

Izzy is five, and is siblings with Emma and Molly. During the interview she is playing with her new toy, a small horse in a barn that folds in to a purse. There is the consistent sound of plastic hitting the table as she continuously stacks the plastic sack of grain on top of the tiny plastic box on top of the pail.

J: So I heard you guys got your new room remodeled?

I: Mmhmm.

J: What's that like?

I: Eh, good.

J: Do you like it? [nods head] How is it different from your last room?

I: Ehhh, it's- I don't know.

J: It's nicer, right? So what's it like living in the shelter?

I: Awesome!

J: What's awesome about it?

I: I don't know.

J: What do you like doing here?

I: Jumping on the bed!

J: Do you have a top bunk or bottom bunk?

I: Top

J: Top! And you can still jump on the bed?

I: {nods}

J: Do you ever get in trouble for jumping on the bed?

I: No.

J: Do you play with your little sister?

I: [Nods]

J: What do you do?

I: Eh, I don't know

J: You don't know what games you play?

I: Oh, trains.

J: How do you play that?

I: I don't know.

J: Do you play it in your room?

I: Mmhmm.

J: Do you play it on the bed?

I: No.

J: Do you line up and act like you are trains and walk around the room?

I: [noncommittal response]

J: Did anything funny happen today?

I: Yeah, on the bus the bus driver was funny.

J: What did he say?

I: I don't remember.

J: Do you remember where you lived before the shelter?

I: Louisiana!

J: What was that like?

I: Mmm, I don't know.

J: Was it fun, was it sad?

I: [immediately] Fun!

J: What was fun?

I: I don't know. Having toys!

J: Do you not have many toys here?

I: No, I have lots!

J: You have all the toys to play with in the nursery right? So what's your favorite thing to do at school?

I: Go outside!

J: You don't like any classes?

I: I do.

J: Do you have any friends at school?

I: Yeah.

J: Do you get to hang out outside of school?

I: Yeah.

J: [throwing in the towel and going all-in] Izzy, do you know what the word 'homeless' means?

I: Uh uh.

J: You've never heard of someone being homeless?

I: Uh uh.

J: No? Have you seen any of the guys on the streets?

I: No.

J: Would it be easier to talk if you had one of your sisters here?

I: Yeah.

J gets Emma, in an attempt to get stories.

E to I: Nice shirt. You look like a pumpkin

J: So, does Izzy have any funny stories to share?

I: Uh uh.

[long silence]

E to J: Fun time ever?

J: Ever is okay.

E: Remember that time you fell on your face?

I: Yes.

E: Want to tell her about it?

I: No.

M: No? Come on.

I: I'm just kidding, Emma, I'm just kidding. I don't.

E: What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of funny?

I: Don't know.

E: Izzy, come on, you gotta be serious.

I: I am!

E: What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of Teletubbies?

I: I don't know what that means.

E: What do you think of? Anything?

I: Horsies.

E: What do you think of when you think of pink? Anything. Any word.

I: Pink.

E: What's the first thing you think of when you think of dinosaurs?

I: Dinosaurs.

[Crazed laughter from J]

E: Izzy, come on. What is your favorite color?

I: Dinosaur.

J: That's a good color. That's my favorite color, in fact.

E: What does that look like?

I: Dinosaur.

E: Dinosaur looks like dinosaur? What if I have no idea what that looks like? Or what dinosaur means?

I: Dinosaur.

E: Alright.

J: I'd say we're getting somewhere.

I: Puppies!

E: Alright, what's your favorite kind of puppy?

I: Puppies!

J: Fluffy puppies?

I: Poodle.

E: Alright. What is- when you think of fun- like, remember that time we went fishing with dad?

That was fun. So what do you think of when you think of a time of fun?

I: Fun.

J: So when did you go fishing with your dad?

I: Fishy!

E: Izzy, you're going to win nothing! [Each interviewee receives a gift card for food]

Izzy is sitting on a very raised computer chair, and it won't lower. A struggle with the chair commences.

J to E: Do you want to tell me about the time you went fishing with your dad?

E: Okay. Well, um, we went fishing, with my dad, and uh, we caught big fish, like red fish, and I fell in the water, she laughed. My dog ate a ferret. My dad played with some alligators.

J: Your dad played with the alligators? How did that happen?

E: We were at a- you know the alligator park? It's alligator park or something. He used the dog as bait. He had the dog bark at the alligators, put them back in the car, he fed them some fish, I slipped into the water, like knee deep. No alligators were in sight, and Izzy laughed.

J: Do you remember that, Izzy?

I: No.

E: She was two.

I: She's a liar. Liar, liar pants on fire.

E: Of course I am. She's such a turd.

J: That's the way with siblings.

E: Izzy, it's time to go. Let's go.

I: No.

E: Then stop it.

J: So, your new room- how is that?

E: Yeah, what's your favorite part of the new room?

I: Jumping on the bed!

J: Does Samantha jump on her bed?

I: No.

E: Why did you start jumping on your bed?

I: To jump on the bed.

J: What's your favorite thing to eat here?

I: Eat. Eat

E: When she thinks of eat she thinks of eat.

J: Do you like spaghetti?

I: Eat.

J: I don't think we're going to get anywhere today.

