



## Alumna Janiva Magness: She's Earned the Right to Sing the Blues

By Nathan Monell

Detroit native and foster care alumna, Janiva Magness was inspired by the blues and country music she heard listening to her father's record collection and by the vibrant music of the city's classic Motown sound.



But the blues became more than a jukebox favorite – it became a way of life. Janiva lost both parents to suicide by the time she was 16. She lived on the streets, was in 12 foster homes in two years, became a teenage mother who gave her baby daughter up for adoption, bounced from city to city, and felt hopeless and desperate.

The blues and R&B music became cathartic for Janiva and a path toward personal redemption. One winter's night, she hitchhiked across Minneapolis to attend an Otis Rush concert, and for the first time saw a path forward. "Hearing Otis sing opened up some other place in me, like letting oxygen into a sealed crypt for the first time." She began going to as many blues shows as possible, soaking up the sounds of her favorite artists.

Janiva Magness' rise to the top of the blues world is a testament to the redemptive power of music and the human spirit. Possessing a rich, soulful voice and absolute command over her material, Janiva is an incredibly gifted performer who can lead her audience through a range of emotions, from the deepest sorrow to overwhelming joy. A survivor of an impossibly rough childhood, Janiva's life experience informs her music in a way that is brutally honest, emotionally moving and, above all, spiritually healing. "Janiva Magness contains some of the most powerful and mature vocal chords I've heard in my reviewing days," writes *Singer Magazine*. "Her voice is sultry, smoky, and strong with jazz, blues, and soul textures enveloping it." FCAA knows that maturity and power comes from deep within and we are proud to claim her as a member of FCAA and our alumni family.

Janiva won the 2006 and 2007 Blues Music Awards for Best Contemporary Female Artist of the Year, and was nominated for the B.B. King Entertainer of the Year in 2008. (See Page 2.) She has seven solo recordings to her credit and her presence on stage is legendary, as she performs 200 nights a year at clubs, festivals, and concert halls all over the world. In April 2008, she traveled to Iraq and Kuwait co-headlining Bluzapalooza, the first-ever blues concert tour to perform for American troops.

In her latest release, *What Love Will Do*, Janiva dedicated a song to everyone who has experienced foster care. "Sometimes You Got to Gamble" was written by her

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**What's Inside**

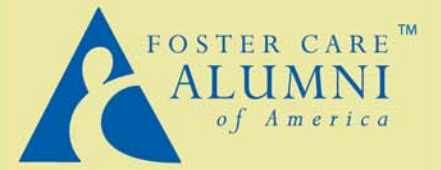
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## Alumna Janiva Magness

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husband and expresses the courage she has found and champions for everyone from foster care. In addition to her musical accomplishments, Janiva was a National Spokesperson for Casey Family Programs promoting National Foster Care Month.

Janiva has reconnected with her daughter and is now a proud grandmother. "I have a life today I could never have imagined. You know, your fate does not have to be your destiny. Fate is what you are handed. Destiny is about what you could be. I'm living proof. The tragedies of my life no longer define me."

Janiva's CD is available at Janiva's website:

<http://www.janivamagness.portmerch.com/stores/home.php>

## Foster Care Focus at the Blues Music Awards



It is the biggest, baddest night in blues music. The Blues Music Awards, held in the Mississippi Delta area of Tunica, Mississippi, celebrated blues legends like KoKo Taylor and "Nappy" Brown and contemporary artists like Tab Benoit, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Dianna Greenleaf.

More than 1,000 audience members and the extended audience listening live on XM Radio's Bluesville channel heard not only the rich tapestry of live performances, but also powerful messaging highlighting foster care.

Multiple Blues Award winner and foster care alumna, Janiva Magness, was nominated this year for B.B. King Entertainer of the Year. A spokesperson for National Foster Care Month, Janiva used her time at the mike to advocate for people to get engaged with foster care for the sake of 513,000 kids in care. She closed with a heartfelt challenge to make a difference for someone in foster care, as someone did for her.

Performers, presenters, nominees, award winners and wait staff raised the visibility of foster care with their blue Foster Care Month pins distributed by Casey Family Programs and Foster Care Alumni of America staff.

## 2008 Alumni Leadership Institute

In November, FCAA hosted its second Alumni Leadership Institute just outside of Washington, D.C. Representatives from each of our eight chapters joined staff and trainers for 2 days of intensive training on public speaking and writing, strategic sharing, understanding and influencing public policy, and building our collective voice.

