



*In anticipation of YCS' 100th anniversary in 2018, we are publishing a series of articles that feature former clients paths to fulfilling lives as adults. This is the 2nd installment in the series.*

This past December, Bruce Castro beamed as he walked down the aisle arm in arm with his former YCS foster parents to his waiting bride. The journey to finding his life partner, his faith, and a job he truly enjoys was fraught with many painful childhood memories. But now, Bruce, 27, wants to share his experience in hopes of helping other young people who are struggling.



"My mom struggled with addiction and sold drugs to feed her habit. The court kept giving her chances, but she couldn't get clean," recalls Bruce. By the age of 5, the state removed Bruce from his home. He was eventually placed with family members. On a visit with his mother, she discovered he had been the victim of multiple abuses. The state stepped in again, and he was removed from the home and returned to his mother. However, the trauma proved too much for him to bear and he was temporarily placed in a children's psychiatric hospital.



For six months, Bruce languished in the hospital. "I barely ate or talked to anyone. I knew I wasn't crazy. I just had all these terrible things happen to me and I was confused." His one distinct memory of his time at the hospital was the day his mom had promised to visit him for his birthday. "I waited and waited, but she didn't show up," said Bruce. "That day they had to restrain me."

Bruce was around eight years-old when he was transitioned into the YCS Laurie Haven group home.

"When Bruce came to us he had so much anger and rage. It was like he was fighting the world," recalls the home's administrator, Etta Sample. "We saw a little boy that was crying out for help." She describes Bruce as an affable, resilient child who could be very caring, but that side was often buried under fear and mistrust.



For Bruce, the home was just one more stop in a succession of failed placements. However, things were different this time. According to Ms. Sample, once Bruce began to trust the staff enough to express his feelings, he began to heal.

History repeated itself when his mom again failed to show up on a visit for his birthday. But, this time, he had Ms. Sample on his side. Bruce vividly remembers how Ms. Sample later confronted his mom at a family conference.

"I love that lady...she always tried to protect me. If it wasn't for her, I would have ended up in another group home. She saved my life"



Bruce should have aged out of the home when he turned 10, but Ms. Sample fought to keep Bruce at Laurie Haven till they could find a foster home.

Today, Bruce has stable employment as a CDL driver for an asphalt company; he loves being a husband and father to his two step children and is deeply committed to his faith and parish. Recently, Mr. Jeune told Bruce how proud he was of him. "It meant a lot to me," whispered Bruce. Bruce has also never forgotten his appreciation for Ms. Sample. Every year, he calls to wish her a Merry Christmas. It is a phone call that she admits she always looks forward to receiving.

Mr. Jeune says Bruce is the one giving him advice now. "When I was very concerned about Anthony, Bruce encouraged me to be patient and allow my son to find himself and God." It worked. Anthony and Bruce are now best friends, and with Bruce's support they are both active in the same church.

William Waller, vice president of the YCS foster care program felt honored to attend Bruce's wedding. "Bruce has been able to move forward positively in his life because he has made peace with his past and has forgiven his transgressors."

For Bruce, the sky's the limit and he is not looking back.