E: What's your favorite toy you got yesterday?

I: This.

E: What's your favorite part?

I: The house.

J: What other toys did you get yesterday?

E: What other toys did you find in our room?

I: A bear.

E: What's Samantha's new favorite thing?

I: None. I don't know.

E: Remember the train?

I: Oh yeah, the train.

E: It's a remote controlled train that circles- it's Thomas and this dragon thing- and she is obsessed with it. All day for three hours, *tooooooot*. They gave us four extra batteries, and we've used three.

J: Where did your mom find the toys?

E: They were in there when we got our room, when they presented it. They had a bookshelf full of books. There was one about how Michael Phelps trained for the Olympics with a T-rex.

J: That's... strange.

E: Next time you come in I'll have to bring it here.

J: Yeah, I think so.

E: So, Izzy. What are your favorite kind of jeans?

I: Skinny!

E: Those are skinny jeans cause they are tight at the thighs. She will wear nothing but. What's your favorite kind of drink?

I: Chocolate milk.

J: Where do you get to drink chocolate milk?

I: School!

E: Do you have it every day or do you change it up a little bit?

I: Every day! [takes off her Ugg-like boots]

E: Do your feet stink?

I: Yes!

E: Haha, she said yes!

J: Oh my gosh, she's biting her toe! You are chewing on your stinky toe.

E: Izzy, that's revolting.

J: How does that taste?

I: [laughing]

J: [in a whisper] Is she putting her whole foot in her mouth?

E: Yes.

J: [in awe] Yes she is.

E: Do you like to wear high heels with your stinky feet, or your Uggs?

I: [muffled around all of her toes, which are entirely in her mouth] High

E: You like to wear high heels?

I: Mmhmm!

J: You have a pair of high heels?

E: She borrows my mine. I have this pair of high heels from this play I did, so I kept them.

J: You have your entire foot in your mouth! Here, everyone can listen to the sounds of you chewing on your foot [garbled, wet sound]

[laughter]

E: What's your favorite shirt?

I: I don't know, my stinky foot.

J: Are you excited to move back to Louisiana?

E: She doesn't really remember it. She was teeny-weeny. Do you miss dad?

I: {Long pause} Ehh, kind of.

E: Normally when you bring it up she says outrageous stuff. Kind of, why is it kind of?

I: Cause I said kind of.

J: What do you miss about your dad?

I: I do not know.

E: Do you like your school?

I: YES!

E: Wait, I have a question. What do you do, the first thing?

I: Work!

E: Then what? Tell us what you do until the end of the day.

I: Go to lunch!

J: And drink chocolate milk.

E: What did you have for lunch today?

I: Chocolate milk and pizza!

E: Did you have any fruit or veggies?

I: Uh huh!

E: What kind?

I: [Feet back in her mouth] Orange and apple.

E: Did you have some stinky feet?

I: Mmmhmm.

J: That's her dinner today. Do you guys have the tickets, or do you know when you're leaving yet for Louisiana?

E: [shakes head no]

I: [After puts other foot in her mouth] Uh, my other foot must be stinky! Blech!

J: How does that taste?

I: Eeeeeeh...

J: Probably not very good judging by your face.

E: What's your favorite way to wear your hair?

I: My feet.

E: You like feet in your hair?

I: Yes!

E: Do you like your hair curly or straight?

I: Curly!

E: I curl her hair sometimes by scrunching it with mousse and putting curlers in, and you roll it up, and it comes out all perfect.

J: You're good with hair, aren't you? Hair and makeup?

E: Izzy.

I: [sharply] What?

E: Do you like makeup on?

I: Makeup!

E: You like makeup on?

I: Yeaah!

E: Do you brush your teeth every night?

I: No.

[laughter]

E: How often do you brush your teeth?

I: One time.

E: Once a day, a week?

I: Just one time!

E: In your whole life?

I: Yeah!

J: You're going to have smelly teeth along with smelly feet! You could put toothpaste on her toes and have her chew on her feet

E: What does your teacher look like? I'll describe one of my teachers. He's bald, he has a beard, he's fat, and uh, he has nose hair. He likes to wear pink nail polish, and he likes to wear pink skinny jeans. What does your teacher look like?

I: [Laughing hysterically] She wears makeup all day!

E: Oh yeah, so does my boy teacher. He loves it.

I: And she kicks peoples butts.

E: He doesn't do that.

J: Whose butt does she kick?

I: No ones. She doesn't.

E: Does she have big feet or little feet?

I: Big feet!

E: What do your cafeteria ladies look like?

I: I don't know [foot back in her mouth] I'm done. Good bye. [She walks to the door]

E: Really? Just three more questions!

I: [stomps back in bare feet]

E: Alright. Describe how stinky feet taste.

I: Good.

E: Which toe is your favorite to chew on?

J: Your big toe on your left foot?

I: EW! This one's dirty.

E: What's your favorite color?

I: Brown.

E: Second favorite color?

I: Pink.

E: Shoes put on the wrong feet. That's perfect. Do you like living here, Izzy?

I: Not that much.

E: Why not?

I: Cause! [running away towards door]

E: What's your favorite part?

I: Nursery!

E: Play what?

I: Bleh bleh.

