

Once Her, Now Me

It was summer and the car she was in had no air conditioning and smells of urine. She struggles to finish in time and reaches for the seat belt to wrap around her arm in hopes of finding a spot quicker. While scrambling for her purple and gold bag, she notices the bulge that she was waiting for and runs her finger tips over the area to make sure that's the one. After a quick pinch, blood rushes into the plastic tube and a sense of relief comes over her. She pushes down on the plunger and gets a wave of heat and an immediate sense of relief. She lays back in the passenger side seat and stared up at the blood-spattered ceiling thinking that this cannot be her life and slowly closes her eyes. The flash of street lights passing and sounds of the radio are noticeable, but not enough to snap her out of her daze. She lay there silently praying to fade away and take her last breath.

Addiction has been an issue for her in many forms throughout her entire life. Addiction to people, money, sex, shopping and substances became a normality and an accepted part of her personality. After about 8 years of clean time, the delivery of her third baby caused nerve damage and resulted in prescribed narcotics for pain. One every few hours turned into handfuls at a time and eventually became too expensive to support. That's when heroin came back into her life. It was the strong medicine she needed to numb her pain and feed the demon inside.

Once she made it to her destination, she woke from her daze and noticed there were no available parking spaces which caused a mix of emotion. The walk into the building sends her heart pounding and makes her palms sweat. Trying to gain control, she whispers to herself "OK Tori, you got this." The air smelled of dirty money and sweat and she made her way down the

stairs to the dressing room. As she begins to get undressed, she hears men yelling and laughter as the music playing over the speakers prompted action and movement which warned her of the rough night ahead.

The seasons change but the drive, the rush, the music and the struggle stay the same. The clothing she wore a few months before slid off her body like silk as she seemed to be wasting away. Her children wait all night for Mommy to come back from work only to see her pass the night away in the bathroom and sleep all day. That was until the snow storm came. The wind and snow pounded against the small trailer and made it difficult to take the daily 40-minute trip. The clocked seemed to tick louder as each minute passed in that cigarette smoke filled trailer. Each passing hour made the chills last longer and the stench of vomit stronger. She tried to sleep as much as she could, but the cold cloth that occasionally passed against her head continued to shock her and make her skin crawl even more. The TV was loud but did not drown the sound the bed made as her 3-year-old daughter climbed up to mother her. She managed to open her heavy eyes for long enough to look at her child while she mumbled "Mommy are you sick? Do you need your medicine?" In that moment the clock stopped ticking and the TV became quiet. She suddenly seemed to snap out of a coma that lasted months while those words lingered in her mind. She grabbed her baby, held her tight and spent the night praying for a better life.

How can something can be so powerful to take a mother from her children and leave her begging to die? This is what addiction can do, it has no limits and does not discriminate. This is what addiction did to me. I was stuck in a whirlwind of pain and suffering and was putting my children through the same emotions and experiences. I became a monster with

extreme paranoia. When my child said those words to me, I knew I had to change. I was skin and bone and was hanging on to life by a thread.

The next day the snow stopped, and she took that ride again, and continued to do so for the next 3 weeks. All the while making a 3pm phone call to be put on a waiting list for a hospital bed. She continued to spend all the dirty money and feel that quick pinch regularly but was not focused on the desire to be numb, she focused on being able to stand on the floor and make a meal for her child. Finally, the day had come. She rushed to stuff all her child's belongings into a bag and ran her out to the waiting car. She heard the sound the car seat made when the seatbelt was in place and it made her knees weak. She waived good bye as her father made his way down the snow-covered driveway and stood there anxiously waiting for her turn to leave.

The trip seemed to take a lifetime. She laid back and stared at the clean cloth ceiling as the flash of streetlights passed her by. The sounds in the van were very different than the sounds she became accustomed to. The man that drove the van seemed to be so happy and didn't look at her like she was simply flesh. He was overweight man with kind eyes, a huge smile, and he spoke with a thick Spanish accent. As he repeatedly laughed with his friend, she watched them for hours and hoped that she would be able to laugh like that soon. Suddenly she noticed the van was slowing down in front of a beautiful building and seemed to be filled with sunlight. When the van stopped she unbuckled the seatbelt and removed it from her chest. She stepped out, took a deep breath and thought to herself "OK Katy, Tori is gone. You got it from here."