

## Foster youth gains a new family — and turns his life around

By Sarah Evans, OYA Communications  
July 7, 2016

It's not uncommon for high school students to ask their teachers for help, but the request Carlos M. put to Gayle Boaz a year ago was highly unusual: would she be his foster parent?

Carlos had been living with his biological mom, but when she left town, he faced moving far away from Salem to live with a foster family or his blood relatives out of state.

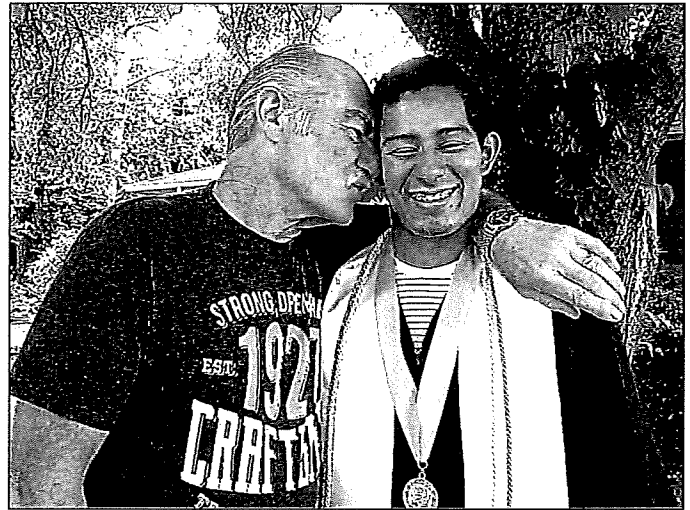
"When my mom left, I felt like I'd been abandoned," Carlos says. "I told Gayle about the situation, and I asked if I could move in with her. We had gotten close at school, because she had helped me a lot."

Heidi Lung, who was the Oregon Youth Authority's Marion County foster care certifier at the time, remembers well the conversations she had with Gayle and her husband, Eldon, as they decided whether to take in Carlos.

"If they hadn't done it, Carlos would have had to leave Salem, his therapist, the support he had at school," Lung says. "The Boazes are an amazing couple. Luckily they believe in change, too."

A year later, Carlos has not only gained new parents, but he has made so many positive changes in his life that several teachers at Sprague High School nominated him for a Turnaround Achievement Award. Salem-Keizer Public Schools give the awards annually to one student at each middle and high school in the district; Carlos was the 2016 winner for Sprague.

"It felt awesome that they noticed what I'd done," says Carlos, who also celebrated his high school graduation in early June. "I didn't really see the change until they pointed it out. But I definitely have changed. I have something to be proud of."



*Carlos with his foster parent, Eldon Boaz.*

I wanted to take the time to thank you for all your support and encouragement over the last several years. Thank you for acknowledging the good in me and for pushing me a better person.

*Excerpt from a letter Carlos wrote to the staff at OYA's Marion County juvenile parole and probation office.*

"I've been developing and growing here," he says of his foster home. "I like the way Pops is in dealing with me. He's a firm but fair guy. That's a big thing that played into my turnaround. Without their guidance and support in my life, I don't think I could have achieved what I did."

Carlos came to OYA as a middle-schooler and went to several residential programs before returning to his mom's home. He says he didn't have strong role models or direction in his life until he moved in with the Boazes.

Carlos was scared about the idea at first — he'd heard Eldon Boaz was a bit gruff — and it took him a while to open up.

"My room was my safe haven," Carlos says. "I stayed in there because I was afraid of doing something wrong and getting called out on it. They told me it was OK to talk with them that it wasn't normal for a teen to be secluded in his room like that.

"I realized they were right. I started interacting, getting comfortable, and it led to more and more."

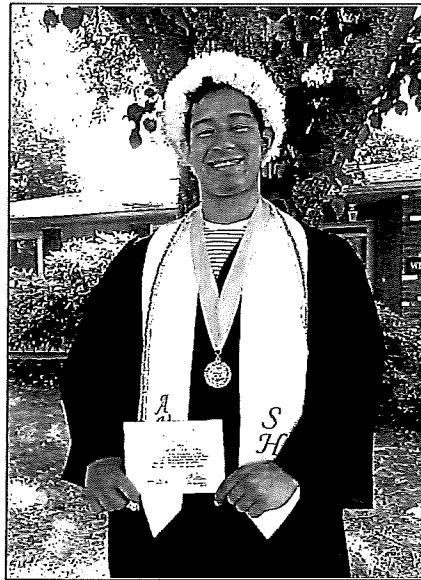
At school, Carlos improved in his classes, which opened up more options for coursework and activities. As a senior, he joined his first high school sport: soccer. He later joined the track team as well.

"I began to explore and became a role model for others," he says. "Soccer was a great experience for me and it made me want to be a good kid. I felt like [the Boazes] supported me the whole way, like what I wanted to do mattered.

"There were things I needed to work on along the way, but they let me know when I needed to step up on things. They didn't yell at me like my biological parents did, and it was a healthier way of doing things. It motivated me better to want to help out."

Carlos says he's "moving on and growing up" as he focuses on his next goal: enrolling in Chemeketa Community College. He hopes to earn his initial credits there before transferring to Western Oregon University to study psychology and human services. Ultimately, he'd like to become a counselor — to help other young people the way he once was helped.

"I started off with people thinking I wasn't going to be anything," he says. "Now I have the opportunity to do something better and become successful. I want to show myself I can do it, but I also want to show



*Carlos holds his high school diploma while standing outside his foster home.*

everyone who went through the struggle with me that they did it for a purpose. I don't want to let anybody down."

Eldon Boaz says he's proud of everything Carlos has accomplished. "He's turned into a nice young man with goals who treats people with respect," Boaz says. "What more can you want?"

"I keep learning from them every day," Carlos says of his new family. "Mom got me through the emotional barriers and helped me develop my understanding of life. And I think of Pops like my dad. I've never had a strong fatherly figure before. It means a lot to me that they have accepted me as part of their family."