E: What's so fun about bleh bleh?

I: Cause I said bleh bleh. Come on!

E: What's your favorite TV show?

I: Sponge Bob.

E: What does he look like?

I: Funny pants guy.

[laughter]

J: I know a pants guy. His name's Charlie.

E: What's your favorite color horse?

I: Rainbow. Now let's get out of here.

E: Why do you want to get out of here so bad? Is it hot?

I: No, let's just get out of here.

J: Yeah, let's stop now.

END

Molly is sisters with Izzy and Emma. They also have an older brother who lives with another grandparent, and a younger sister who was not interviewed. Molly uses laughter as a shield when she talks about difficult situations.

J: So what grade are you in?

M: Fourth.

J: And your sister said you lived in the shelter for about a month?

M: Mmhmm.

J: What do you think about living in the shelter?

M: Ehhh. It's- okay. [laughs].

J: So what's "eh" about it? What's good and what's bad?

M: Um, it's not like a normal house, and pretty much I can't leave my mom's side, so it's kinda weird. She leaves me in the room; it's like the same as leaving me in my own room and going to the kitchen, so it doesn't make sense. And, uh, what's good about it is they have really good food and they have dessert every night, and it's... I don't know. It's just, I live on the third floor above us, and I can see everything.

J: You have a good view?

M: Yeah, we used to live in Columbus like on the top of the highest hill there. It was crazy.

J: What was it like living with your grandparents?

M: Well, my grandma, she's crazy.

J: Why was she crazy?

M: She's just crazy [laughter].

J: What did she do?

M: Since she was on a diet, we were on a diet, and it really sucks.

J: What did you have to eat?

M: Salad.

J: That's it?

M: She doesn't like all-the-way cooked meat, so she makes us eat the gross, bloody meat. It's so gross. But I liked the view, and my grandpa was really nice. And uh, they used to have horses and I'd go to their house and ride horses. But that's when they lived in Georgia.

J: Ah, then they moved up here and don't have them anymore?

M: Nope. I yelled at my grandma for getting rid of them. Cause right when they sold them, one of my favorite horses had a baby! I was so mad!

J: Do you know why they had to sell them?

M: Because they couldn't afford a trailer to take them up to Montana.

J: So have you ever been hungry before?

M: Yeah, in Mississippi cause my mom and dad would always go fishing and stuff, and she'd just leave us home with no food. It just sucked [laughs].

J: But you cooked with your sister sometimes, right?

M: Yeah, I cooked a lot. We'd always make spaghetti or something.

J: What was that like?

M: Not fun. But at least I got to watch TV all night.

J: And were you going to school then?

M: Yeah.

J: How did you get to school?

M: My uncle or my cousin drove me there. She picks me up.

J: So have you ever been scared in the shelter?

M: Yeah, there are some pretty creepy people. I just stay away from people. But there are some nice people. Oh, but this girl, she just got here, and she had head lice. I stay away from her.

J: Is she better now?

M: Oh, I don't know. She was kicked out today. She was like 14. She's Ally's sister. She got kicked out, too, and her dad. So... Sucks.

J: Why?

M: Her dad couldn't take care of them cause he was at work and then three times, it was cause Ally and Kara got rude with the desk people. That was two strikes gone, and you only have five. They got five, and they were out. I have four left.

J: What was your strike?

M: Well, it's my mom's. You have a chore, and her chore was laundry, and she wasn't doing it correctly. People complained about that cause there were still stains on their blankets.

J: That sucks.

M: I know, but at least I'm going to be out in two weeks. [They were planning on leaving for Louisiana in that time. Unfortunately, the father spent the money and they weren't able to go.]

J: Yeah, you should be able to maintain four strikes in that time.

M: I think I can just wander around, cause you have to be at your parent's side. So I'll just wander around and it'll be okay.

J: So what do you think about the word homeless?

M: Uhhh, I don't know.

J: What do you picture?

M: Uh, hobos.

J: Dirty old men on the streets?

M: Yeah.

J: Do you know any kids that are homeless?

M: Ehhh, no. Well, there's a lot here. It's the only people. There's some people that moved from here to a different shelter cause they were kicked out, then somewhere else. There's two shelters in Billings, probably more.

J: Do you know anyone who's ever been hurt by someone else?

M: Uh, my mom... by my dad.

J: What did he do?

M: In Louisiana he'd always beat her up, and stuff. But he got out of that. I don't really want to go back to my dad.

J: So you're not excited to be back with him?

M: Not really.

J: Why?

M: Well, kinda yes, cause he's really fun, and awesome, but sometimes he has his mean side where he's like, spanked me, and I get really mad at him. And I remember once, when my mom was having my little sister Sam, it was Opposite Day when she had the- uh- what's it called?

J: C-Section?

M: No, when they see the baby.

J: Ultrasound.

M: Yeah. It was Opposite Day, so I came home yelling to my dad, I was like, "Oh my gosh, it's a boy." And he said, "Why did you tell me?" He got all mad, then I started crying, and he said, "Oh, I didn't mean to."

J: But then she had a girl.

M: Yeah!

J: So, does your dad drink?

M: Yeah, Emma probably told you.

J: Is that when he's mean?

