



PC: Jazmyn Hayes

ALEXIS ROSS TAKES BACK HER IDENTITY

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Imagine being one of the most talented and gifted student athletes in your class and having to go home to a place that isn't "home." Well, this was the life of Alexis Ross, campus monitor and alumnus of North High.

Ross was separated from her parents at a very young age due to her parents not being able to take care of her and her sisters. She was adopted and raised in Des Moines, receiving a different last name, which went against her birth mother's requests.

"I always wondered what life would be like if I never got adopted, would I even be alive to tell my story?" she said. Her mother had the choice of raising her and her siblings with her own crisis going on, put them into foster care, or send them all to Nigeria with their father.

Foster care was the decision that was ultimately made, and she and her sisters were legally adopted when Ross was just two years old.

Her adopted parents later got legally divorced which "ruined the family dynamic and threw everything off," she said.

Her adopted father later got remarried

causing much more turmoil in the home.

In middle school, Alexis was facing more issues at home yet her academic and athletic ability hid her harsh childhood. She dealt with hunger and clothing issues along with verbal and mental abuse all while being an outstanding student.

"Although I was going through mayhem at home, I loved school because it felt like a safe spot," Ross said.

When Ross first went to kindergarten she was immediately labeled as "talented and gifted" and because of this new label, she was invited to be one of only three kindergarteners who were allowed to stay for a full day of school, instead of just half days. She felt more loved in school by her teachers than she did at home, and that's when she fell in love with school.

"I was seen as the smart, athletic kid who all the teachers loved and cared for," she said. She felt special as soon as she entered Oak Park Elementary.

She really missed not being able to know about her African culture until later, getting to really know her biological parents more. When asked if she would change anything about her upbringing, Ross said she isn't sure because her life has made her who she is today.

Ross missed out on certain things because she had responsibilities that most students her age didn't have.

"I had to purchase my own car, my own phone, and even my own groceries," she said. She described herself at the time as "a broke high school kid who just wanted a normal childhood."

Just recently, she legally took action to change her name back to her biological family's last name like her bio-mother's wishes stated originally and in that gained a huge part of her identity back. "My identity is more important than a last name."

Ross advises students who say, "You're doing too much" that they're not doing enough. "It's a blessing to be able to live life, so try your best to make it your best," she said.

"Des Moines North is a huge part of my identity; I don't know where I would be without the Polar Bear community. I was even offered a job back at Goodrell with a higher pay rate, teaching I-JAG, but I turned it down because I love the Des Moines North environment and I can relate to the students because I've been in their shoes before," she passionately said.

"Maybe I'll consider another place, but for now I believe North is where God wants me to be, and my job is not finished!"

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