June, 2006

The graduation speech of M. Clonan:

If you ask most people about high school, they'll say they hated it, that they were always waiting for graduation day so they could get out of there, but not me. High School was the best thing that ever happened to me. Not just high school, but Karafin. The Karafin School molded me into who I am today. It gave me a chance to expand my horizon beyond a city block in Yonkers.

Before I came to Karafin, I was afraid of everything. I stopped going to school because I was afraid the other kids would tease me. I barely left my house for a little over a year for fear I'd be ridiculed and I had this constant feeling that people were staring at me. It got so bad that I developed welts all over my body due to bad circulation because I didn't move much. I needed an outlet, and my mother, who never gave up on me sought help.

For about a year, I was enrolled in many different programs, including home schooling, but none of them worked. Then we found Karafin. We visited, and loved it. I was terrified at first, but I pushed myself because I didn't want to be that scared little girl anymore.

When I got to Karafin, I was surprised to find people who were like me. They were scared too. Now, at first my "social phobia" held me back, but I got comfortable. I realized that it was okay to be myself; there was no reason to hide because nobody else was. It helped me see that there was a world far different from the one I grew up in. A world where people saw *you* , not your weight, or the clothes you wear. Nobody cared about how I looked, just who I was. I found out I wasn't so different after all, and even if I was, it wouldn't matter. I met all of my best friends at Karafin over five years ago, and I'm still friends with all of them, because they were just that: Friends.

Had I gone to a Yonkers high school, I would've turned out like all the other drones. I would've strived to fit in, to be a part of everything. I would've strived for something I wasn't meant for. I'm not the same as everyone else. Fitting in isn't important in Karafin because there is no "in crowd", there's just a crowd, where everyone blends. In a way, Karafin saved my life. The people, the atmosphere, everything about it, makes me feel at home. Don't get me wrong, I'm ready to leave, but I'll miss it forever. Karafin taught me so much. This is the one place that made me forget about that scared, awkward, 14 year old girl, and mature into a self-sufficient, fun-loving, determined young woman. I *know* who I am now, and if you asked me about high school in ten years, I'd tell you exactly the same thing.