

FLEX YOUR X

The dream was crazy. He was 18 and standing before a judge, courtroom packed with social workers, lawmakers, politicians, police, probation officers, juvee-heads, teachers, preachers, lawyers, therapists, and every foster family he ever had. Judge looked down at him and said: *Here you stand in judgment of your e-mancipation, Tell the court why you believe you are prepared to become a productive member of society.*

Young man took himself a swallow, stood tall and let his truth be heard: Your honor, I started out this life as a hummingbird, just looking for a place to land and, for whatever reason, life kept switching up my nest. I did my best to go with the flow, from this nest to that nest... after a while my wings needed rest, so I decided that from now on, I'm gonna flex my X.

Judge frowned, looking down, and said: *What do you mean flex your X?*

Young man replied, X is that thing you pick up every time a family throws you down. It's that hunger that burns inside to feel like you belong. It's the way you learn to see past lies and find the truth. It's the beauty born of a private pact to prove yourself.

Y'all see us as nothing more than train wrecks and rejects, full of missteps and defects, but we're a new nation, we're about to flex our pecs. Every day until we *age out* of your system, we're building dreams inside, *age-ing into* our life mission. Foster care is a journey of attrition and ambition. I wouldn't even be alive at 18 if I hadn't lit my own ignition. Sometimes I doubt myself and my fear chases me with claws and teeth like T-Rex, but then I remember I was *given* this life to shape me into something special, someone who cares about other people's pain and situations in life.

Foster care taught me not to give Love pecks when people need compassion and their due respects. Holding back our Love is what wrecks the whole human complex. See, X is that factor inside picked up from the extraordinary foster care ride. It's about learning how to overcome the hex and make it your reflex to thrive. That's how come I'm extraordinary and I'm still alive.

Y'all in this courtroom can stop craning your necks, we're not rejects with defects, we're like X-Men, we've got super-powered reflex. We've been called mutant and outcast, but we learned what makes each of us special. Our life in foster care is one of those things. Now when life shines its light through our X, that light reflects on objects on our path, and we have new vision. We step over, we step forward, we rise.

We've got a passion y'all can never know, a passion to set the world straight, a passion to grow. We've got stories to tell and gifts to give. We dare to live our lives in super-powered 3-D, not like superficial cartoons on TV. We're fully human and full of destiny. So when they treat us like suspects, we just flex our X. When they call us derelicts, we stand tall and represent our reality like Memorex, then we use our truth in steps to rise up over the mountain and reach our apex. We keep coming up aces no matter the decks.

When you run your checks on our specs, you'll find us listed under *heroes* and *she-roes*, because we survived then thrived, so with all due respects judge sir, I'm not emancipating or aging out, I'm stepping in, stepping up. I'm about to change the game, and to all my people in foster care: When life gives you mess, don't stress, just FLEX YOUR X!

From Jaiya John's book *Beautiful: A Poetic Celebration of Displaced Children*. Online where books are sold. JaiyaJohn.com | [@JaiyaJohn](https://www.facebook.com/JaiyaJohn) | [Facebook.com/JaiyaJohn](https://www.facebook.com/JaiyaJohn)