



Refuse to be a Victim

Growing up I always felt very fortunate, I had a really great family life. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and my dad worked a lot but always made time for us. I was a total daddy's girl, and we were extremely close my entire life. My parents always made sure we had everything we ever needed. I am pretty sure they lived paycheck to paycheck but I never knew we struggled to make ends meet. Looking back, we never really went on family vacations or out to eat, I didn't have name brand clothes, but I never really cared. I always felt like I was extremely lucky because I had parents that would do anything for me. I was never told I couldn't join a club or do a sport, I always had full support, they always pushed me to try new things and do my best. I didn't have secrets from my parents we were all a very close family.

My junior year of high school, things started to change. I had been playing travel softball for a couple years and we started to really do a lot of traveling, to a lot of places further away and I could tell financially it was starting to get hard. We wanted to go to different ball tournaments though because there would be college scouts, and that would hopefully be a way for me to get into college.



My mom decided she would start back to work; she started part time at first then went full time at a bank. It was the first time that she had a real job since she was about 18 years old. I think she was finally starting to feel like she was doing something for herself and had a purpose. She started hanging out with friends and finding a life outside of kids. Things at home were different, she would come home later and later, and she would go out with friends often. She would tell me she was having so much fun just shopping and being able to talk and socialize. I was glad she was having fun, but it also hurt a little that she was choosing that over us. I could tell it was hurting my dad also. Since my dad and I were so close he would confide in me a lot. I can remember one night getting home late from ball practice late. I went to my room that night cleaned up, did my homework, and grabbed something from the kitchen. When I noticed my dad sitting on our back step sobbing and really upset. I walked out and he just grabbed me and hugged me and apologizing for breaking down. We talked about how things had been tough with mom. She had been home with kids almost her whole life and now she just wants to go out and enjoy her time. I am pretty sure she wanted a divorce, but he never told me that's what she wanted. Over the course of a month there would be times that dad would have talks about how he was trying to be supportive, but she just wants to do things for herself right now. Watching my dad break down and cry and just say he needed a hug was one of the hardest things for me to have to witness.



I can remember the night I got my senior pictures I was so excited to show my mom because up until this point my mom and I were really close, too. We had long talks about boys and life all the time. This particular night I was so excited for her to come home, and she was two hours past when she was going to be there. When she finally got home I threw the pictures across the table at her and said some rude comment. She looked at me and knew how upset I was. That night she explained everything to me and told me how she felt like she had been trapped taking care of kids for so long right out of H.S. and now she finally felt she was doing something that gave her life meaning and value. For about another week I listened to both my mom and my dad go back and forth telling me their feelings and everything they were trying to do and what they were going through. Mind you I was a 17year old kid finishing my junior year of high school, not a marriage counselor. I felt like both of them were pulling me back and forth and just needing me to listen and justify their feelings.



I got to the point I didn't want to go home anymore because I didn't want to feel like I had to pick sides. I started making excuses why I didn't want to go home and just kept staying at different friends houses. I stayed at a friend's house the night before our class trip to an amusement park. We got up that morning got on the bus to spend the day about three hours away. When we finally got on the bus to head home everyone was a little off. They were quiet and not saying much besides lots of whispers. I looked at the bus driver who was a mom of one of the girls in my class, and she was in tears. I asked her if everything was ok and she assured me she was fine. It was a very very quiet ride home. I just figured everyone was tired. However, when we get into town the bus isn't going to the high school, where all of our cars were. The bus started going towards our elementary school. I am sitting in a seat with my friend Katy. We look at each other like what is going on. Then we see flashing police lights and we pull into the elementary parking lot. We immediately think someone is in serious trouble. We had nothing to worry about because we were the good kids and never did anything crazy enough to get us in trouble. We are just waiting to see what is about to happen. The bus doors open and in comes a police officer, he starts walking down the aisle and he is getting closer. Then I get this feeling come over me like DO NOT STOP at my seat!! Then he stops at my seat and at this point I look at my friend like it's got to be you, I didn't do anything!! He motions to both of us to come with him. I start following him and I get to the door of the bus, and there stands my cousin and his friend. They take me and Katy to a car, where my grandmother is sitting in the back seat with this sweater draped over her shoulders and she is holding a wadded-up tissue just crying. She looks up at me and says "they are gone". I started screaming take me to see them, I want to see them now! They wouldn't take me. We pulled up to my grandmother's house where there were so many people in every direction, people were talking to me but I have no idea what they were saying. My two brothers were standing on the step, and we all hugged for a long time before going inside to watch the news tell me over and over again that my parents were dead, due to murder/suicide.



The next day was a blur, then they said we could finally go back to my house. When I went in, the glass to the back porch door was broke. I opened the door, and I was completely overwhelmed with the smell of chemicals and what I guess to be blood/dead body smell. I walk in my parents room and most of the furniture and walls were poorly wiped down, there were still smears of blood where they tried to clean. I walk in the bathroom in my parents room and in the wall are all these crescent shape marks about the size of a quarter and the shower curtain was missing. At this point I still haven't been told what happened I just know they are gone, and I can't see the bodies.

