILL SEND OUT A NOTICE WHEN
WE BEGIN THE GROUP AGAIN.**

**Don't Forget!!!
Our new office is at the
East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street, 1st Floor
New York, NY 10029
212-348-3000**

**If you would like to be added to CWOP's mailing
list to learn about upcoming activities, please
contact us!**

Don't Forget!!!

Our New Address is:

**Child Welfare Organizing Project
East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street #1E
New York, NY 10029
212-348-3000 phone
212-348-1605 fax
e-mail: mike@cwop.org**

We welcome any articles, stories, poems or comments in English or Spanish from parents who have been involved with the child welfare system. Please send, mail or e-mail to the above address along with your contact information. If we use your submission we will contact you regarding any edits before printing.

A Falling Star By Carmen Caban

I usually became alive at night
Oh! I was always one of the visible sights
I hung out with those so called big names,
A rising star absolutely without fame.
The only thing I really had to gain
Was foolishness,
Degradation and a lot of shame.
Who did I really think I was?
Trying to fool anyone just because.
I became a falling star without any hope.
Just running the streets, indulging in a lot of dope.
Deep within I knew I was reeling, just falling back,
I was out of control
I couldn't stop smoking crack!
Suddenly the clock stopped,
and now I'm halfway up the ladder.
Holding tightly, every time I reminisce I would
shudder
This time, with God's help, I believe I'll make it
So I can be normal and won't have to fake it.
When I reach the top, I'll print my footsteps in
The walk of fame.
Yes! I will have arrived and everyone
Will know my name.
Now for the good times of life,
I will develop a natural affinity
Then eventually walk with my God into eternity.

Legal Help

One way for parents to seek justice in the child welfare system is through lawsuits or other specialized legal assistance. At present, there are at least two important child welfare-related lawsuits in progress in New York City of which you have a right to be aware, and to which you may be able to sign on as a plaintiff:

- **Are you a survivor of domestic violence who has had children removed and / or been charged with “failure to protect” or “engaging in domestic violence” by ACS?** Sanctuary for Families, represented by Lansner and Kubitschek, is challenging ACS policy in domestic violence cases through a federal lawsuit called *Nicholson*. For more information, call Jill Zuccardy of Sanctuary for Families at (212) 349-6009 Ext. 271, or Carolyn Kubitschek at (212) 349-0900.
- **Do you have a child in residential treatment due to serious emotional disturbance (SED) who you feel could be home with you if appropriate outpatient treatment services were available?** The New York Legal Assistance Group is filing a class action suit on behalf of Medicaid-eligible children under age 21 with a diagnosis of SED who may not be receiving the full range of outpatient services to which they are entitled by federal law. Call Andrea Spratt at (212) 750-0800.
- **Do you have a child in foster care who was kept out of school due to delays in re-enrollment at the time of placement, or who has been denied an appropriate education in any other way?** There is no lawsuit currently in progress around educational issues, but Advocates for Children may be able to help you on an individual basis. Call Randee Waldman, Esq. at (212) 947-9779 Ext. 51.
- **Is your foster care agency actively involving you in service planning for your children? Are you getting regular and meaningful visitation with your children, that gradually increases over time?** South Brooklyn Legal Services is actively working for parents on these issues and may be able to help you. Call (718) 237-5500 and ask for Linda Holmes, Jennifer Light, or Lauren Shapiro.

When I got tired of this, I wanted to leave, but he would not accept this. I took my son, changed my daughter, and when he saw this he said “where are you going?” I said “I am leaving.” He said I could go with my son, but that I could not take my daughter. He pushed me against the wall and threw our things at me and my son. So I lost control at this time. I could not believe what he was doing. I took the first thing that came into my hand – a trophy – and I threw it at him. I started fighting with him because I was mad, and because I felt I had to defend myself and my son.

His sister called the cops and asked to have me arrested. She said I was crazy. The police took me to jail. I did not stay in jail long, because I was able to prove that I was the victim, and that I was not crazy, and I did what I did in self-defense. But, when the police receive a report of domestic violence with children involved, they call ACS. When I got out of jail, I went to the precinct and they told me that I was facing charges of child abuse. My children had both been placed in other people’s custody.

When I went to Court to ask for my children back, they gave me all kinds of requirements: parenting class, domestic violence class, counseling, find my own housing. I have done most of these things in the past year. My children are still in foster care.

I feel that ACS was able to take my children and keep them from me this easily, first of all, because I am an immigrant. I had no resident papers. I could not work legally. I was not eligible for a court-appointed lawyer. I could not speak English, and I could not defend myself in Family Court. When they looked at me, they saw only a poor latina with no friends who people said was crazy and dangerous. Since I could not speak for myself, they decided to assume it was true. They never saw me for who I really am. No one stopped to ask, “who is Claudia, really?”

I also know, even though I am poor, people are making money from keeping my children. It makes me think about *los roban ninos* in my country. They take the children and sell them in other countries for money, for sexual pleasure, or to work like slaves. They also take their organs to sell – their kidneys, their eyes.

But I am fighting back and I am not giving up hope. I am learning English. All the English I know I have learned in the past nine months. I am going to school and continuing my education. Soon I will have my resident papers and I will be able to get a real job and to afford a decent apartment. I am lucky to be working with the N.Y.U. Family Defense Clinic. They helped me to get a lot of the services the Court said were required, but which ACS would not provide me because of my status. I see my children every week. I never miss a visit. I am a Parent Leader with the Child Welfare Organizing Project. I have learned a lot about my own rights, and I am helping other parents like me. I thank God for helping in all my progress. God has helped me to stay strong and joyful. I have faith that my family will be reunited.

CWOP Mission Statement:

Through organized client involvement and collective advocacy both inside and independent of the system, the Child Welfare Organizing Project will change/transform the quality of services provided to New York City families through the New York City child welfare system.

Nuestra declaración de misión:

A través de la participación organizada de los clientes y la acción colectiva ambos dentro de y afuera del sistema, el Proyecto cambiarán/transformarán la clase de servicio provisto por parte del sistema de protección de niños para las familias en la Ciudad de Nueva York.

Child Welfare Organizing Project
East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street, #1E
New York, New York 10029

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