M: Yeah. He's kinda crazy. Once it was really funny cause we were doing something weird- I forgot what it was- but it was actually really funny and uh, I forget what he was doing, but... I don't know.

J: What did you do when your dad was being mean to your mom?

M: Well a few times we ended up calling the police cause we were scared [laughter] then other times my mom just ended up taking the car and leaving, then came back, then left again. It just kept happening.

J: Did you guys hide in a different room?

M: No, cause there was only one room left and we all had to share it. So I ended up sleeping in the living room. There were three beds in the living room- a pull-out, a couch, and two mattresses. Actually that makes four.

J: So that was in Mississippi, when you were living with your uncle and their friend, and a bunch of other people?

M: Yeah, but then his friend got kicked out cause he went to jail. [laughter]

J: What did he go to jail for?

M: I don't know. [laughter] He's been there a few times, I know. I don't know why.

J: So you guys were stuck in the same room. Did your dad just shove your mom?

M: Actually, there was one incident, when I was living with my uncle, what happened was that my mom and dad were fighting over the keys to the car. That's when my sister Emma called the cops on him cause it looked like he was actually choking her, but he was just trying to get the keys from her. So, that was one time when he looked like he was choking her.

J: But he was just pushing her to get the keys?

M: Yeah. And then there's like metal shish-kabob thingies, and my sister Emma locked him out again, and my dad got really mad and he whooped her on the butt with them, and my mom got really mad at him and started beating on him. Then there was another time when he like, slapped my brother John in the face, and he got mad and did that again. And I remember when I was like, five in Mississippi, like, it got me really upset because he threw my fish tank and it had my little clown fish in it, and he was all flopping on the floor. And I tried to get him up and put him in the tank, but I cried because he died [laughter].

J: Oh no, he didn't make it! Why did he throw your fish tank?

M: He got really mad, and just throwing things out of nowhere, and it was like, "Oh, fish tank!"

J: What was he mad about?

M: I don't know it was like, four years ago. It sucked. Poor fishie. I had a lot of things in there, like a puffer fish, a star fish. After that my dad got upset that he threw it and bought me a tank that was as big as a table, and filled it was more puffer fish and stuff. Then he ended up getting an identical clown fish, and I was happy with it.

J: What was the fish's name?

M: I forget. You know how kids always end the 'y' after something? Like, my little sister once got a turtle and she named it "Turtley." [Laughter] So I ended up naming him Mr. Clown Fishey [laughter].

J: [Laughter] Yeah, like Fluffy...

M: Yup, they put 'y' at the end of everything, so it was Turtley.

J: So were you scared when they fought?

M: Yeah, I ended up taking my siblings and taking them someplace else. Then they stopped, and I came back. And I don't know.

J: Has Emma always had to call the police on them?

M: No, my older brother did once cause my dad slapped him in the face with a spatula, and it was oily and hot. Then they started not wanting my brother, so they sent him to Arizona. Then he was put in a foster home, and before that in Mississippi he was put in this one place, I don't know what it was called, but he stayed there for three weeks. And I never really got to see him at my Uncles cause he was always at a friend's house for three months at a time, then he'd come back for a day to get his clothes, go back for another three months. Don't really get to see him that much. Now I don't get to see her at all since she's in Mississippi.

J: Why didn't your parents want him?

M: Cause he didn't like my dad, so he tried to separate them. My dad was sick of it so he was like, [strange noise that sounds a little like a high-pitch, cheerful 'boom'].

J: How do you feel about that?

M: Sad. Even though he'd always hit me and smack me, and mess around with me.

J: Like big brothers?

M: Yeah, don't do what he says, and smack. [laughter] Sucks, now I miss it.

J: Are you gonna get to see him again soon?

M: Yeah, I think my dad is going to get him back, like, to Louisiana with us. But actually, uh, once with my brother, he actually busted my lip open cause we were playing airplane on the tile floor and fell.

J: Ow!

M: Yeah, it hurt. And then once, in Aizona, when I was visiting my uncle, he had this dog named Charlie that I absolutely loved. He could jump over a five foot fence and it was awesome. I was cuddling with him and laying down, and I accidentally sat on his tail and his tooth went right through my lip. Then his cat, I actually still have a scar somewhere, where he bit me. Then I had to go to the hospital. It sucked a lot.

J: Do you have to protect your younger siblings at all?

M: No really. Not anymore. We're here, and there's nothing really to protect them from.

J: You guys stick together.

M: Yeah, just me and my little sister, cause she goes everywhere I go now. She sits with me on the bus, she walks with me into school, I have to walk her out to the play ground, then into her classroom, then I have to go back to mine. When I get home, she follows after me. She does everything I do.

J: How old is she?

M: Five. She's about to be six in January. Then my mom turns 36 in February. I think my dad turns 38 in August. I turn ten in April. Emma turns 13 in October, and John turns 16 in February. My brother is spoiled rotten. He got the iPhone 4, then he got the iPhone 5, now he wants an iPod. He gets everything. I could show you, maybe some time, like on YouTube they have pictures of him singing. He was a star in a play. I don't know if that went sensational or something. But he's on the news, he was on the front page.

J: How did you feel about that?

M: Je-lo [laughter]. I want to be on the front page of the newspaper.

