

# ADVOCATES

First, we listen ...

*"Each of Us Is a Person First"*

*By Lorie Mousseau, 1<sup>st</sup> Prize Winner*

I've always put people first. I've always been respectful of others. I have learned this through different ways and it has taken me a while to get here. My experiences have led me to the person that I am today.

I was born in a strict family never spoke of sex, how to be loved, be loved by other people or how to express love. I've been through any things in my life including, being married having a baby, I was also raped and abused. I have also had to go through an abortion because of how I was brought up. When my father died I went through a breakdown and this is when my family turned against me, because they were ashamed of me. Fifteen years ago I was living with my daughter and my daughter was taken away from me by Gale, my older sister, and my daughter's father. My daughter's father got custody of her. At that time Gale took all of my things from my apartment because I was in a state hospital from a nervous breakdown. And she threw out all of my things and didn't care. She wanted me committed to the state hospital and my mother gave her my key to my apartment so that she could get all of my things out and give them to the Salvation Army. Since then she's hated me and treats me like dirt. She is jealous of me because I have Charles and for the first time in my life I'm happy.

Now my life has changed. I've been taught how to love. I'm getting married to Charles in April, which my family disapproves of. My daughter Amy, who is 25 now, is the only one that likes and respects me and Charles. Cathy and Beth, who are both my sisters, think that Charles just uses me for money because when my mother dies I inherit \$24,000 dollars, which my sisters got a lawyer and made me sign a paper where I get \$200 dollars a month for the next 10 years.

I tried not to treat people like my family does. I'm learning how to love people and respect people. Charles has taught me that. Through the love of God I have learned how to accept people for what they are and who they are. I try not to judge.