

MY STORY

Someone recently told me that everyone has a story, but, that doesn't mean that they all have to be dark and dramatic. Hearing that that made me think about my own story because when I take a look back it's hard to see any positive or happy times. I can remember the three of us kids making the best of bad situations. When I say the three of us, I mean my sister Trevona, my brother Franco, and me, Carlos. My mother struggled a lot with trying to provide for us kids. I was pretty resentful towards her for a long time, but now that I can look back I can see that even though she made some mistakes, she tried her best. It's taken me years to get to this point and it feels good to be able to let that resentment go, well at least start to let it go.

Let me go back as far as I can. In my earliest memories I can remember my mother and my father were still together and we lived as a family. In those times we didn't go without much, but the way that we got our stuff was not the most honest way. When most kids were going fishing or hanging out with their friends, we were in the mall getting hands on training on how to get what we wanted for free. At the time it seemed natural, exciting, but natural. I remember my father would have my brother and I tuck our tee shirts in and wear big Cleveland Browns coats. We would go into a store and take what we wanted and stuff it into our shirts and the

MY STORY

baggy coats would hide the bulge. We had all kinds of stuff, toys, cloths, and everything else that we needed or wanted. This one time my brother Franco and I was in the K.B. Toy Store in the mall, and he stole a train set that was bigger than him. I remember how exciting it felt to just go into a store and get what we wanted. I can see how crazy that was now, now that I can look back on it, but like I said earlier, at that time in my life, it all seemed natural.

There was another side to my father that wasn't so pleasant. I still don't know exactly what he suffered from but he was a very abusive and disturbed person. I don't like to go into detail on this subject so I'll just share the quick version on this part of my life. There was lots of abuse. My father would beat my mom, he would hear voices, and he suffered from some mental problems that progressed with time. It got to a point to where my mother took us and left him.

Things started to change after we left my father and I remember moving around a lot. We went from having lots of toys and material things, to having hungry bellies and a very small amount of clothes. My mother had it pretty bad and I never really understood that until recently. Every time she moved us my father would find us. That caused us to move out of

MY STORY

town and it seemed like that made things worse. I remember living in dumpy apartments and being so hungry that I would get sick. I would get so mad that I would get to a point where I would just shut down. I started to build a wall up inside of me at a very young age. At the time it seemed like a good idea, but I had no idea of the effects it was going to have on me as I grew up. The wall was a defense wall that was designed to protect me from ever getting hurt again, but in the long run it had a devastating effect that isolated me from everyone, even God.

After moving around from town to town, apartment to shelter, family member to stranger, my mother did the only thing left to do. I remember we were standing in front of a gas station and my mother looked at us trying real hard to smile but had tears rolling down her face. She told us that she loved us, but we were going to go live with a different family. A lady came that same day and took my brother and me. My grandmother kept my sister for a few months, but then she came and joined us too. We went to go live on a cow farm in North Hampton. The first night there was truly the worst night of my life. Its crazy how something good can come out of something so bad, sometimes I think it takes something bad to happen for people to reach out. When I was lying in my bed that night I didn't say a word out loud. My brother laid on the opposite side of the room and we cried all night

MY STORY

long. I was lost and confused, and all I could think about was how long was we going to have to stay here. During that horrible, lonely night something beautiful happened to me. Again, the blessing was not visible at the time but still to this day it proves to be the best thing that's ever happened to me. That night when I was laying there in that bed, I said a prayer. I said my first real, heart filled prayer. I'm not sure, but I feel like if I wasn't in such a painful and lost spot in my life, I might never have reached out the way I did.

Our foster parents weren't the nicest people in the world and I really couldn't wait to get out of there. I think we ended up staying there for about two years, and then whoever was in charge decided that they would split us up. My sister was the first to go. She moved into a home in town and she said she liked it so I was happy for her. My brother was next to go and that was pretty hard for me because my brother and I was always real close. He moved a couple of blocks down the street to a trailer park and I think he liked it there. After a couple of let downs, someone thought that it would be a good idea for me to be moved also. They sent me to a home that was still out in the country, but it was a lot better than the first one. The foster parents were Christians and we went to church every Sunday and

MY STORY

Wednesday, and they also enrolled me into a Christian school. I didn't know what to think at first, but it turned out to be a really good experience.

After a few years of foster care, my mother got us back. Once we were all back together again, I started to see things for the first time. My mother was with a guy and they were on drugs. I'm not sure how she got us back being on drugs, but she did. Somewhere back before foster care; my mother gave birth to twin girls. She gave them up for adoption.

