

## TEN

### IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE

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There was a time that I knew exactly who I was, and in my over-inflated sense of self, I thought that I had an awesome life and that the rules didn't apply to me. This is a true story, a snapshot of how I once lived my life. Although I was not a heavy drug user, I was nevertheless an addict. My addiction? A relationship. This is a story of how a disillusioned single mother single-handedly changed her and her son's lives forever, and how her actions sent them down a road to hell they will never forget.

My son Caleb and I have lived in the same house for years. It has been just the two of us until recently, when I decided to move in my boyfriend, Peter. It was a regular Tuesday night, and Caleb was tucked safely into bed. My boyfriend and I were having drinks together when he decided to hack the neighbors' WiFi, craving inappropriate films consisting of *other* women. Looking for any excuse to leave, I decided to tell him that I was going out to buy cigarettes. I bought the cigarettes and decided to drive over to Rick's house. Rick was a drug dealer, but we were also friends.

Rick offered me some methamphetamine while I was there. I believe there is something very intimate about using drugs with a member of the opposite sex. There is a connection, a co-dependency if you will, that occurs. When you use together, it makes you feel more connected to that person. I accepted Rick's offer. After about an hour had passed, Rick received a text from my boyfriend, Peter. "Where is she?" He wrote. I called him from Rick's phone immediately. When he answered, it was clear that he was upset.

"Shit. I've been gone too long," I thought. I quickly said goodbye to my friend and drove home. Peter met me at the door, grabbed me by the shirt and flung my 110-pound frame against the wall. It knocked the wind out of me and sobered me right up.

Words roared out of his mouth, “What the fuck are you doing, you fucking whore? Were you out getting high? Where are my fucking drugs, you piece of shit?” Looking into Peter’s eyes was like looking into a dark abyss; he was no longer the friend that I had once known. Picking me up, Peter threw my body into a pile of my son’s toys. The colorful Tonka trucks and smiling stuffed animals greeted me with a blow to the ribs. He spit on me. He continued to scream obscenities at me. As if that were not enough, Peter began kicking parts of my body. I screamed for him to stop. It was very obvious that he was calculating each blow—none of them would be visible to others the next day.

I screamed at him, “What’s wrong with you? Look at me! Peter, stop it, stop it!” Dragging me across the floor by my clothes was the last straw. I did not know when his tirade was going to end. I had to fight back. Kicking was my first line of defense. I kicked like my life depended on it. Sadly, I never got a good shot at him.

Like a storm cloud lifting, Peter suddenly straightened up and staggered backwards. I saw my chance and took it. Darting across the living room, I snatched up my cell phone from the coffee table and started to dial 911. He pursued me through the house, but stopped when he realized he could no longer salvage the situation. I ran out the back door and into the backyard. I was talking to the 911 operator, and from my vantage point in the backyard, I saw him walking briskly up the block. When my breathing slowed and I was finally able to stop shaking, I ended the call and went back into my house.

The house was quiet, silent over the scene it had just witnessed. It was cool inside, and my front door was still open to the night air. I closed it tightly and locked it securely. I also went to the back door and checked it. I looked in on my son. He was sleeping soundly. I sat down on the futon, clutching my sweaty cell phone in silence. Waiting.

The police arrived. They asked me to give my account of the incident, which I did as accurately as I could, although at that point I was very shaken up and unable to remember things in

exactly the way they had happened. They also interviewed Peter, but since he fled the scene they contacted him by cell phone. He refused to talk to the police, claiming he had to work early. He told the police that he would allow an interview to be conducted in the morning. He set up a time to call them at 8:30 am.

He did, however, manage to leave the cops with these statements about my character. He said that I was “messed up on drugs,” that I kicked him, that I was “out screwing some drug dealer,” and that I’d “rather party and do drugs than be a mother.” I was floored. The cops asked me if I had been using drugs, which of course I denied. “I am not the one who should be put on trial here,” I thought.

Somehow during the scuffle between me and Peter, someone got scratched. There were drops of blood on the floor in the entryway. Since I was not cut, and because I was having a hard time recollecting the events, the police suggested that I attacked him and that I was the aggressor, and not the other way around. I was getting nowhere with the cops, and I was feeling scared that they were going to arrest me for assaulting him. The female officer wanted a taped statement. I refused. I felt like they were being accusatory and mean. They made me mad. Finally, I asked the cops to leave my home. I was drained and no longer feeling the effects of the methamphetamine; I just wanted some peace and quiet.

