

I want to begin by saying that your past does not determine your future and your mistakes do not define you. I don't even believe in mistakes anymore. I just re define them as learning opportunities. Right? God has put a dream inside of each one of you. And that's where I come in. To give you hope. To bring your dreams back to life. See when I was young, back in Jr High, I wanted to be a counselor, but I traded following my dreams for chasing the wind, but now I am living my dreams. Over the next few minutes I'm going to share with you a little bit about my past, how I got there, how I got out and where I am today. In doing this my hope is to breathe life back into your dreams.

I grew up in a small town where everyone liked my family. My parents were very over protective and I never quite felt like I was good enough. Behind closed doors, my mom was unpredictable. She would be angry one minute and the next minute she was okay. I grew up thinking it was my job to keep her happy. I ended up moving out when I was 15 and I got in with the kids who were smoking weed and up to no good. That lasted throughout my teen years and then after a struggle with anorexia, I was introduced to meth. This is when things got real bad for me because the eating disorder and my addiction fed each other in this violent cycle. I was in and out of college, on and off of jobs; I truly believe getting pregnant with my son, Cayden, who is now 14, saved my life. I quit all the drugs while I was pregnant but my son's dad was still using and was very violent. I left him after 2 years and Cayden and I moved in with my parents in Poteau.

As time passed, I ended up meeting and marrying Lee, a good looking, fantastic man who was going to school at OU. Cayden even started calling him Dad – all on his own. We had a

daughter, who we named Jacelyn – we called her Jacey though. I had a job as a teacher's assistant at an elementary school in Norman while Lee was finishing his senior year and worked part time. That's when the unthinkable happened; on New Year's Eve morning 2004, I found my daughter dead. She had died in her sleep from a condition I was later told was called SIDS. Her brain just forgot to tell her to breathe while she slept. My whole world turned grey. After this Lee and I began taking prescription pain pills and Xanax by the handful day in and day out. Within a matter of a few months we had both landed ourselves in the ER on overdoses, barely being saved. His 2<sup>nd</sup> overdose, my husband didn't make it through.

After Lee's death, there are many years I don't clearly remember. My memory goes in and out. I had another violent relationship, which I would never take back because from that I have my son Gabriel, however in my addiction both my boys had to live with my parents. I've lived here and there and everywhere inbetween, I have been arrested too many times to count, in and out of numerous rehabs with only 1 completion. I know, right now you're probably starting to wonder why they picked this lady to talk to you tonight. She's a little bit depressing. Hang with me .. I know this has been a downer but I tell you all this so you can see, and I mean truly see the transformation ...This is how it happened to me..

2014 started out as a wild year. I was on the run for a grand total of three days. My boyfriend Deken's truck had broken down so we were stuck. Stuck of all places at my known address. They had us surrounded. And all that was going through my head was all this over a bench warrant...they must be here for him. Turned out they were there for me.

My probation hadn't been going so great and was revoked in full, which meant I got 10 years. I still remember how it felt to hear those words. When I got sentenced, I had been sober for about 6 months, that's the longest I'd been without drugs since I was 15. I decided I was done. Altogether, I spent 2 years locked up and during that time, the blinders fell off of my eyes and I felt like for the first time I could really see. I opened myself up to the spiritual side of recovery and allowed God to heal my heart. Today I have a new heart. I don't even feel like all the trauma and grief that I went through happened to me. And it gets even better; half-way through my prison sentence my Judge heard I was doing well, gave me a Judicial Review and just like that, I got out. My sentence still isn't up, not until Thanksgiving of this year and I've been out for over a year. That's not just good- that's God. That's a miracle.

When I was in prison, a pastor told me at a church service one evening that things were going to happen real fast for me when I got out. I have been out now for a little over one year and this is what's happened: you know my two boys Cayden and Gabriel that I didn't have? We live together now. I see them everyday, I put them to bed at night. I have had the awesome privilege of spending my summer here at Resonance with women just like me while growing and learning everyday. I hadn't had a driver's license or a car since 2010. I now have both...Bonnie helped me with my license and that's actually how I found out about Resonance in the first place. As of tomorrow, my Bachelor's Degree in Counseling is complete, my church has asked me to be a youth sponsor for our youth group. I get to help out with the teens every Wednesday and Sunday and I even got to go to youth camp for 5

days. Two weeks ago the OK DOC let me go through their training to be a volunteer in the prisons, and I start a new job next week working with homeless veterans helping them find housing. And now, now here I am talking to you. I truly am living my dream. At one point in my life, I forgot I even had one.

I only have one more thing.... Do you know what the strongest tissue in your body is? It is Scar tissue...what was once broken, bleeding, and our most vulnerable point, now healed is the strongest and most resilient. Just like our addictions, what was once a weakness now healed, now recovered, has become a weapon. What was once a setback is your comeback. Now that you know the way, all you have to do is show up and show others.