After thinking about it I needed to know, as much as everyone tried to talk me out of it, I wanted the specifics. I had to have the details and if they wouldn't show me the bodies then I wanted to see the pictures from the crime scene. I was told that the only other people who had scene photos like this had both died shortly after. One was due to age but the other was due to suicide because they couldn't handle it. I guess they were trying to scare me from looking, but I couldn't handle the not knowing. I found out that my father beat my mother with a hammer 17xs to the head and face with multiple blows to the chest and arms. I looked through the photos and saw that he beat her in the bathroom, that is why the marks were in the wall and the shower curtain was gone. I saw a photo with her wedding ring in the middle of the bathroom floor, I saw a photo with what looked like her brain shot out on the bathroom wall and it had slid down to the floor. Her pinkies were photographed because they had been broken. I saw a photo where he had laid her down and sat beside her and shot himself, his head looked like what an old pumpkin looks like with the face all caved in.



After looking through all the photos and listening to the officers explain the scene as they found it. I put my own thoughts together on what I think happened, I believe they were driving home and got into an argument, must have been a pretty intense one. My mom ran into the house and locked the door, dad must have been following her and grabbed the hammer off the porch and broke the glass to get in. He would have chased her into the bedroom, where she probably locked herself in her bathroom. I am guessing he beat the door down which made her mad enough to throw her wedding ring at him where it laid in the middle of the floor. That made him lose control and he just began to beat her, which they told me he went into a “fit of rage” apparently it is when you lose control of your emotional state and don’t realize what you are doing. I never bothered to look this up if it is a real thing or not. When he finally came to and realized what he had done he knew she wasn’t going to survive and so he shot her with the shotgun. He drug her limp body, this is why I think her pinkies were broken, and he laid her on the bed. He then called a family friend to tell him to send the police he had done something very bad. I am guessing he didn’t want me to come home from my trip and find their bodies. He then called his mother and told her that he loved her and he was sorry. After that he opened my mothers arm sat beside her and shot himself so that he would fall back into her arm.



I went back to that house one last time, I went back to see it completely emptied and everything outside on our basketball court as people made bids on everything we owned, it was all being auctioned off. I stood in my bedroom of the house watching out the window as people walked off with different pieces of furniture a lamp, dishes, random things. They even auctioned off the house that day. I said goodbye to my room that my mom and I had painted and hand stenciled the border around the ceiling, I said goodbye to my giant barn that I had a taped outline of batter's box that I would pitch to for hours and hours, I said goodbye to the beautiful irises that my mom collected from all over to include in her garden, I said a lot of goodbyes that day.

A lot of that summer is foggy and I can't remember much, but I do remember that next weekend I had a softball tournament and I had set up to take my ACT's for college. No one expected me to go, and that is when I started to realize no one expected anything from me anymore. I went and played my heart out and took my ACT's. I could either sit around and feel sorry for myself or use this as motivation to make them proud. I knew I wasn't going to let this be the end of me too. I could hear the whispers and people would talk, and it drove me crazy that everyone just expected me to lose all my motivation and do nothing because this happened to me. It was hard, extremely hard, and it got worse. In my parents will they made my Aunt our guardian who lived in GA, with us being in Ohio we tried to stay with my grandmother but she couldn't handle all of us. My two brothers went to GA and I stayed in Ohio bouncing around from friends and family to try to finish my senior year. My Aunt in Georgia had 5 kids of her own and couldn't handle both my brothers, so she ended up sending one of my brothers to Utah to a "depression" camp. We all got split up and raised by different families.



I was determined to make something of myself, I did not want people to know me as poor Justyn her parents killed themselves. I wanted people to say my name and know me because I achieved something, or I was successful, that was my motivation. I was not going to take handouts from anyone, I was going to put in the work and energy to make something of myself. My parents had a life insurance policy but I refused to use that money. I always told myself that was blood money and since they passed I still have most of it sitting in money markets and stocks. I worked hard in school and busted my butt in softball, I was accepted to a Div 3 college where I got partial scholarships and the rest I paid for with student loans. I played 4 years of college softball, my senior year I was awarded 1st Team all OAC. I graduated college with a 3.2 GPA (it isn't awesome, but I am happy with it!) I went into sales for a few years then became an event/wedding planner. I decided I wanted to have a more flexible career and went into real estate. I have been married twice, I got it right the second time and we have 4 awesome kiddos. Together we run my husband's custom home building business and we operate our cabin rental business. Most of our friends that we run around with don't know of my past because I don't let that define me. It is and always will be my motivation to do better with my life and make sure my kids never have to feel abandoned or lost like I did. I hope that everyone can hear my story and know that just because bad things happen doesn't mean you have to be a victim forever.



A couple things that I will add because there were things that I learned later in life that I didn't realize while I was going through everything. I found out that my dad had been seeing a therapist who had prescribed him prescription pills. I have no idea what they were but police or someone let me know that whatever medication they had put him on, gave him the reverse effect. Apparently, he was taking them for depression, and they sent him into a further depression. I was very angry with my mother for a long time afterwards because I felt like it was her fault all of this happened. It took me going through my own divorce to realize how she felt. I now know how she had felt so trapped and she just wasn't happy. I have learned a lot over the years, I feel like I have been successful and proved that all those whispers and people with low expectations of me, weren't going to hold me back!