

My Visit to the White House: December 3, 2000

By Victoria Rowell

"I was invited to lunch in the White House Dining Room with Clare Faulkner, who works with me at my charitable organization, the Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan, by my friend Zina Pierre. After lunch we were given a brief tour of the West Wing. At the end of the tour Ms. Pierre introduced us to President Clinton's personal secretary, Betty Currie.

"I asked Ms. Currie if she would be so kind as to allow me to sit down in her office and write the President a thank-you note for all he has done to support foster care. I wrote that I was in Washington attending the National Post-Adoption Conference sponsored by Casey Family Services and that I was presenting advocacy awards to various House and Senate members that evening. I completed my letter and Ms. Currie assured me that the President would receive it.

"As I was leaving, President Clinton stepped out of the Oval Office. I was just as surprised to see him as he was to see me. We exchanged how do-you-do's and I reminded him that in the recent past Mr. Dick Van Dyke had visited with him in the Oval Office and that I work with Mr. Van Dyke on the CBS/Viacom show 'Diagnosis Murder.' The President recalled the visit and returned to his office. I left feeling completely over the moon having briefly spoken with the President.

"Ms. Pierre escorted us to the Oval Office lobby where we received White House photographs. As we were exchanging good-byes we were summoned by Betty Currie to return to her office. Behaving like any good citizens would do, we met her request. The suspense was palpable. Once we were escorted back to Ms. Currie's office we were informed the President was requesting a meeting with us to discuss my involvement in foster care.

"My excitement was uncontainable; my eyes welled up with tears as I prepared to enter the Oval Office. As I had planned only to have lunch with friends and participate in an impromptu tour, my mind was reeling with thoughts from 'How am I dressed?' to 'What will I say to the President of the United States?' President Clinton couldn't have been warmer. The President remained engaged as I thanked him and the First Lady for their advocacy in helping to pass the Family Preservation Act and the Foster Care Independence Act. The President was pleased and grateful for the acknowledgment of his work on behalf of foster children. At the end of our meeting the President graciously posed for photographs.

"As an alumna of the foster care system, founder of my own non-profit organization and national spokesperson for Casey Family Services, a feeling of pride befell me as I realized at that very moment I was the single voice representing over a half a million foster children in this country. This opportunity was the highlight of my journey. Never had I imagined that *this* foster child would be in the presence of a President of the United States."