

Alaska Job Corps Office Administration student Ahava Faith James has read hundreds and hundreds of books in her short lifetime. Reading has been her love, her duty, and her survival. For years in isolation, books were her friends. Not surprisingly, her favorite genres are fantasy and historical fiction--focusing on strong, capable women. Her love of reading helped her withstand years of abuse during her formative years. This tragic story was well-documented in the media and courts, but Ahava has never written about it—until this Job Corps Essay Contest.

Ahava brought her phenomenal reading and vocabulary skills with her to Job Corps when she finally decided she was ready to try out the program. Ahava doesn't like to write nor does she feel she is any good at it. This essay proves that indeed she is a great writer and she has stories to tell and share with the world. She agonized over the amount of details, but all in all, the following essay is a therapy in her truth and her transformation journey, which has really just begun.

WHY I NEEDED JOB CORPS IN MY LIFE

My name is Ahava James and I come from a broken family. This truth has caused me to search for my place in this world for many years. When I was 23 I started the Job Corps program, but only after I was sure enough that I could finish it. You see, my confidence and maturity were both questionable prior to Job Corps.

I was born at Providence Hospital in Anchorage, AK, on January 11, 1992. I was taken from my birth mother around age 3 and raised in foster care until I was 9. Then I was adopted--but my adopted home (for the next 9 years) was not healthy. (Eventually I would be taken into protective custody, by the state. when we were finally rescued and removed from isolation.)

Because of the hardships of my adopted home, I needed to survive and I learned quickly that if I didn't do what was required, I would be without food, sometimes for up to a few days. I was forced to write 20 or so pages a day and sometimes--if I did not finish in time--I was forced to stand at a stool until I got it done. If I fell asleep at the stool, I was splashed with cold water. We were forced to use a bucket, even though there were three functional bathrooms in the house. I remember being dragged by my hair, down the stairs by my adopted mom. I tried many times to run away. But she kept all of us isolated. And when I was able to escape, she would tell authorities all her adopted children were disabled. She would never allow us to speak to anyone, unless she was present. After these situations I would be returned to stay naked in a small room, until she felt I had learned my lesson. Many more things happened at the house that I do not want to re-live or speak about.

Finally, after enough concerns from neighbors, the State visited on October 10, 2010; my siblings and I were finally taken into protective custody.

This lengthy trauma has cast a long shadow. It has affected my ability to trust, to grow, to learn and to mature at a normal rate. Several years ago, while I was relearning my life, I toured Job Corps and I liked what I saw. But I was not ready. I toured twice more over the next two years.

Fast-forward to June 2015; I arrived at the Alaska Job Corps. I immediately felt safer. The structure and rules made me feel supported. Yet I could work at my own pace. I did have a hard time making friends at first because I had never really had any kind of social life. Since I came to Job Corps, I have made some valuable friendships at Job Corps which I hope will last a long time.

I was not accustomed to all the social interactions in life. I didn't know the movies or music. It was hard to adjust but I did it. Job Corps Rec activities in the Recreation department helped me along with swimming, going to the movies and the zoo.

I have learned to build a web of support. I have support from three church families, some neighbors, biological family, former foster friends, landlord and siblings. Now with Job Corps, I have support from teachers and counselors and more friends. This Job Corps experience has made my web of support tighter and more secure.

I am now over 70 percent done in my trade and have earned my Microsoft Office Specialist Certification in Word and PowerPoint as well as other credentials. I am currently doing Work Base Learning at Jack White Real Estate. I have learned to get along with coworkers and I have improved my communication skills.

I have good career plans now. Since I came to Job Corps, I have become a better communicator so I hope to move into the advanced training in Transportation Communication International Union at the Excelsior Springs Job Corps in Missouri. My birth dad lives near there so I can learn advanced business and maybe get to know my family better. I have plans to become a talented office assistant and work in the airlines industry. I want to travel and experience new settings and scenery. It is hard to know exactly what I will do, because my world gets bigger and better every day.

My ultimate dream is to help children, all over the world. I want to make sure they have clothes and toys and enough to eat. This is important to me because these were things I did not have all the time. I have good coping skills and I want to share this skill-set with other young people, because coping enables you to go on living life. I also want to adopt three children after I am thirty.

Job Corps helped me get back on my feet, out of the clouds and into a pleasant reality. This world can be a cruel place for someone in my position, with my history.

Job Corps has helped me come out of my shell and be able to confront this whole, big world with my head held high. I am able to face my fears, and not run away from them. I am able to be proud of myself for surviving a disturbing childhood, and being able to come out of it, stronger and more prepared for this world. I can do anything if I put my mind to it and am given the chance. Besides, this world is wide, and there is so much I can do.

My Past
By Ahava James
Age 23

*I am a little girl
Who's been hurt too much
I've been in too many homes
To actually grow up*

*I am not alone
And I know I won't be the last
I'm one among many
Who've dwelt upon the past*

*Even though my past is tough
I must grin and bear my burden
My history is sad, it's true
But I'm not the only one who's hurting.*

*I've been tossed about
But I have weathered the storm
I've come out better
Than I ever was before*