J: So, Emma said that your grandma was doing that-

M: To get back at us, yeah. Everything she buys she keeps track of, so we have to pay it back to her. But she's only wasting her own money. So we have to pay everything she spends on John, back to her.

J: You guys do? How do you know that?

M: She's told us.

J: She tells you that you owe her money?

M: Yeah, when she gets really mad. And actually, my uncle, his girlfriend and my cousin, were actually plotting to make my dad and my mom go to jail so they could have custody over all five of us.

J: Why did they want custody of you guys?

M: Cause his girlfriend was really fond of us, and he wanted to make her happy.

J: What was he going to do to get them in jail?

M: Like, my cousin was making my mom really mad so she was about to punch her cause she got so mad. She was trying to make her do that so she could go, and then they'd take us.

J: So where have you lived?

M: I was born in Mississippi, lived in Louisiana for five years, visited Arizona often, then pretty much Louisiana, then back to Mississippi, then to Montana, so like, four different places.

J: Have you always lived in a house?

M: Yeah... But sometimes it was for rent, like in Louisiana and Mississippi. My grandma's house and we paid her. It sucked.

J: So you never had to live in a car or in a hotel?

M: No. Actually, for awhile, yes, cause when my grandparents picked us up from Mississippi to go to Montana we were living in a motel for awhile, but the government was paying for us to stay there while we were finding some place to live. It had a pool, it had breakfast, internet, it was awesome. They had a computer there, they had pretty much everything.

J: How long did you have to stay there?

M: About two weeks. Then there was a fitness room. It was awesome.

J: You liked the fitness room? [laughter]

M: Yeah! Cause there was a TV.

J: What was your least favorite place to live?

M: Hmm... I'm going to say with my uncle. Really sucked. [laughter]

J: What was so bad about it?

M: Well, the different incidents that happened there, like, um, my uncle's friend, his name was Jamie, and he was always getting drunk so he had a lot of problems. And he'd have to go after his girlfriend and he'd have to drive away, then he'd get called on by the police and he'd run away, and then everything would happen. And then once I accidentally locked my dad out of the house cause we were all mad at him, and he got really mad and we all started cracking up cause he was like, "Come on, let me in, I gotta poop!" [laughter]

J: How long did you lock him out for?

M: Like, an hour.

J: Was he angry when you let him back in?

M: Yeah.

J: What did he do?

M: He just stormed in and went into the garage and played pool with my uncle and he was like, "Oooh, I hate them so much." [Laughter]

J: That's not very nice

M: I know [laughter] But it was funny.

J: Anything else?

M: No.

J: What's the funniest thing that's happened recently, like at the Shelter?

M: Well, uh, I'm gonna say with my Grandparents, my grandma, when she was in High School she used to go to dances, so she dances really funny now. It's just hilarious, like when she's dancing to Toby Keith she's all acting crazy.

J: How does she dance? Can you show me? [laughter]

M: No, I can't imitate it! She's so stupid! It's hilarious. And at one point me and Emma were laughing behind her back cause she was all like, Ahhh [tosses head back like a sexy dancer on MTV]

J: All dramatic!

M: Yeah!

J: So do the other kids know you live in a shelter?

M: Some of them. Not really.

J: Do you keep it a secret?

M: Yeah, most of the time.

J: Why?

M: Cause I don't want other people thinking that I'm actually really poor, cause that's what they think of homeless. Being super-duper poor. All the people in school have iPhones and stuff, and are like, "Ah yeah- oh, you're poor, never mind."

J: I don't have an iPhone. I don't want an iPhone.

M: What kind of phone do you have?

J: It's two years old, but it still works. I'm really practical, though. I don't make a lot of money.

M: How much do you make?

J: I make less than minimum wage.

M: Oh my. [laughter] Do you like working at Venture Theatre?

J: I do.

M: Good.

J: I love it, but I'm a volunteer right now, so that's why I make so little. I make 5 dollars an hour, so I'm on food stamps and all that.

M: Yeah, my mom's on food stamps. But my dad, he has to pay my mom child support. So we get like, a 100 dollars a week. So that helps. That's why we bought the movie The Lorax. We watch that every single day. We watch it five times a day.

J: So you're excited to leave the shelter?

M: Duh!

J: Well, I don't know you said-

M: It's okay. It's like a 2 star hotel.

J: Yeah, pretty much.

M: Some parts are just, eh. But then I get to go to sewing class and I get to make a froggie stuffed animal right now.

J: Really?

M: I made a blanket, I've made a pillow, now my froggie. I love frogs.

J: Is that your favorite thing about the shelter?

M: No, the nursery probably. Cause I like the little kids, but only when they're nice to me and not mean. Have you ever heard the story of a little boy and his mom, and she's like, "Do you love me?" And he's like, "Yeah, only when you give me cookies".

J: No, where's that story from?

M: I forget, but it's on YouTube.

J: So what do you do in the Nursery?

M: Watch movies, do crafts. Right now I'm making a wreath out of my family's hands. I have a little bow and little bells and stuff on it. It's so cute.

J: So is art your favorite class in school?

M: Uh, yeah, duh.

J: Some people it's P.E.

M: Oh...my. That's like my least favorite.