My mother had different men in and out of our life and we continued to move a lot. We went from one neighborhood to another and always ending up on the west end of town. I usually tell people that I grew up on the west end because of that reason. It seemed that she would always make the worst decisions and that drove me crazy. I would fight with the feelings of me loving her, and being mad at her at the same time. This happened a lot and it got to a point to where I wasn't even sure if I even liked her anymore.

The things I went through caused me to view the world as a mean place, but in time I was showed how to turn those experiences into strengths. I wanted to share that because every time I talk about the past, it always sounds so negative. My family and I did have some good times too.

MY STORY

I remember times when we would go for walks and to the park. I sometimes find myself laughing real hard over the silliest things and I think that's because of the way I was raised. Being alone and being broke a lot, I had to find ways to entertain myself and that meant to find the humor in the situation. Like this one time when Franco and I was in the same foster home together and was both in trouble for something that we probably didn't even do, and Jane, our foster mom, had the both of us on the couch for time out. Jerry, our so called foster brother that was mean as heck, and never got in trouble for nothing, was taunting us so I came up with a plan. Jane was in the kitchen doing the dishes so I convinced Jerry to sneak into the kitchen and bite her on the butt. I couldn't believe it, but little Jerry thought it was a good idea and he ran into the room, growling, and gave Jane the bite of her life! She screamed at the top of her lungs and threw a plate across the room!!!!

So anyways to get back to where I was at, I started high school and that's when I started to experiment. I started skipping school, smoking cigarettes, drinking, doing drugs, having sex, fighting, going to parties, and I think it would be safe to say that my whole life changed. I could go way into detail with this but to make a very long story short; my life started a downhill journey.

MY STORY

I went through a lot with the whole drug thing. When I was using, it was like my escape from the pain and anger of the past. It didn't seem like a bad idea at the time, but it lead to me dying a spiritual death. I got to a point where I stopped caring about life altogether. I was a very angry and depressed person, and the bad thing was, I was the last one to realize it. Denial can be pretty tricky.

By the time I was at the end of my drug use I was homeless, spiritual bankrupted, had made a horrible reputation for myself, had got my nose, eye socket, cheek, and hand broke, and had made all kinds of enemies. It seemed as if my life was done for and I came so close to just giving up. That's when I hit my bottom and once again, reached out for help, the kind of help that a person couldn't give. I remember praying to God and telling him that I was sorry, and that if he had a plan for me than now would be a nice time to show me, at least a hint. Something that I've learned about God is that He never left me. When I was out there formulating all those plans, those "survival skills", somehow, somewhere along the way, I turned my back on him. It's like He was there the whole time just waiting on me to let him in because all it took was me surrendering to him, and then there he was.

MY STORY

About a month latter I was in treatment, and that's when the blessings started. There's so much that's happened from then to now that it would take me forever to share it all. I have no problem sharing my story and I really enjoy the opportunity, but what I can say about this part of my life is that God works miracles every day. He does, He really does! The only difference in him working miracles in other peoples life compared to him doing it in my life is ME. I must first ask, believe, allow him to work, and then give him the credit. That's it.

NOW

I'm now 31 years old, single, living on my own, and working at Think Tank as a VISTA. Although there are lots of things that are different, I'd say the biggest thing about my life that's changed is the way I view it. A lot of the old problems are not as bad, and some of them are not even problems anymore. New ones however, turn up all the time, but I get through them. I've learned that I can't change the past, but I can change the way I react to it. It's very important to stay positive and to find the gratitude in the situation because if I spend too much time focusing on the problem, well, I become the problem.

MY STORY

My life is pretty stable now days and I can honestly say that I'm happy to be alive. So many things that I use to run and hide from has been turned into strength. All my experience of going through the things that I went through is what I bring to the table. I never would have imagined that I'd be a happy person. I mean there was lots of times when I would put on the happy mask, but to be really happy, happy to just be me, that's the kind of feeling that's hard to describe.

