

## **Faces of Addiction – Testimony of Triumph from Tragedy** *Told through the eyes of Brianne, a mother & addict, and her Son, Brandon*

**Brianne:** I remember excelling in sports, going for walks, playing tag, hide and seek, birthday parties, sleepovers, and hanging out at football games with friends. I remember Saturday morning cartoons and watching Disney movies on Sunday nights. I remember family gatherings, and trips to Grandma and Grandpa’s cabin where I loved to fish and hang out at the Lake.

My Substance Abuse began at age 12, and as with many addicts, it started with cigarettes, pot, and booze. By 14, I was always in trouble, drinking, and drugging as much as I could. I told so many lies I couldn’t keep up. I was stealing...even from my own mother. The police were a constant presence; along with psychiatric hospitals, juvenile centers, and jail. I was a runaway and pregnant by 15. At 16, I gave birth to my 1<sup>st</sup> child, Brandon. But I continued as if I had no responsibilities; bouncing between alcohol, marijuana, acid, “shrooms”, cocaine, crack, crystal meth, ecstasy, and heroin. Of course, I had the biggest responsibility in the world....a child.

**Brandon:** Raised by a mother so young and crazy, my life wasn’t the easiest financially, emotionally, or spiritually. I grew up with no siblings; just me and a teenage mom with a drug problem, supporting a kid she had too early in life. My father abandoned us and was in prison before I got the chance to know him. We were flat broke. I made friends, but constantly switching schools taught me not to hold on to relationships too hard. With mom and her crazy life, who knew when we would have to move again?

Mom dragged me with her wherever she went. I remember many situations where mom was drinking or doing drugs. I was so young; I had no idea what a “normal” life was. I remember when I was 8 years old; I sat, wobbling on a water bed, watching mom talk to a man with a gun strapped to his wheelchair. Then there was a “Lieutenant Dan the Dealer” in one room doing crack with my mom while some prostitutes used the bathroom to do “their business”. And, there I was... watching cartoons, laughing at Tom and Jerry; not understanding what was going on around me. Yea, there I was, a kid put in situations with drug dealers and prostitutes, even sexually molested at age 7. How could this kid amount to anything?

**Brianne:** Because of the grip addiction had on me, I hardly knew anything about my son until he was 10. I missed out on all the memories and milestones most mothers cherish of their little one. I never had a chance to bond with my son and embrace the feeling of awe as a young mother. It’s all still a mystery to me. I missed it. Addiction stole it from me.



After having my 2<sup>nd</sup> child at 25, I wanted to be a good mom and stop the madness in my life. I felt lost, alone, sad, angry, tired, and confused. I felt like a failure. I hated life. I had no friends and my family had given up. I had nowhere to turn. I just wanted to enjoy my children and be the best mom I could be. I wanted to go back to school and make something of myself. I wanted to take family vacations, ride bikes, rake leaves, carve pumpkins, eat snowflakes, sing in the shower, smile, and laugh again. I tried to stop using multiple times, but it always ended in failure. I absolutely hated what I was doing and who I had become. I just couldn’t stop. No consequence could keep me from it; not the loss of my children, legal problems, losing family and friends, not even living on the streets could keep me from using. I couldn’t

understand why getting and staying clean seemed impossible.

**Brandon:** One day she told me she was going to “meetings”. Suddenly, my mom was gone and I was pulled out of school to live with my grandparents. I finally felt safe with my grandparents. But eventually, my grandparents told me I had to move again - to Port Huron. I cried. I didn’t want to leave! But I was reunited with mom and we ended up in an apartment for people in recovery who can’t afford rent. We lived among other recovering drug addicts. We literally had nothing. No clothes, no furniture... nothing. We acquired a few things through churches, goodwill, and the like. We lived there for about a year. I made some good friends, but wasn’t doing well in school.

Next thing you know, we moved again, now with a new man named “Nick”. He kept us afloat in a decent place by the water. My life was video games and the beach with his two



kids. That was short lived too. Mom relapsed and we headed back to a homeless shelter. I was 12 years old, sharing a bunk bed with mom and eating at soup kitchens.

**Brianne:** I couldn't understand why it was so hard to stay clean until I finally accepted help from those who knew more than me. Any addict that thinks they can get clean and stay clean on their own is kidding themselves. With the help and support I received during my recovery, I finally understood the truth about myself. I lived for only one thing - to feed a craving inside of me that I didn't know existed. For most of my life, I thought I was a bad person; only to realize I was a good person with a disease. I wasn't a horrible human being. I was sick. I never knew addiction was a disease and that recovery was possible.



**Brandon:** After a while, my mom started to go to meetings with other addicts working toward recovery. I saw mom starting to form connections with these people. She had real friends and was staying sober. I finally had normal relationships with friends. I was on the basketball team. My grades were improving. I was gaining confidence. My mother was a year into her sobriety. We lived in an apartment and I was in high school. I was choosing my own outfits, forming friend groups, playing sports, talking about colleges. I seemed to be sliding into a somewhat normal life.

Wow! How was I okay? I had a mother who was a heroin addict at one point; surrounded by kids that were bad influences; in the presence of dangerous drug dealers; sexually abused as a child; often going without basic needs like clothes and food. But I never once felt sad or angry towards anything.

**Brianne:** By the Grace of God and a lot of hard work, I've been sober for 8 years 10 months. I have an amazing relationship with my children. I married a wonderful man and love mothering his two children. We just purchased our first home and adopted our first puppy named Zenna. I earned my degree. I accepted a position as Peer Recovery Coach at CARE of Southeastern Michigan where I answer the cries of other addicts who believe their situation is hopeless. They dream for a better life, to be a better person, to love, and to be loved. CARE welcomes them, with outstretched hands, and without judgement. I love being a part of this support system. I know how many lives are transformed, and in some cases, even saved.

**Brandon:** I'm 21 now. When I tell my story, people feel bad for me. I think "why?" I am more than okay! Once living in shelters; we have a home in a nice neighborhood. We even have a dog! I am a top tier athlete in a martial arts sport and travel the world sharing my love and passion. I'll soon graduate from community college and have a beautiful girlfriend who loves and respects me. Because I've seen and experienced so much, I'm able to "walk in people's shoes" and see the possibilities within them. I beat



the odds and I am changing the world! I will accomplish more than most that had a "normal" upbringing and will continue to make my mother proud.

**Brianne:** Today, I'm singing in the shower again. I enjoy movie nights, family dinners, vacations, hiking, fishing, eating snowflakes, and carving pumpkins. I can dream about a future that shines brighter each day that passes. Today, tomorrow and always, I know I will smile, laugh, and love... a lot! I am happy. I'm thankful. I'm me again!

**Brandon:** They say those who have been through the most are most aware of the true meaning of life. Mom and I have found our purpose. Each day is a gift that offers a chance to bring what we can to the world and share our experiences; helping others get through their tough times in life. This is just the beginning. The best chapters of our stories are yet to come.



#### CARE's Peer Recovery Coach Program

Recovery Coaches are trained men and women who have succeeded in breaking their addiction and leading a life of sustained recovery. These professionals work with individuals in substance abuse treatment and working toward recovery. Peer Recovery Coaches don't "talk the talk", but "walk the walk" 24x7 as trusted partners in the healing process and road to long-term health and well-being.

#### CARE's Project FOCUS Children's Camps

Children impacted by a loved one's addiction learn to recognize that they did not cause it and cannot cure it. Project FOCUS offers a safe place to be supported. Camp improves resiliency and ability to cope with living in high stress family situations. Parents and caregivers are also welcomed to participate. Project FOCUS is FREE to anyone concerned about a family member's use of alcohol or drugs.