

A Child's Story "Robbie"

Robbie was 9 years old and had been living with his step-mother, Stevie, for a year. His father, Jason, was in prison for drug charges and his mother, who was mentally ill, could not care of him. Robbie found it difficult living with his step-mother...he felt like she didn't like him very much.

About once a month, the step-mother would take Robbie and his step-brothers to visit their dad at the Arizona State Prison. Once there, the step-mother would tell father what a bad boy Robbie had been. The father would then have Robbie take off his belt and would spank Robbie with it. This happened routinely and this was the only physical contact Robbie had with his dad. It seemed like Robbie could never do anything right. He felt very alone.

One particular afternoon at home, the step-mother was in a bad mood and started screaming at Robbie. He felt confused and didn't know what to do, so he started to cry. This was wrong because suddenly the step-mother attacked Robbie, punched him and pinned him on his bed. In self-defense, Robbie attempted to shield himself, using his arms and legs. In a rage, the step-mother called the police and reported Robbie had assaulted her. She later reported she had suffered a miscarriage because Robbie had kicked her in the stomach. Robbie was charged with a homicide and was one of the youngest children ever to be detained at the Gila County Detention Center.

After approximately two months in detention, during which time Robbie was a model detainee, the County Attorney's Office changed the homicide charge to assault, which was later dismissed. Child Protective Services was contacted and took custody of Robbie because the step-mother would not take Robbie back into the home. CPS placed Robbie in foster care and it took four years to terminate the legal rights of the biological mother and father. During these years, Robbie never had any contact from his father or mother despite his many letters and pleas that they write him. He also did not have a Court Appointed Special Advocate. There simply were not enough CASAs.

By the time Robbie was 13 years old and free for adoption, he was at an age where he was virtually un-adoptable. Although he was a beautiful child, with blue eyes, freckles, and a smile like sunshine, no one wanted to adopt a teenager. Without a CASA, he was lost in the foster care system. He had no voice in court. A once lovely child with a difficult childhood, became a confused adolescent and an angry teenager.

Robbie was never adopted. He grew up with no parents or family and with CPS as his legal guardian. He lived in multiple "out-of-home placements" during the nine years he lived in foster care. He "aged out" of the system at age 18, was dropped from the system, and was then suddenly "free" to go about on his own...to literally search for a family. Robbie's story is not a success. This is the true story of a real Globe-Miami child.

Statistics demonstrate that children in the juvenile court system who are assigned a CASA volunteer achieve a permanent, stable and loving home sooner than children without a CASA.

CASAs make a huge difference in the lives of abused & neglected children and are often the only consistent adult in the child's life. CASAs not only advocate for children, are not only the voice for the children in Court, but they are also the eyes and ears of the Court. They meet the children, develop a relationship with them, and then provide recommendations which assist the Court to make important decisions to fulfill their best interests.

If you are interested in becoming a CASA volunteer, please contact Cecelia M. Gonzales, CASA Coordinator, at 928-425-7971, ext. 47 or 27 or e-mail her at cgonzal2@courts.az.gov. To learn more about the CASA Program, please visit the CASA website at www.azcasa.org.