

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

17 1/2 Year Foster Teen  
Overcomes His  
Difficult past

## MICHAEL ANDERSON



By almost everybody's estimate, Michael Anderson was close to being a lost cause. He had been placed in foster care at the age of 18 months and was moved to his third foster home, the home of Florine Ruffin, by the age of 12. Michael had a history of very poor grades and very bad behavior.

Without giving up or giving in, Florine Ruffin and the rest of her family worked toward succeeding with Michael where all others had failed, and succeed they did. The now 19-year-old Henry County High grad having "graduated" from Marine boot camp on January 22nd.

Michael had been in trouble at the other foster homes, showing many streaks of violent behavior.

Miss Ruffin stated that Michael "still had some anger to work out. Michael was a professional 'F' student and was kicked out of Henry County schools several times. He did plenty of pulling grass & weeds at my home and decided school was better than that." He had also been to "boot camp" twice before at Camp Fortson in west Henry. There he did nothing but work - digging ditches, splitting wood, and cleaning up the camp.

Michael's grades gradually improved but he still was not an exceptional student. Miss Ruffin said she would accept nothing below a "C" and Michael was able to pull the mark.

Then came another crucial step . . . at the end of the 8th grade, Michael decided to enter the R.O.T.C. program at Henry County High. "I learned how to work as a team (in R.O.T.C.), and how to help other people" Anderson added. He wound up as an ensign in the cadet corps. When he first came to Miss Ruffin's home, he did what he was told only because he had to...in R.O.T.C. he learned to do things not only because he had to, but because he wanted to.

Michael's grades did improve to "B's" his senior year, after he had signed up for the Marines. He had to take the equivalency test four times, and getting into the Marines was no picnic, but Sgt. Michael Bradberry, Michael's recruiter, worked with him to pass his entrance exams.

Finally, on October 25, 1998, Michael entered boot camp at Parris Island, SC. He did not find the discipline that different from Miss Ruffin's home, but did manage to lose 29 pounds, from 223 to a solid 192, his best shape since the 9th grade. Now Michael is thinking of a career in the Marines.

Michael thanks his "best friend," Florine Ruffin and said if she didn't come along, he might be dead. His best friend from his pre-teen years was killed in a dispute over a girl.

When asked what he can pass on to other foster kids, Michael said "Not to look only at just the bad things. I was angry at first, but I changed. They can to."

*Adapted From Interview by Joe Hiatt, Publisher-Editor, The Henry County Record*

Michael's sister Wonda also graduated with honors June 5, 1999. Wonda went to Harding University to study medicine after being awarded several scholarships. Wonda was an honored cadet in N.J.R.O.T.C.. "Wonda was a joy to help go on her way in life," states Miss Ruffin.

A  
Word  
From  
Our  
President  
**VERDELL DANIELS**



Thank each of you for the support you have given me and your Board of Directors, because without your commitment and support we would not be able to increase the value and meet the goals of our Association. Thanks, Thanks, Thanks.

Whenever we are faced with challenges as individuals, we often remind ourselves that achieving any worthwhile goal requires both hard work and commitment. What is true for individuals is true for our Association. If we as an association are to make our Association's vision a reality, we need the hard work and commitment of every team member.

Building commitment requires a joint effort of all team members, the state agency's Foster Care and Adoption unit, and Foster and Adoptive parents. The general membership alone can't increase their commitment to the association unless given the opportunities and incentives to do so by your President and Board of Directors. However, they can't provide those opportunities and incentives unless you the members exhibit a certain baseline level of commitment that will allow our Association to grow. It is very obvious that cooperation and coordination are the key elements in building commitment.

We as an Association must empower and respect our members. Therefore, whenever we display that value, individually or collectively, in some way we are helping to build an atmosphere of commitment within our Association.

There are many steps involved in committing yourself to our association. Many of you are already committed to helping the Association by recruiting and retaining members, getting the required training hours, educating yourself on special skills, seeking better benefits for the children in our homes, and seeking total quality of support and service from the D.F.C.S. State Office to the local Foster Parent Association.

As we move forward to total commitment, it is important to remember that we each have a duty to give our best efforts. If we make a point every day to live our values and deliver the best care to our children, we will meet our responsibilities and help build commitment. In the end, we all will benefit.

VERDELL DANIELS

**Q.** Dear God,  
Why didn't you save the children  
of the Littleton school?  
Sincerely, Student

**A.** Dear Student,  
I would have, but  
I am not allowed in schools.  
Sincerely, God