It's funny how certain things come along at the right time. It's like that old saying goes, "When the student is ready the teacher will appear." A few years ago I probably wouldn't have had any interest at all in taking an honest look at myself, or planning for the future, or giving back. For one, I didn't even like myself, the way I viewed my future was on a very short term level, and as for the giving back part, well, how could I give back when my mind set was on "How can I get out of this mess right now!?" It's obvious that I had to deal with some personal issues before I could even think about getting ahead, but once I did, with lots of help, I was introduced to the Getting Ahead Class. At that time in my life I didn't really know what it was about or what kind of people I would meet, but I did know that I was willing to grow. I've been through a lot and have been given lots of tools. Some doors have been opened for me that I never even saw before. The Getting

MY STORY

Ahead Class has defiantly been one of those doors. I got to see for the first time how the hidden rules plays a big part in the things that people do and how we act. I was introduced to the different class lines and could see how this affects some people's relationships. I've also been learning how to use these things in my personal life to build relationships with people that I would of never have done before. One of the best parts of all this is the way that I am giving a chance to give back. Growing up in generational poverty is more than just being broke. There are lots of other things, misunderstood things that come along with it such as resentment, anger, fear, pain, guilt, shame, and even more. The thing is, that it's hard to see those things when your use to them. I mean how could I of ever known that there was another way, or how to get to the other way, when there wasn't no one there to show me or teach me how? Some people look at the poor and think that they just need to get a job and quit feeling sorry for themselves. Some people look at the wealthy and think that their just spoiled brats and they don't appreciate anything. I share this because I've seen it from both sides and I can see the ugly in it. One of the things that I really like about the Getting Ahead and Circles is that we're trying to help people better themselves, not recruit them into middleclass. What's the lesion in "*giving*" someone a job, when the real joy comes in helping someone by teaching

MY STORY

them how to find their own job? I'm learning a lot every day, and although it gets very stressful with all the things that come along with the change, I'm really enjoying the ride. God has blessed me with so many positive and exciting people to learn from, and at the same time, some people that are not so positive, but still people that I can learn from. It's like when I apply open mindedness, I can see how everyone has something to give, not just the kind of people that I've been use to.

I was in a meeting one night and there was a lady speaking. She shared her story and she said something that I didn't quite understand. She said that when she's lost and confused, and feeling all alone, that's when she's at her strongest. She also said that when she feels like she's got it all together and she's in control, that's when she's at her weakest. You guys probably feel like I did when I first heard her say that, but I found out that she was right.

What I'm about to say is for me. I'm not trying to tell anyone how to live or that the way that you are living is wrong, this is my personal experience. I got baptized a while back and I really thought about it before I did it. I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to God. I was scared because I didn't know what kind of person I would turn into once I made the

MY STORY

decision but I'll tell you what. It's awesome!!!! It's like the more I surrender, the more God blesses me. So many things in my life have been put in my life. That's not to say that I don't put in the work, it's more to say that my motives have changed. I'm learning that being successful is not the same as living my life purpose. The blessings that I receive are hardly ever material things, but at the same time, they are more valuable than any amount of money.

As for my future, I feel like I'm headed in the right direction. I'm not just aimlessly wondering through life any more, but at the same time, I don't have a concrete path that I'm following either. I have a huge desire in my heart to help people that want it. I've learned the hard way that people must be willing to help themselves before anyone else can help them.

I use to be real concerned about leaving my mark behind after I die but that's not to important to me at all anymore. There are things that I would like to experience, such as, owning my own house, visiting China, Graduating College, owning my dream sports car, and when the time is right, have kids and experience what it would feel like to have my own family. I realize that all this stuff, no matter how good or bad they may turn out to be, will all be temporary. Is it important to me? Yes, but I feel like the

MY STORY

way I live my life is more important. My character and my spirit is all I'm taking with me when I check out and the life after this one is the one that's really going to matter. Like I said earlier, I do love my life now days, but to think about the big picture, this life seems kind of short.

When that lady said that she's lost when she feels in control, I understand it now, and I agree. If I'm reaching out to God and I'm depending on his guidance and strength, then how can I go wrong? I've been going through the storms for as long as I can remember. Before, when I would go through them, I would make all kinds of bad decisions and come out worse off than I was going into them. Now, I still go through them, but doing it this way once I get through it, and as long as I don't do anything crazy, I come out a stronger person. It's like having the ultimate insurance plan. It's so great that even the day that I die will be like a birthday to me. Change isn't always easy, and at times can be very scary and painful. However, although it may seem scary and painful, it can be a very beautiful thing. If one is willing to grow, one must be willing to venture out into the unknown. It makes me think of a quote I once read. Dr. Martin Luther King said "Take the first step in faith, even if you can't see the rest of the staircase, take that first step."