**Veronica Martinez (S2JTR Version)**

When I was 8 years old, unfortunately I was put into the foster care system! I was in the foster care system until the age of 12, then finally my grandmother adopted me and we moved to South Central LA. Well, when I was in South Central, I loved going to school. When I was in elementary school, I graduated with honors and with the Presidential Award. I was a gifted student. I loved school and loved to learn. Well, in 5th grade, my parents didn’t attend my graduation. I was mad and rebelled in junior high school.

Once in junior high school, I got numerous tickets—for truancy, for throwing a milk carton at the school police, for being defiant, for starting rallies and food fights, for pulling the school fire alarms, for setting the school restrooms on fire. Finally, I got expelled from LA County, and I got kicked out of junior high school during 6th grade. I never went back to school. No one ever helped me get back into school. I was a dropout at age 13. Then I ran in the streets with the homeboys and they always took care of me. They found me a place to sleep and a place to eat! And they never asked me for anything, just to be myself.

I got locked up at the age of 13, celebrated my birthday in juvenile hall. I witnessed many things in juvenile hall, staff locking themselves in the rooms and getting down physically with the girls that were also detained. I found bugs in my food. That was - the most disgusting thing that ever happened to me besides that, sometimes I was humiliated by the staff - not just me, but the other girls detained too. They would read our cases out loud and tell everyone why we were detained. Then everyone would know why or what everyone else was detained for. It would be the most humiliating thing ever. Then sometimes they would take away our snacks or our phone calls. I was locked up for a very long period. I celebrated 2 birthdays in juvenile hall. I used to tell my parents not to visit me in juvenile hall because it was sad.