J: It is? I don't like it either. So glad that's done.

M: Math is my second favorite, cause I'm super-duper good at it. We had to finish a packet really thick all about area. I was the only one without homework cause I'm so good at it.

J: Are you good in school then? Do you get good grades?

M: Yeah. [Two weeks later she got her first report card. Her and her sister both have straight-As] I'm an honor roll student. And next year I'll be in honor school society... Oh, I have to go to dinner now.

END

Andrew is a great, mild-mannered boy who spent the whole interview fidgeting with a toy and not looking at me. He was very shy and cautious about the interview, but very polite. He always greets me when he sees me.

J: Alright, Andrew, what grade are you in?

A: Fourth.

J: How long have you lived in Billings?

A: My whole life.

J: Wow, so what do you think of living in the shelter?

A: It's... fun. It's okay.

J: Have you had any hard times here?

A: No, unless it's getting up in the morning.

J: What's so hard about that?

A: Cause I'm tired. Always am in the morning. But nothing else.

J: How long have you lived here?

A: ...uh...about three or four months, maybe.

J: Where did you live before that?

A: Friends house.

J: And before that?

A: Hotel.

J: Oh, which hotel?

A: Um, Rainbow.

J: What was that like?

A: Fun.

J: What was fun about it?

A: TV. Um, we had food, I'd go to the park every day.

J: You can't go to the park here?

A: Well, I can, but it's too cold.

J: Yeah, it is. So do you remember your first day coming to the shelter?

A: Yeah.

J: What was it like?

A: Strange... Embarrassed. Then I got over it.

J: Why were you embarrassed?

A: First time here. But see, my mom used to live here, and I would come visit her and stuff. I felt embarrassed when I came to visit her, too, cause I didn't know people, but now I know people, so I'm not embarrassed.

J: So you feel very comfortable here?

A: Yeah.

J: Have you ever felt scared?

A: No.

J: Have you ever felt scared living anywhere else?

A: Yeah, my great-grandma's house.

J: Why?

A: Cause my auntie passed away, and sometimes we could hear her spirits.

J: Really?

A: In the kitchen.

J: What did they say?

A: I looked in there and, stuff was moving around and stuff.

J: How old were you?

A: Nine, or ten, but I'm ten now. So nine-ish.

J: So can you tell me- no, let's see. So where is the first place you remember living?

A: My whole life?

J: Your WHOLE LIFE! I want to know about your whole life!

A: Probably my grandma's house. Not my great-grandma's house, but my grandma's house. Or our own house.

J: So who did you live with?

A: My mom, my sister, my grandpa, my grandma, my two dogs, and sometimes my uncle would come over.

J: Why did you guys leave?

A: We got kicked out.

J: Why? You don't know?

A: Nope.

J: Where did you go after that?

A: Mmmmm... Probably, at an apartment. Cause when I was 8 we were living in an apartment.

J: And it was just your mom, sister and you?

A: Yup.

J: Where's your dad?

A: My dad? Uh, he lives with his mom and dad. And, yeah.

J: Do you ever get to see him?

A: Um, yeah. I see him a couple times. His name's Rick.

J: What does he do?

A: For a living?

J: Yeah.

A: He cleans places, like truck stops. He's a janitor at some places.

J: Cool, and what does your mom do?

A: Nothing yet. She used to work at Wendy's and all that stuff. That was when she had a car. It's kinda hard to do it in the freezing cold these days without a car. But she's trying to get a job which when she does, and when we get enough money, we'll go get our house.

J: What happened to your car?

A: It actually wasn't our car, but it was our car, cause our great grandma let us have it. She kinda gave it to us. Then my grandma took it away from us cause we got kicked out, and she didn't let my mom take the car. I don't know why.

J: So that was- you guys got kicked out of there right before you got into the shelter?

A: Not likely- after we got kicked out, we stayed at my mom's friend's house. They gave us money to stay at Rainbow Motel, then we went to go stay at my friend's house, then we came here.

J: What was it like living with friends?

A: FUN! Cause I got to play with someone every day.

J: Have you ever been hungry?

A: Yeah.

J: I mean, have you never had enough food?

A: No. Always got to eat.

J: That's good. What's the funniest thing that's happened in the shelter? Like, do you have any stories of something funny that's happened here?

A: Umm... No.

J: So what's it like living in the room with your mom and sister?

A: No, not my sister. She ain't living with us now.

J: How old is she?

A: 16.

J: Where did she go?

A: I don't know. I think she's living with friends, or something like that. She... actually, wasn't going to school. She got home schooled, but now she's back in school. At least that's what I heard, that now she's back in school. And she has kind of like a job, like she helps this old lady make dinner and breakfast and stuff, everyday.

J: So who does she stay with?

A: I actually don't know.

J: Do you two get along?

A: Sometimes, when we play fight. Then we argue.

J: So it's just you and your mom. Do you guys get along?

A: Yeah. We never fight.

J: Never?

A: No, never, ever, ever.

J: So you're really close.

A: Mmmhmm.

J: Have you ever had to defend your mom?

A: Yeah.

J: About what?

A: This guy kept trying to push her, cause she wouldn't go down the stairs, and I said, "Hey, don't touch my mom!" and shoved him and stuff.