Following the training, ALL participants visited Capitol Hill to spend time talking with federal law makers. We used this opportunity to share our thanks for the recent passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and to offer the support of the FCAA community in implementing the new law in each state.



Visit our website to meet our newest Alumni Leadership Institute graduates and to see more photos.

## We Can't Say It Enough: *Thank You!*

2008 was an incredible year for FCAA and our member community. Thanks for being part of our movement! Our FCAA members - both alumni and allies- are behind each and every success. We could not transform the foster care system and connect the alumni community without you.

Special thanks to the growing number of FCAA members who made a donation to FCAA this past year. Like all non-profits, we rely on the financial support of individuals who help fund our important work.

Member contributions support:

- dues waivers, ensuring that all alumni who wish to join our movement but are unable to pay can stay connected to our community and to our work,
- advocacy work addressing foster care reform, ensuring that alumni have a voice in creating and passing laws that improve the quality of life for youth in care, such as the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 did this past October.

If you haven't already, we hope you will consider becoming one of our many FCAA donors. A gift of any size will make a difference, and help us build on our incredible momentum.

To make your secure, tax-deductible gift, visit our website or contact our office.

Have you considered making a monthly gift to FCAA? Select our monthly giving option and spread out your annual FCAA contribution over 12 months! Federal employees can support FCAA by making a gift through their workplace in the government's Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Designate #61788.

## Why I give to FCAA...



*I wish that FCAA had been there when I was a young alumna. I would have felt less alone in the world. I want to do everything I can to make sure that FCAA stays strong and thriving. I think it's important that we continue to grow our cause and strengthen our voice. FCAA gives us a place where we can be proud of our accomplishments and contributions.*

*I want to transform the world to be a better place for foster children. I know first hand that the foster care system is in need of reform and that there is a lack of awareness in our society about the plight of foster children. Working together through FCAA gives us a strong collective voice in our society and the ability to initiate change. I feel a responsibility to do my best every day to make a difference given the resources and means that I have. If I'm not willing to support this cause, how can I expect others with a lesser understanding to contribute?*

Miriam (Murry) Aliberti, alumna, CA

Please tell us about why you give to FCAA, and hear from other members on our website.

We estimate there are 12 million alumni of foster care and 800,000 foster care professionals in the United States.



"It feels so special to finally have a family reunion because now I connect with the family I never had."

"I feel like I will finally be recognized as part of a family unit. I believe that we need to remember that we are all brothers and sisters and that we need to support each other, if we don't, who will?"

Eshawn Peterson,  
alumna, AZ

"This event redefines both 'family' and 'reunion' in a way that strengthens us as a community of individuals with a common experience."

Whether it is Thanksgiving on the Capitol steps or a reunion in a local park, we are taking 'family' traditions and making them our own."

