

Malachi Stidham: I'm not gonna lie, I thought I was going to go to jail. Cause usually my mom always taught me never go to a courthouse or you would go to jail. And when I went there, I was a little nervous because there's a lot of people.

Serenity Binder: Your world is just pretty much evolved around everybody else's opinions and not your own opinion. So you're pushed here and you're pushed there and if you don't have somebody advocating for you then you were just stuck.

Tom Jones: I had met someone who worked within the program and I just immediately became very interested and I decided to volunteer.

Serenity Binder: Well, I've been in foster care since I was 12.

Malachi Stidham: Just entering foster care for the first time, I was only 13 I believe when I first entered, it was kind of hard. I had to go to court every three or two months.

Serenity Binder: It was more of a checkup with the judge to make sure everything was going good. For me, I wasn't big with going to court, so for me to go up there and speak myself was not going to happen.

Malachi Stidham: Once I entered a group home named, Boystown, they were telling me that I would get a person, they called it a, "special person." I didn't know what it really meant, then I met Tom.

Tom Jones: I remember the drive over to where he was staying at the time. I think we talked for maybe an hour or hour and a half, laughed a lot and, and got to know each other just a little bit.

Serenity Binder: So they read your file just like everybody else, but they don't strictly read it and then that defines you. They actually ask you like, "how are you? What are your plans in life? What do you want?"

Malachi Stidham: They, he said that they would be kind of like my voice through court and everything and he was there to help me and cope with like, everything's going to be okay. And that it's not like a bad place to be. It was so really important to get my social security card for one, my ID so I can get a job. The social worker at the time was not doing her job really. And Tom and the gal program were the only people that really reached out and tried their hardest to get it. And they got it.

Serenity Binder: There was a time, a period when I was at a group home and I was 17 at the time. And I wasn't sure, I knew when I turned 18, I was leaving the group home. I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do. And then these people came, they were church members at the time, volunteering at the Florida Baptist Children's Homes and we ended up having a close bond and the time, my case manager did not think that that was a good idea, which I am not the type of person to just go and move in with people. So, my Guardian Ad

Litem definitely was like, yes, I'm here for this. And when I moved in with them, at first, I was like, there's no way I'm getting adopted, I'm too old. Like this is not something that I want to do. And eventually my heart softened and I let them adopt me.

Malachi Stidham: Those two years that I was alone in Boystown. I was, he was kind of my, I guess you could say savior throughout it all. Cause he was the only person I felt comfortable talking to about my problems. He became basically almost like a close relative to me.

Serenity Binder: It's what helped me make decision to stay in school, to pursue my career, to do something with my life. I am in classes for paralegal. And wherever it takes me is where it takes me.

Malachi Stidham: Everyone deserves the chance that I got to meet somebody good that can help them. If it wasn't for Tom and his help in the Guardian Ad Litem program, I wouldn't be the person I am now.