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# San Mateo County Times

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"I feel people with disabilities can live as fulfilling a life as the average person or even a more fulfilling life because they push themselves more. Some healthy people might take the things they have for granted."

—Misty Blue Foster



Misty Blue Foster stands with dignity in the cardiac department of the center hospital in Palo Alto. Foster, 36, has a heart condition and is a member of the San Mateo County's Foster Care Program. She is currently studying for a master's degree in counseling.

## San Mateo woman thrives in face of life's adversities

Disabilities, foster care past can't slow her

**By Neil Cummings**

Misty Blue Foster grew up in a small town after losing her mother to a brain aneurysm. She was raised in a foster home and later moved to San Mateo County. She has a heart condition and is a member of the San Mateo County's Foster Care Program. She is currently studying for a master's degree in counseling.



## Cuts threaten drug program for offenders

Proposition 36 shifted approach to prosecute charges, but treatment may be cut to budget cuts

**By Elizabeth Perle**

The elimination of funding for a state law that provides treatment for certain drug possession offenders may be one of the consequences of Proposition 36, which voters passed last November. The law will cut state funding for the treatment program, which is currently funded by state bonds.

## U.S. shuts down embassy in Yemen

Fears of al-Qaida attack prompt closures of American, British facilities in Sana'a, the capital

**By Steve Delaney and Lee Smith**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. and British embassies in Sana'a, Yemen, have been closed in response to a threat of an al-Qaida attack. The U.S. State Department announced the closure on Monday, and the British Embassy followed suit. The closures are the latest in a series of security measures taken by the U.S. and Britain in response to the threat of an al-Qaida attack on the Arabian Peninsula.

## Public policy tapping minds of top scholars

P.D. engineers, scientists to help state Legislature shape laws

**By Steven Hoffman**

SAN FRANCISCO — The Legislature will get a unique advisory group of public policy scholars to help it shape laws. The group, called the Public Policy Council, will be made up of leading scholars in various fields, including engineering, science, and public policy. The council will provide advice to the Legislature on a wide range of public policy issues.

**IN READING MOOD?**

**New Year's miracle for Pwet truckers**

The Pwet truckers' union has announced a new initiative to help its members. The initiative is called the "New Year's miracle" and involves providing financial assistance to truckers who are struggling to pay their bills. The union is currently accepting applications for the program.

[http://www.insidebayarea.com/sanmateocountytimes/localnews/ci\\_14116471](http://www.insidebayarea.com/sanmateocountytimes/localnews/ci_14116471)

## Thriving not just surviving for San Mateo woman with serious disabilities

By Neil Gonzales  
[San Mateo County Times](#)

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Misty Blue Foster grew up in foster care after losing her mother to a drug addiction.

She also spent much time in the hospital having surgeries for serious physical disabilities.

Between foster care and the hospital, there was no question where she would rather be.

"The nurses were some of the most kind people to me," said Foster, now 24, of San Mateo. "I got food. I got my treatment. I was always made to feel special as opposed to when I was in foster care."

Much hasn't gone well in Foster's young life, but she's not complaining.

In fact, she's thriving despite — or even perhaps because of — the medical, emotional and other challenges she has endured.

Her perseverance and accomplishments in the face of severe adversity recently earned her national praise from the Great Comebacks Program. The organization spotlights inspirational people living with intestinal and other diseases that can lead to ostomy surgery, which creates an artificial opening on the body for the discharge of waste.

Just before her recognition, Foster experienced another kind of comeback — she reunited with



## Misty Blue Foster: San Mateo woman thrives in face of life's adversities

the younger sister who she believed died as an infant.

"It's been quite a year," said Foster, a petite woman with a bubbly, round face and a young girl's voice.

### Tough start

Foster was born three months premature and diagnosed with cloacal exstrophy, a rare and complicated

defect in which inner-abdominal structures are exposed.

She also has spina bifida, a birth defect that involves the spinal cord.

She went through several surgeries at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital in Palo Alto to treat her medical conditions.

If that wasn't enough to contend with early in life, she was placed in foster care at age 5 after her mom's incarceration. About a year later, her mom died from heroin use. She doesn't know what ever happened to her father.

She preferred not to talk about her years in foster care other than to say, "It wasn't really good."

At 18, she was out of foster care and on her own. She was determined to not let her disabilities limit what she wanted to do.

"It hasn't been easy because of my physical condition," Foster said, "but that doesn't stop me. I felt that my disabilities didn't mean I didn't deserve the same quality of life as other people. I feel people with disabilities can live as fulfilling a life as the average person or even a more fulfilling life because they push themselves more. Some healthy people might take the things they have for granted."

### Living life

Because of her fond memories of the nurses who cared for her, Foster decided to be just like them.

She studied to get her nursing credentials and currently works as a licensed vocational nurse in the cardiology department of the veterans hospital in Palo Alto.

"Now I take care of vets," she said.

"Sometimes they're self-conscious, but I say don't be because I have some of the same things they have. I can relate to them, and they don't have to be embarrassed."

Maggie Bussey, Foster's supervisor, applauded her work with patients and co-workers.

"She's just wonderful," Bussey said. "I don't want to lose her for anything."

But Foster still has goals to pursue and is continuing her studies at College of San Mateo. She aspires to be ultimately a registered nurse working in a hospital emergency room.

Foster also got married and in her spare time enjoys in-line skating, yoga and practicing the Brazilian martial art of capoeira.

"She has been put in situations that would stop a normal person," said Tom Exler, a good friend of Foster's and vice president of the Association for the Bladder Exstrophy Community based in Michigan.

Great Comebacks was also impressed and in October honored Foster with an Ina Brudnick regional award in memory of the pioneering nurse in ostomy care.

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"These debilitating diseases and the prospect of ostomy surgery can leave you feeling isolated, fearful and uncertain about the future," said Rolf Benirschke, chairman of Great Comebacks and a former professional football player who was diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease.

Foster attended the award ceremonies and met other honorees. "It was an inspiration to hear their stories about not letting their physical disabilities hold them back," she said. "I think that's very important. With advances in medicine, people (with debilitating illnesses) can still go to school, get married and do things that maybe 30 or 40 years ago they can't imagine doing."

### Reunited

Foster couldn't have imagined the e-mail that popped in her inbox a few months earlier.

"You look a lot like me," the e-mail read, "and your name is similar to the sister I had when I was younger."

But Foster thought that the baby sister she recalled holding as a toddler passed away long ago and she had no other family around.

She and the e-mailer confirmed having the same mother and grandmother. After all these years, Foster got back her sister, Brandy, now 18 and living in Rancho Tehama.

Brandy tracked her older sister down through the Internet, finding an online story about Foster winning a scholarship award. A picture of Foster accompanied the profile.

The two reunited Memorial Day weekend. "We're getting to know each other," Foster said. "She's very proud of me."

During that reunion, Brandy handed Foster an unwrapped Christmas gift from their grandmother, who died several years ago.

"My sister kept it, hoping to give to me someday," Foster said. "It had a gift sticker on the wrapping. My sister never opened it."

The sticker said, "To Misty. Love, your Grandma. I love you."

Foster opened the gift.

"It was the most special gift I got," Foster said. "It was a small child's gold charm bracelet."

For more information, visit the Web site [www.greatcomebacks.com](http://www.greatcomebacks.com).