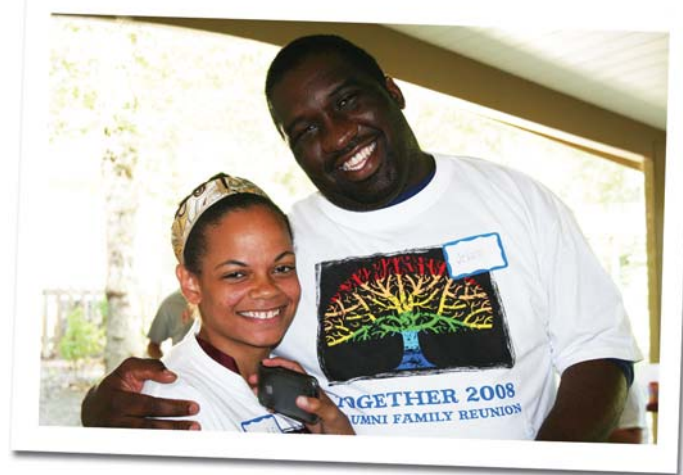


Sam Broderick,  
alumna, NJ

## TOGETHER 2008 ALUMNI FAMILY REUNION

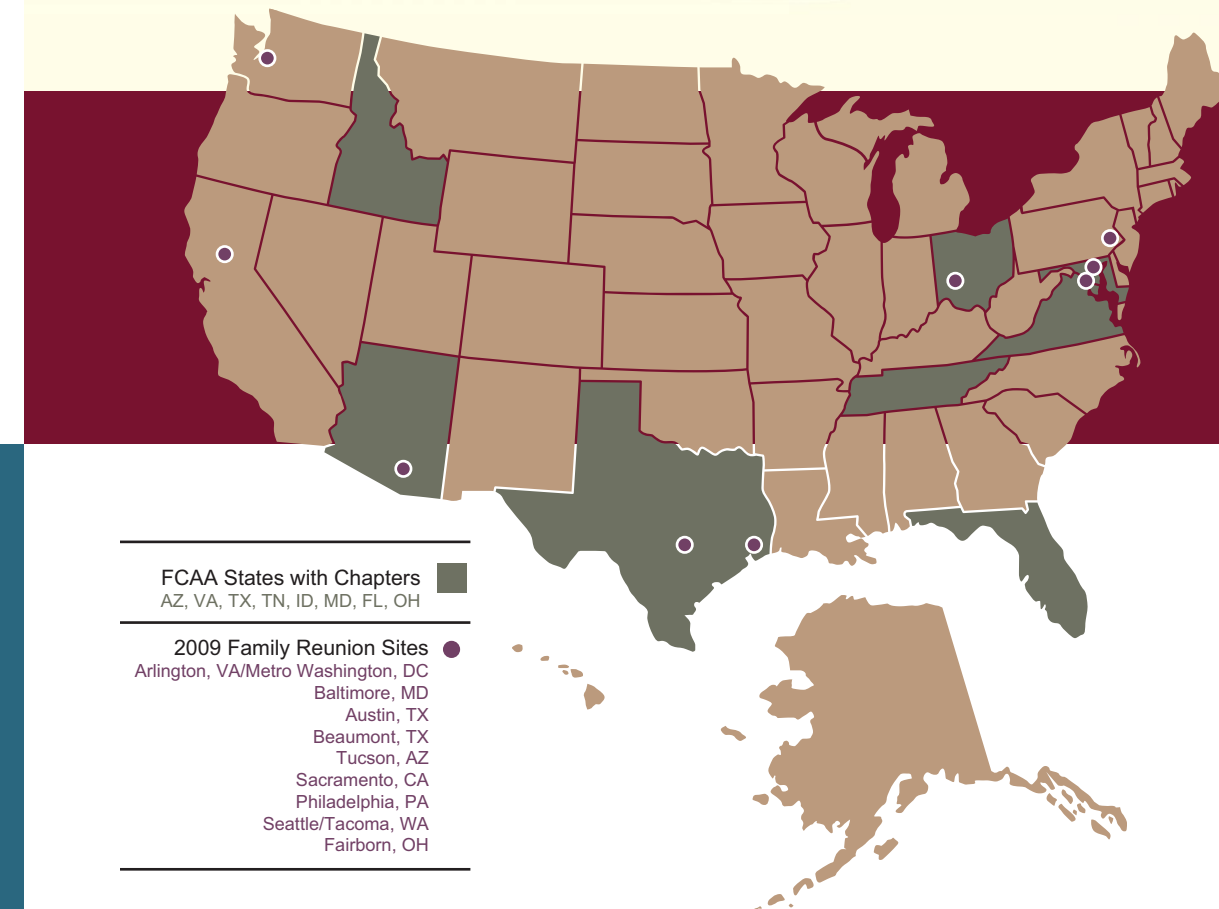
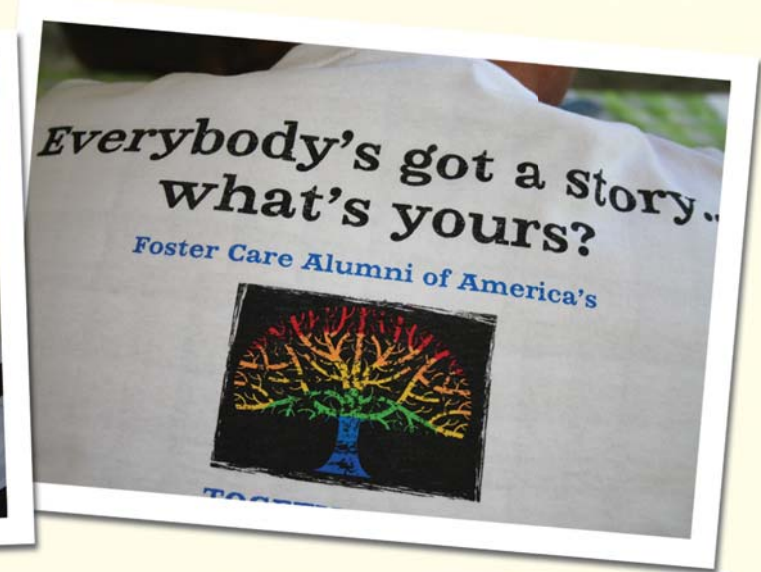
Armed with whiffle ball bats and fueled by fried chicken and potato salad, our members from across the country claimed an important family tradition as our own — our first ever Alumni Family Reunion!