J: Was that here?

A: No, it was at a friend's. But he stopped after that.

J: That's not cool. Was it just cause she wouldn't go down the stairs fast enough?

A: No, it's cause she didn't want to, and he kept making her.

J: Why?

A: He just kept pushing her and pushing her, and she said stop, so then I shoved him, and he stopped.

J: Are you nervous? [About the interview]

A: No. Yeah.

J: Haha, which one, dude? Can't make up your mind! So, what's your favorite class in school?

A: P.E., music, art.

J: All the fun ones. Do you know what you're doing to do tomorrow?

A: No, we do something different every day. Unless we do catch-up day.

J: What?

A: That's when we catch up on homework from the week. I know it sounds like ketchup, like we'd eat ketchup all day.

J: Yeah, or make it. What's your least favorite class?

A: Math.

J: Oh, it's always math. It's such a pain!

A: It makes my head hurt.

J: So what do you want to do when you grow up?

A: Probably be a football player or a cop, or something.

J: Those are pretty different. Why would you want to be a cop?

A: I like action, and guns and stuff.

J: So you just want to be able to run around-

A: And catch people and stuff. A football player gets to tackle, and stuff.

J: So do you have friends in the shelter?

A: Yeah, uh-huh. I'm friends with the people that's here right now. Except for the little one. The one that's playing on the computer right now. I don't know him yet.

J: He seems kinda quiet right now. Are they new to the shelter?

A: Yeah. But I know the other kids here, I know Jake, Cankles- my mom calls him Cankles, I don't know why, and yeah, other kids.

J: So what do you guys do when you're not in the tutoring room? Do you guys get to play anywhere?

A: ... No.

J: What do you do after school?

A: Mostly- like right when we get out, or when I get here?

J: All of it.

A: Well, when I get out I ride the bus here, and when I get here I say, "Hi mom, I love you," and give her a hug, then come to the tutoring room on the day you guys are here, after that I go eat dinner.

J: Are you hungry?

A: Kinda.

J: So does anyone at school know you live at the shelter?

A: Yeah.

J: What do they think?

A: They think it's a safe place and stuff.

J: Have you ever been bullied?

A: No- well, kinda. They surrounded me, and stuff.

J: Why?

A: Then my friend stepped up and helped me.

J: Made them step down and stuff? What were they saying to you?

A: They were just calling me tiny and stuff. They surrounded me and started pushing me in a circle.

J: You don't seem very little to me.

A: I know. And then my friend stepped in front of them and they ran away, plus I've helped a kid that was getting bullied before.

J: What did you do?

A: Told them to quit.

J: And they stopped?

A: No, not like [snap]. I told them to quit, they didn't quit, I told them again, they didn't. The next day I told them to quit, and finally a teacher caught them.

J: What were they doing?

A: They were, like, kicking him and hitting him. Not hard. Like in the knees and stuff, pushing

him against the fence and trees. The teacher caught him and they all got in trouble with their parents, and got grounded, hopefully.

J: Hopefully! What were they bullying him about?

A: I don't know. Probably his chubbiness, cause he was kinda chubby.

J: That sucks. It's cool you stood up to him.

A: His name's Mark. That was when I went to ----- school. I used to go there.

J: How many times have you had to change schools?

A: ... Not that much.

J: And you have no trouble making friends.

A: No, I make friends like that [snap]. I used to have a best friend here, well, two actually, one was a girl and one was a boy. Their names were Sam and Hope.

J: Oh, yeah! Yeah!

A: You know them? They moved though.

J: I know. I'm so bummed. I really liked them.

A: I know. Now they're living in a camper with no lights and no heat. And yeah, they were my best friends. They were wild, though.

J: I could tell. So you don't get to see them now?

A: No. Well, yeah, when their parents pick them up from the bus. I don't think they go through the bus anymore, though. She kinda has a car that she borrows from their uncle.

J: So how did you find out they were living in a trailer with no heat?

A: They called. I heard my mom talking about it on the phone.

J: And how do you feel about that?

A: About them living in a trailer? Sad.

J: Do you wish they'd come back?

A: Yeah... I think- I also have a little best friend. Do you know Tony?

J: I don't know. He's here?

A: He used to be. He left like, a month ago.

J: I might have seen him once or twice.

A: He's a little dude. He was my new best friend.

J: Who's your new best friend now?

A: I don't know.

J: Still working on it. Do you feel different from people here?

A: Uh huh, yeah, sometimes. Cause... ...

J: Cause why?

A: I don't know. They're different. [long pause]

J: So what do you think about the word homeless?

A: [Immediately] Don't like it.

J: Why?

A: ... Sad. Cause other people are homeless and stuff.

J: What do you picture?

A: What do you mean?

J: When you picture someone who's homeless, what do you imagine?

A: They're poor, broke, they live under a trash can, and it's raining, and yeah.

J: So do you know any kids that are homeless?

A: No. All my friends and all the kids that I know have a roof over their head.

J: Do you know any kids that don't have enough to eat?

A: Probably my friend Ben, but his grandma has money so they can go to Burger King and stuff. So, yeah. But no, actually, no, I don't.

J: So where do you- How long do you think you'll live in the shelter?

