

A Mother Inside

by Renee Matarese

When I was growing up I was abused by my mother. I ended up in foster care for two years. In my first foster home my foster father tried kissing me. When I told my foster mother she called me a liar, so I ran away. Then I was placed in another foster home where I was happy. I still talk with them once in awhile. Then when the state went for support from my mother, she claimed she loved me and wanted to have me back with her. I said I didn't want to go home but they made me go home on my 15th birthday. That made me sad and scared; my mother kicked me out three months later.

So I decided that when I have children I want to give them the love of a mother and father that I never had. I was 29 years old when I met a man. I got pregnant and had my daughter and not too long after that I had my son. I loved having my children. I spent so much time with them. I am a good mother. When I had any questions I called my worker at Catholic Social Services. I didn't have my mom to help me so I went to them for parenting advice and if I needed anything they would help me get it. I sang the ABC's and counted with Selina and Sebastian from the day they were born. I really enjoy being a mom.

Their father ended up being abusive to me and he also hurt them. I got a protection order to keep him away from us. He was fired from General Mills for children pornography. I had gone to the local police department and Children and Youth to press charges. Since my children were so young, (my daughter was only eighteen months old and my son was four months old), they told me I couldn't press charges because the children couldn't talk.

At that point I was a single mom with two precious children living on SSI. That was not enough to make ends meet. I never held a job, though I have a GED. I looked for a job in restaurants and stores to be a cashier but I never even got an interview. I lived in a drug-infested area. So with all that in my head, I decided to sell drugs (cocaine) Bad decision. Six months later I get set up with 14.9 grams of cocaine on my possession. I was arrested with intent to deliver.

That's when Children and Youth stepped in. I first decided to let my brother take the kids. I really didn't want that because I didn't like the way he treated his children. My sister said, "Renee, you will see them all the time and they won't be split up." So, when I went to see my babies, my brother wouldn't let me. Then C & Y set up visits for him to bring them to and he didn't bring them. He was hitting them and I asked C & Y to place them in foster care. Why? Because I love them and I did not want them to go through what I went through.

Until I got sentenced I had supervised visits one hour every two weeks and I went to every one. I would love the time we spent, to watch them play, I took them for pictures. I love my babies.

Then a year later I get sentenced in June of 2006 to 3 to 6 years, which I am now serving at the Cambridge Springs Correctional Institution. Since then, I have not had any verbal or physical contact. I have been denied phone calls and visits. All I get to do is write them. I also made them VHS tapes of me reading stories to them twice. The first time I made one for them to share and this past time I made one for each of them. They are not allowed to write me back. It is a one way – conversation: me to them. The caseworker fills me in on them every three months. It kills me inside. The goal is to return home to me. But I can't even call them. I would do anything by the grace of God to be able to hear their voices.

I don't know why I am denied contact with Selina and Sebastian. I believe it's because I am incarcerated. They say I never had a bond with them, but that is not true. I have a family service plan where the worker states that I had a good rapport with my children and they enjoyed their time with me. This was written the same month I was sentenced.

I have written so many people to try to get more rights to my children, but so far I am getting nowhere. My dealings with Children and Youth have not been very good since I was incarcerated. Crime does not pay, especially when you love your children like I love mine.

That's my story. I love my children with all my heart. I write to them at least 2 times a month.

My daughter Selena is now 5 years old and my son Sebastian is 4 years old.

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Renee attends the family support program at the State Correctional Institution at Cambridge Springs.