The Alumni Family Reunion was an important and symbolic event for us. Too many foster care alumni have never been invited to a family reunion, as family reunions are just one of many "family privileges" that are often missing from the foster care experience. By creating an opportunity to connect with each other, to share new "traditions" that have long been part of American culture, and to build new friendships and extended



family, we are improving the quality of life for alumni and increasing the likelihood of permanent family and community for all of us.

The Reunion has an equally important secondary purpose of strengthening our ability to educate both the public and decision-makers about the culture of foster care and where changes to foster care can have significant impact for the lives of children currently in care. The voice of alumni has been absent from foster care policy discussions for far too long, yet the alumni perspective adds unique insight to the culture of foster care, insight that is not available anywhere else.



**Together 2009  
Alumni  
Family Reunion  
will be held on  
May 16, 2009**

Please visit our website  
for more information!

If you are interested in getting involved in one of our chapters or in starting one in your state, visit our website or call our office for more information.

### Special thanks to our Family Reunion Sponsors:

- Casey Family Programs
- Kids Are Waiting
- Virginia Commerce Bank
- Clarke & Sampson Incorporated
- Clark & Allen, P.C.
- Renner & Company CPA
- Focus Data Solutions

### Honorary Family Reunion Host Committee:

- Rep. Jim McDermott - co-chair (D-WA)
- Rep. Jerry Weller - co-chair (R-IL)
- Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-NV)
- Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
- Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA)
- Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-CA)

William Bell- President & CEO Casey Family Programs

# Handbook for Life After Foster Care

Did you know that you have younger brothers and sisters? It's true. If you were ever in foster care, and on some level, view the government as a member of your larger, albeit dysfunctional family, then you have a sibling group of about 12 million. On average, that number is growing by 54 young people every day, and they need our help.

FCAA will soon be publishing a book for young people who are transitioning out of foster care. The book, tentatively titled "The Handbook for Life After Foster Care," isn't about how to get a job, find an apartment or cook a meal. This book is about the emotional transition from foster care to adulthood, as understood and told through the expertise of alumni.

Alumni from around the US and Canada have been participating by submitting writing and art for the book and we are confident that young people who read it will be able to see themselves represented through our experiences.