I checked on my son. He was sleeping soundly. I was grateful that he did not wake when the cops were there. I felt a wave of relief wash over me that he did not see his mother get attacked. I looked down at his sleeping face. He looked so peaceful. I felt my heart swell with love for him. I caressed his forehead and with a sigh, I turned to leave the room, closing the door softly on my way out.

I stood in the hallway. My nerves were still frayed, and I was shaking my head back and forth as the events replayed in my mind. How could he? I thought. I felt pangs of sorrow and regret shoot through my heart and down to the pit of my stomach. I

started to sob, my body became weak and I sank down to the floor. Sobs that physically hurt overcame me.

“Why?” I cried out. “Why?” I thought he understood to be careful with me, that I had been traumatized before and that I took domestic violence very seriously. Years ago, a man had beaten me so badly that I had spent time in a hospital. He gave me a concussion and broke some of my teeth. What’s even worse, when it came time to prosecute him, he went free because I had sexual intercourse with him the night before. A domestic assault carries less weight than a “real” one, I guess.

I cried on the floor in the hallway for a long time. Aware of my pathetic state, some composure came over me and I got up. It was late. I knew sleep wasn’t going to come anytime soon so I decided that something to drink would settle my nerves. I sat down with a pint of bourbon. I poured out a shot of the amber liquid. I downed it and felt the warmth spread through me. As I was preparing another, I heard the familiar ping of an incoming message spring up on my computer.

It was from Peter. “Are you okay?” it said. I felt my heart race as I contemplated the message. Anger rose up inside me. I was pissed. “How dare you!” I typed. “You piece of shit!” I said. “How dare you treat me like that? You are over! You are so over, you can’t even see the light from over! I hate you!!” I hit send. I should have shut the browser down right there, but I didn’t. Ping! He posted back. “I am not over, you’re over! I am going to fuck your world up! I am going to take away everything you ever had! You’re going to regret the day you were born, bitch! Kiss your son and everything you love goodbye!”

I was heated now and, feeling very arrogant, typed, “Fuck you, Peter! You piece of shit! You can’t touch me!” Send. I went on, “You’re just jealous because you lost your kids, and no one loves you and you have nothing! I have my home and my son and all my stuff and it’s mine! Not yours, mine! Now leave me alone so I can enjoy my awesome life!!” Little did I realize at the time that my life was far from awesome. “You assaulted me, Peter. The state is looking to press charges,” I lied, “So good luck with all

your shittyness and loserness! I'm done!" I hit send, proud that I had effectively driven my point home.

Ping. "I'm coming over." "No, you are not!" I said. "You leave me the hell alone, Peter! We are over and I mean it! Stay the hell away from me!" Message send failed. He was offline. I sat back down on the futon. I didn't feel safe. I took the metal support brace out from underneath the futon and tucked it in close beside me. I felt a little safer, but not much. What I really felt like doing was packing up my son in the middle of the night and going to my Mom's, but I didn't because I had been drinking. I passed the time instant messaging friends for support and company.

Before long, there was a knock on the door. My heart thudded in my chest. I knew it was him. Gripping the metal piece of the futon, I said through the door, "What do you want?" "Open the door, Sara," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you; I just want to talk." Suddenly, all of the anger and rage came bubbling out of me like a volcano. I ripped aside the sliding lock mechanism, tearing away at it with my fingers. My fingers fumbled with the doorknob, turned it and swung the door wide open with as much force as I could muster. He was standing there with a pathetic expression on his face. I lifted the metal brace high up, my face contorted with rage. As bad as I wanted to, I knew deep down that I could never injure someone. Instead, I quickly slammed the door shut and hit the inside of it numerous times, cussing and swearing and calling him every name in the book. I eventually stopped and looked out the peephole. He was gone.

I made my way back to the futon and sat down. I decided to get good and drunk. I was sad and heartbroken. I opened my browser and decided to listen to some good ol' heartbreak music on a popular video website. I received more instant messages from Peter. He called my crazy and fucked up one minute, then propositioned me the next saying, "Come on, let me come over and we can fuck like rabbits." I repeatedly told him to fuck off, that I did not want him anymore. After my final rejection, I nursed my heartbreak with the rest of the whisky and finally fell asleep around four in the morning.

My son woke me up around eight the next morning. I had a wicked hang over. I set him up in the bedroom with his *Bob the Builder* DVD and chocolate milk, then went to lie back down. I was bruised and sore, and my eyes were swollen from crying. Around 8:30 a.m. there was a knock at the door.