A: Hopefully until my mom gets a job. Probably, I don't know, until I'm 11, like or 9 or 7 months or so. My birthday's at the beginning of summer so then I get to play with all my new toys.

J: What was your favorite birthday?

A: Probably when I got a cake shoved in my face.

J: You got a cake shoved in your face?

A: Me and my friend, cause his birthday's pretty much the same as mine. We were at his uncle and auntie's house, and my mom and sister were there too, and we got the cake his uncle and auntie- his auntie got me and shoved it in my face. It was chocolate, too. I liked licking it. Then we had to wash it off. I would have loved to leave it on.

J: How much cake was on your face?

A: A lot.

J: What did you get for that birthday?

A: A batman toy. A little bit of money. Clothes. And that's all.

J: So what do you do for Christmas?

A: Hopefully this Christmas I'll go celebrate it with my grandma, my mom, my sister, cause last time when we were living with my grandma she had to buy a little Christmas tree and put it up and a table, dressed up our dogs. We gave my black dog, his name's Diesel, we put these antlers on him, then we have a little white dog, and she's chubby, and her name is Sassy, and she was a sheep.

J: You had a reindeer and a sheep?

A: Yup! They were cute.

J: So what do you guys do for Christmas? Do you have a big Christmas dinner or lunch?

A: Yeah, big Christmas dinner. Then we get presents, and I mostly get money. I get money on my birthday, Halloween, and stuff. Yeah.

J: What do you use your money for?

A: Games, stuff to eat, toys, and what else? I buy collars for the dogs, sometimes.

J: Are your dogs living with your grandma?

A: Yeah. They're not mine, they're my Grandma and Grandpa's, but they say they can be mine, too.

J: When do you get to see your grandma and grandpa?

A: Like, they come here, and I'm probably going to go see them this weekend. I get to see them almost every Saturday and Sunday. I can't see them on school days, they have to work. Well, my grandma and grandpa got in a bike wreck. Not yesterday or anything, like, four or five, or eight weeks ago, a long time ago. They were driving and this guy pulled out, and my grandpa turned and they started sliding. They hit the car and both went over the car.

J: They're both okay?

A: Yeah, they both broke their legs, my grandpa lost half his nose, and there was a picture of them after the wreck. My grandma's whole leg was splattered open. So they had to put a metal knee cap in. My grandma died two times.

J: Two times?

A: Yeah. She came back alive. She died on the table, and died while taking x-rays, but they made her come back alive.

J: Does she have any stories about that?

A: Probably.

J: Does your mom have any stories about it?

A: No. But- we were driving down the hill and we seen the bike wreck and me and my sister and mom looked at each other and said, that could be grandma and grandpa, but we say in our minds it's not. We went on our way, but we seen an orange piece on the road. His bike was beautiful. It was an orange bike and really pretty. It was an orange piece, next thing you know we seen our grandpa's bike. Next thing you know my mom was crying, I was crying, my sister was crying, my grandma and grandpa's friends are there saying, "Calm down, there at the hospital right now." Everybody was there. Me, my mom, my sister, my friend's dad, my uncle, my grandma and grandpas friends. [long pause]

J: And that was when you were still living with them, right?

A: Yup. You know what? That's past. My grandpa can walk now. His nose healed. He's at work. My grandma is still kinda crippled up, her legs are still- she had to get all these stitches and stuff- she has this cane so she can learn to walk on it. They almost had to cut her whole leg off, but she said no.

J: So what did you do for Halloween?

A: Went with my friend Damien. He's my best friend. And we went to this place where they give out whole candy bars.

J: Where did you go?

A: Out there- it's hard to explain. But it's out there a little bit.

J: What did you go as?

A: I had this robber mask. My friend went as a clown.

J: He went as a clown and you went as a robber? Ha ha!

A: They don't combine.

J: Not unless you're robbing a birthday party. Why did you go as a robber?

A: I felt like it. It was fun though, it was a fun Halloween.

J: How late did you get to stay out?

A: Nineish, eightish, cause we have to be back here by ten. That's when they lock the doors. But I still got a lot of candy. A pillowcase full.

J: Oh my gosh, are you sharing with your mom?

A: Yeah. It's not even half way gone.

J: I bet. That's a lot of candy. What are you doing for Thanksgiving?

A: Hopefully go to my Grandma's again, cause we have a big- I like Thanksgiving, cause you get like, a big chicken things.

J: The turkeys?

A: Yeah, what else do you get turkeys on?

J: Some people have turkeys on Christmas.

A: I mean, but what else do you have?

J: Goose?

A: There's something else my grandma makes and she cooks the bottom of it. We have a Thanksgiving dinner.

J: You have cranberry sauce, stuffing, mashed potatoes?

A: Yeah! Stuffing! That's what I was talking about. All that stuff.

J: So how long did you live at the Rainbow Motel?

A: A couple weeks. Three or four weeks.

J: Did you ever hear people fighting?

A: No.

J: Did you make friends there, too?

A: [Long silence] No, there are no friends there. But I do, yeah, actually, I had friends but they didn't live there. They were at the park. I knew a couple boys and we would go play there.

J: What did you guys- oh, oh, is it dinner time?

END