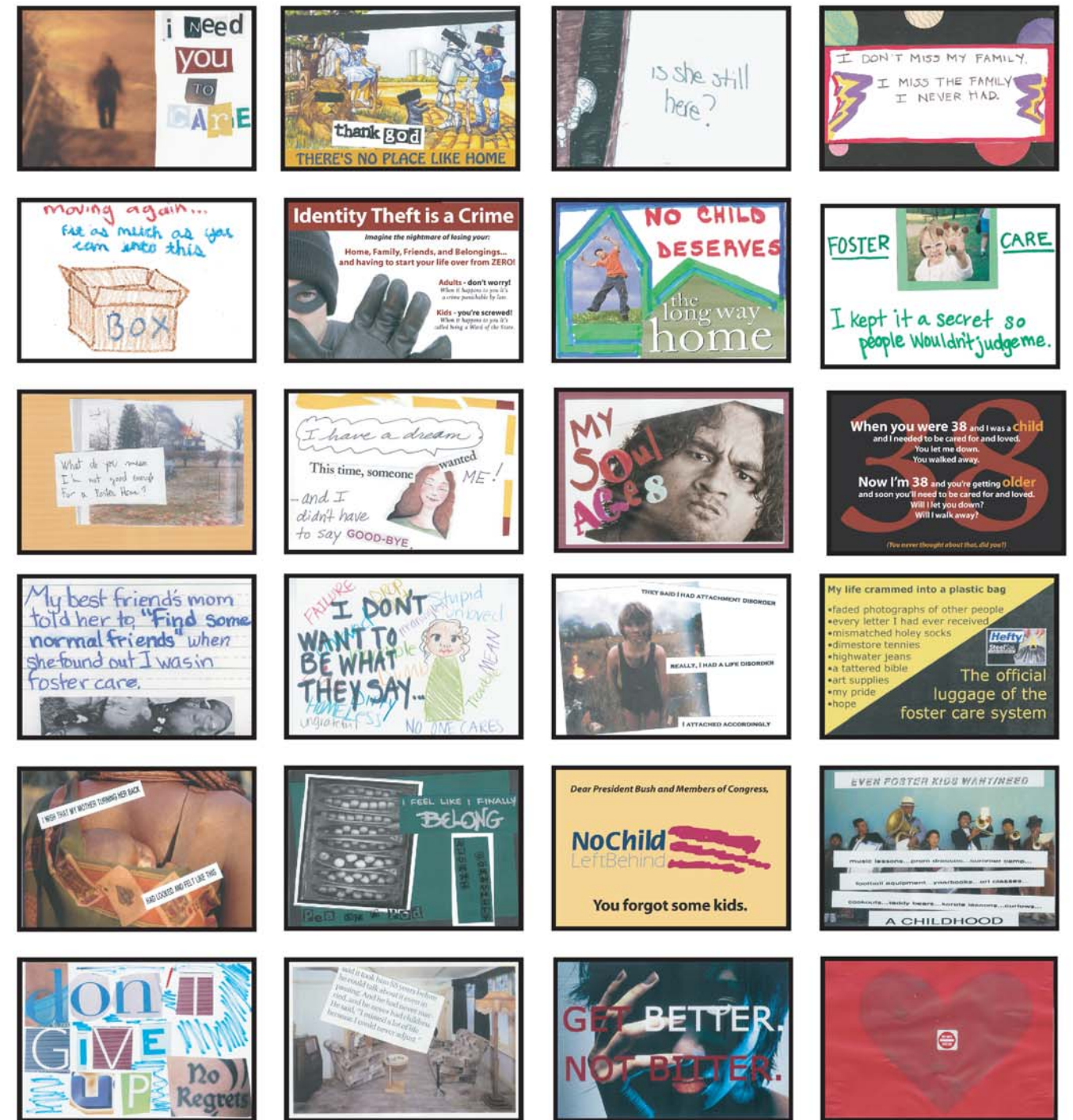
We look forward to bringing this resource to the youth transitioning out of care this year, and in the years to come. The Handbook will be available for purchase through the FCAA online store beginning in June 2009.

# FCAA Chapters

In December 2008, we established our newest FCAA Chapter in Idaho! We are so pleased that our chapter network continues to grow, and that our influence is being felt across the country. Idaho joins our existing chapters in Arizona, Florida, Maryland, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

FCAA Chapters have been active in many ways over the last year:

- Hosting our Alumni Family Reunion events as well as other traditional family activities like holiday celebrations.
- Serving their communities by getting involved in mentoring programs, luggage drives for youth in care, and reading to young children in foster care.
- Bringing the alumni experience to influence foster care practice and policy as conference keynote speakers, workshop presenters, and trainers.
- Building skills and knowledge through leadership training.
- Expanding networks of support through our membership of alumni and allies.



# The Alumni Family is...

A home... without doors that might block our view from where we have come.

A community... in which our sense of belonging comes from our sense of never having belonged.

A classic comic... in which the heroes possess superhuman strength, regeneration, and miraculous resilience.

Marnie Pollard, alumna

# Exploring the Culture of Foster Care

As the alumni movement has grown and gained momentum, we have discovered that regardless of age, race, ethnicity, geography, education, occupation, or placement history, as alumni of the foster care system we have a great deal in common. Our shared experiences form the basis of a shared culture—the culture of foster care. We are exploring the culture of foster care through our community art project where people in and from foster care share their observations, insights, and lessons on postcards.

Visit the FCAA website for more postcards, information about how to submit your own, and to purchase FCAA products featuring this powerful artwork.

Foster Care Alumni of America was made possible by multi-year grants from Casey Family Programs. Casey Family Programs is proud to be the Founding Sponsor of Foster Care Alumni of America.

# Exploring the Culture of Foster Care: A Community Art Project

Connecting Today... Transforming Tomorrow

Visit the FCAA online store or call our office to purchase the 24 x 36" poster featuring these postcards and more!