It was a serious knock, like that of an official. Still disoriented from the alcohol, I stumbled towards the door. I looked through the peephole, but couldn't see anything. I opened the door. There stood two cops. My first thought was that they were here to follow up on the call from the night before.

"Miz?" one of the cops said. "Yes?" I responded. "We are here to do a child welfare check on a five-year-old boy." The cop flipped open a small notebook, "We received a call," he said. *Peter...* "My son is in the bedroom," I said. "Where is the bedroom, Ma'am?" I pointed towards the hallway and told them that it was the first door on the left. I turned away from them and they followed me in. I did *not* formally invite the cops into my home, but they came in anyway. I sat down on the futon. I was self-conscious because of the overflowing ashtray and the empty bottle of whisky on the coffee table. As one of the cops passed through the living room, he ran a gloved hand along the top shelf of my entertainment center. Obviously not finding what he was looking for, he joined his partner who was already in the bedroom checking on my son. Or so I thought.

I sat there for what felt like forever, and I started to feel uncomfortable. I did not like the idea of two adult males rummaging through my personal stuff, cops or no cops. I got up to go see what the deal was. As I was approaching the doorway, one of them emerged holding a frosted white light bulb between his latex gloved thumb and forefinger. I backed up slightly and stared at the object. I felt weak in the knees, and dread came over me. I didn't recognize it as the methamphetamine pipe that Peter had manufactured in my kitchen about a week ago. I had completely forgotten about *that*. My boyfriend had placed it high up behind my clothes on the top shelf in the back of the closet. And here it was, on display in front of the cops. I didn't know what to say. An

insane thought occurred to me that I could still salvage the situation. I casually asked the cop, "Can I see that?" Maybe he thought that I was actually going to examine the object, I don't know, but he handed it right to me.

I took the light bulb and threw it on the ground as hard as I could. I tried to destroy it. I tried to step on it but it kept rolling around, and I very ineffectively stomped on the hallway floor.

In a flash, there was a flurry of activity. The cops jumped into action, their boots thudding a hollow sound on the thinly carpeted hallway. "Get her, get her," one grunted. Their handcuffs clinked and rattled as they tackled me to the floor.

Caleb ran out of his bedroom and with desperation in his little voice exclaimed, "NO! Don't arrest my mom!" I surrendered. I did not want there to be any more violence or repercussions. They pulled me up to my feet and cuffed me. I knew I was in trouble. I sat down on the futon with my hands behind my back. One of the officers talked to my son and entertained him and asked him questions. My son showed him all of his favorite toys. I listened to the rhetorical comments from the cops, "It's a felony to have meth in the house with a young child, isn't it now?" They hated me because of my reaction.

I couldn't get myself to connect to this reality. I felt detached from the events that had unfolded in such a short time. "This is not really my life," I thought. I felt like this was happening to someone else. I sat there and waited, not knowing how this was going to play out for Caleb and me. The cops dispatched to control to have a child protection services agent called to the scene. They were taking my son into custody. My heart broke like tectonic plates shifting in my chest. I wanted to cry out. For my son's sake I kept my composure as much as possible. I thought that if I was cool that he would not be scared.

The Family Services agent showed up and it was time to go. The man stood behind my son with his meaty hands resting on my son's shoulders, possessively. I knelt down in front of Caleb so that I was face to face with him. I said, "Caleb, honey, you're going to go live with some other people for a while now. Okay?"

Solemnly, he replied, “Okay, Mom.” “I love you.” “I love you, too, Mom.” I lingered, caressing his face with my eyes, trying to capture his features in my memory. Finally, I wrenched myself away and allowed the police to guide me out of the house.

I am now serving a three-to-five-year prison sentence in a women’s correctional facility for my involvement in these events. Caleb lives with his Grandma. Peter has never been held accountable. Sadly, I tried for many years to make him take responsibility for his involvement, only to realize that the only one who can make him take accountability for his actions is God.

Today, I am incredibly blessed; my son is home waiting for me, I have a safe place to go to, and I was able to get a college education. I am thankful and appreciative of my life today. I have learned not to take advantage of the gifts this life gives me. I also have forgiveness in my heart, but I have to work on it every day. If it wasn’t for this memoir, that day, and my eventual imprisonment I would have never seen my life for what it was. It was a mess. I was sick for years and it took going to prison to get better. I will always be an addict, but today I can identify these defects of character, and ask for help when I need it. I have learned so much about myself and about life. I have learned lessons that will last a lifetime, and I wouldn’t change it for the world. When you finally read this publication, I will be a free woman, and my son Caleb and I will be living, if I dare say so, happily ever after.