

A Daughter... and a Mom

My name is Felicia. I'm 22 years old and work for the Tri-county health services department in Maine. I also go to college and hope to major in either social work or criminal justice. I'm engaged and the mother of an 8-month-old boy. I love to sing and have been in several plays at the community theater.

I grew up with a single parent, my mom, who struggled with alcoholism and probably the after-effects of childhood sexual abuse. She was a prostitute, and hooked up with a military guy in a one night stand. The result was me.

By age 5, I was sexually abused by three men. I never had a good relationship with men before my fiancée and that was definitely because of my mom—seeing men abuse and mistreat her and her letting them do all that. Because she was a prostitute,



if men didn't like what she gave, they wouldn't pay her or they would beat her. My grandfather abused me, and I think he abused her too. He was an angry guy, and I wonder if he passed that characteristic onto her. She had

drunken rages and abused me; she would beat someone if she couldn't find a drink. I think some of that could have been avoided if she had been more mentally stable. My mom needed all sorts of support, but no one was ever there for her. I can't help but think that if she had had a chance with foster care, she wouldn't have been the way she was.

While I lived with my mom, I remember my dad coming to visit me every once in a while and giving me presents. Then, when I was 7, I went to live with my dad. I don't really remember much about living with him, but it was more stable. He had a job and a good place to live. But that only lasted for about a year.

Then one day my mom called and said that she wanted me to come home. She promised she was done drinking and that my step dad wasn't

going to be around. She had just had a baby and wanted me to meet my new stepsister. I went back—but the whole thing was a trap. My mom stayed home for about a week when I first returned, and then she started to just leave us alone. She left me to take care of the baby by myself. She would come back every once in a while to give us food or money but would just leave again. So I was pretty much by myself.

I tried to keep going to school even though I had to take care of the baby. I would ask my neighbors if they could watch her when I wanted to go to school. I would say my mom had to leave early for work and make up excuses, but I think they knew what was really going on. Apparently—I didn't know this until later—the police were outside my house undercover for a while. The step father wasn't supposed to be around me, but he was coming in and out of the house and they saw that. They also saw that I was being left alone a lot. So, eventually the police came in and took me into foster care.

I lived with the same foster family for almost 10 years—until I graduated from high school. For me, it was a second chance at life. It was like being baptized. I didn't start making real connections until a few years into foster care, and after a few years of counseling. I was very angry and couldn't trust people. I mean, if you can't trust the person who birthed you, who can you trust? I would beat on people just like my mom. But I was lucky and had a lot of support that got me through some really rough times. My third-grade math teacher got me into singing—she encouraged me to audition for the elementary school choir and I got in and just kept on going. Then and now, theater is a great source of support. I have had all these people in my life that really cared—my foster family, counselor, teachers, my music instructors—they have been everything to me. They provided positive support by telling me that I was a good person. They gave me the positive reinforcement that I was lacking in my past life. My mom didn't have

any of that. I sometimes think about what could have happened to me if it weren't for them. I would be like my mom.

I had contact with my mom for the first 2 years I was in foster care. Then my mom and I got into an argument and we said we never wanted to see each other again. That was the last time I ever spoke to her. I see her about once a month now just walking around the neighborhood but I haven't talked to her. When I look at her, she looks out of it. She doesn't look well at all. I know she still drinks because I know the people who own the convenience store and they told me she comes in there every day to buy alcohol. Every once in a while, I would think of trying to talk to her, but when I learned she still drinks I changed my mind. My sister was adopted by a former teacher of mine. She lives a half hour away and I see her quite often. She's doing great—she really excels in almost anything she touches.

Now that I am a parent myself, I sometimes fear whether I am a good parent. I worry that other people might not think I am doing a good job. It is something that is always in the back of my mind. I try to remind myself every day that I am going to be a better parent than my mom ever was. I think my foster mom really helped. She was patient with kids and did a lot of activities with them.

We would go outside and play, color, and work with clay. My mom would never do anything with us and so we just sat around and did nothing. But I know the best way to parent is to do a lot of activities with your kids and be patient when your baby is fussy. My baby is a good baby—he is really easy going and relaxed so it's easy to be with him—but sometimes, I freak out when he is fussy and I wonder what I should do. But then we just go on a walk together and I take a deep breath of fresh air and relax. And, with their love and support, I can talk to and work through things with my family and closest friends. My best friend is a social worker, but sometimes I think I should have counseling, and not rely as much on my friends. When I feel parenting anxiety, my coping mechanisms are reaching out for the support of those around me and knowing that my son is relying on me to give him what he needs. That is my therapy! I am working on being patient, knowing that I am OK, and just going through what every other mom goes through.

Author

Felicia Brown is a youth resource specialist for the Thrive Initiative and the Tri-County Mental Health Services in Maine.

