

NINE

THE WOUND MAY HEAL, BUT THE SCAR WILL REMAIN

LaTasha Lynn LeBeau

As I lay here on my bunk in my six-foot cage, trying to get past all my hate and rage.
Wondering will my kids ever forgive me for being in this prison of Hell that I've created within myself?
Hoping that they will understand my addiction has nothing to do with them.
It's been a demon that I once called friend.
Only because she is always there waiting for me to give in.
Please know I've been dealing with this demon long before I ever dreamed of having them.
Yes, my four sons mean so much more than this demon I hold within.
That's what brings me to the crossroads in my life once again.
I have a choice.
I must choose.
Before the train leaves me alone on these tracks that sing my blues.
Life or Death?
Joy or Misery?
My children or only their memories?

I am pregnant and in orange. The only thing missing are the handcuffs and shackles. It is 4:30 a.m. and a female officer came to my cell door; she told me to pack up – it's time. At that moment, my heart skipped a beat, and then it was beating fast and hard. I am gathering up my things: blankets, toothbrush, jailhouse toothpaste, a small four-ounce clear cup, and my indigent shampoo and soap. The officer is rushing me, "We have a schedule to follow, and if we don't hurry, we will be late." So I hurry. Finishing gathering

my things and dressed in my orange uniform only to be stripped again for transport. I am scared as hell. Not knowing how to feel or what to say. I'm feeling a lot of different emotions all at once – anxiety, fear, loneliness, excitement, happiness, guilt, regret, and a lot of shame—for being here in prison and having my fourth son because I gave in again to this demon I hold within!

Even though I've been pregnant and have given birth three other times before, this is the first time that I am doing it alone and in prison. As I am escorted outside, it is dark and raining. I soaked up the fresh air as I waited to get into the state car. All I really wanted to do was to drop to my knees and cry and cry. Instead, I had to hold it all together like everything was fine, so I held on tight to all my fear, anger, guilt, shame, loneliness, and regret. I held my head up and acted like everything was okay, even though I was really falling apart inside.

On the drive to the hospital, I'm excited to finally be able to meet, see, and hold this little life that has grown inside me for the last nine months, showing me every time he moves around or kicks me from time to time that there is more to life than an ounce of dope, needle, and spoon. Still, I am not sure that 24 hours after giving birth, I am going to be ready or able to hand over my newborn son, only to have him bond with my older sister, instead of me – his mommy. Here I am once again left with this familiar pain that cuts through my soul. My heart breaks even more than it's already been broken. My soul aches with shame and despair.

When we arrive at the hospital, I'm escorted by a nurse and an officer to the delivery room. The room is nice and big, but empty and cold. There are two flat screen televisions, a brown leather couch, a chair, and a female officer. All I wanted to do was to call my mom or dad so they could tell me that everything was going to be okay as they've always done up to this point, when I needed them the most. Knowing that I couldn't was devastating. I do the only other thing I know to do—I talk to God and find comfort in knowing there is more to this than meets the eye. I also start to find comfort in the officer who stands guard over me. I

make jokes and find light in the situation. We talk a little and watch television.

As the officer calls and checks in with the prison every hour on the hour, I am left alone with my own thoughts and feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt that flood my mind, heart, and soul. It is so overwhelming. I feel like I am crawling out of my skin. The doctor finally comes in with the news that I am going to be released to go back to prison. Other patients, who went into labor unexpectedly, have shown up, and they need my room. So they will start to induce me again in the next day or so—it is a security risk if I know exactly when I will be transported. So after finally starting to accept everything that's about to happen, I get sent away as if I were unimportant and not as worthy as the other women that were not inmates. I am escorted back to the men's prison in Torrington, Wyoming, just to go over and through this all again the very next morning. No matter how hard I tried to get a hold of myself, I was never mentally or emotionally ready or prepared to go through this. By the strength that is so freely given to me by the grace of God, I did get through it alone.

After watching my three older sons grow and become young men through pictures my dad and brother would send to me, as well as having my fourth son in prison, I knew I had some choices. I had to choose life or death: my children or my addiction.

I thought I was having so much fun getting high, when in all actuality, I was unknowingly creating a state of misery inside my heart and mind. Over time, that damaged my soul. I am tired of hurting from the pain and heartache that cut deep—from head to toe. From all my regret, shame, guilt, fear, and living day-in, day-out with this big hole in my heart and emptiness in my soul.

I chose my children and life to live again. I wasn't able to see my third son crawl, grow, walk, or become the little amazing boy that he is. I was unable to be there for my two oldest sons when life is most crucial for them as they become young men. Missing out on the only thing I really know in life without the drugs and men, and that is being a mom, a mother to the lives that I helped create. Now, here I am handing over my newborn baby boy

to the nurse only to wait for my mother, sister, and five-year-old niece to come pick him up and take him home to be loved and cared for without his mommy.

Meanwhile, I am escorted back to prison and my cold little cell. Now, I sit alone again with my reality smacking me in the face from all the choices I made. Choices that have become regret, shame, guilt, and a whole lot of sleepless nights crying endless tears, finally I am able to express my feelings and share my guilt and shame without having my scapegoat to shove in my arm and run from all my mistakes. Here and now, I am stuck with me and my rawness. Wanting to change for the better and be somebody that my children will be proud to call mom. So I start from the beginning, talking about myself from my childhood to my teen years to my cellie (cellmate) as well as in group settings. I had come to accept this past I created and shaped by knowing and understanding that my past is just that, my past, which can never be gotten back again. I know that my mistakes don't have to define me, especially with all the hurt I have experienced and dealt with on a daily basis. I've chosen to allow it to motivate me instead of allowing it to hold me back, especially with the support of my family, friends, and all the educators that cared enough to help me to succeed. With my dad, mother, brother, sisters, uncle, cousin, and the voices of my children, nieces, and nephews, I have learned to become okay with who I am and where I've been. I have faith in where I am going in my life. From a quote my dad had sent me: "To finally move on and start something new, you must release the unchangeable past and embrace your future."

If my story touches just one woman or just one person, it was worth it. And if one day my children read this, no matter the situation or the reason, right, wrong, or indifferent, I just want them all to know that I am sorry for the tears, sorrow, pain, and any self-doubt I've caused because I went away. I think of you all every day, miss you like crazy glue, and love you all more than mere words could ever express. I will show this to be true with my actions and not words.

“It’s not about the mistake; it is all about the lesson. It’s not about the direction, it’s about the journey.” The best things can come out of the worst situations. I found coming to prison to be a very, very positive experience, which is hard to believe even for myself. When I was first sentenced to prison, I was so ashamed. Then after getting here and getting involved, doing things I wouldn’t have even thought of doing or succeeding in, I’ve done and succeeded. I can honestly say that I’ve found inner peace with myself. I’ve been productive and successful in everything I’ve done here in prison. Who would have thought I would go to prison as an uneducated addict and leave prison as someone who is college-educated and certified in welding! Or the thought of anyone that comes through the back doors can even be rehabilitated in a place like this— hey, it is more possible than you think. I’ve obtained and maintained my GED, CRC (Career Readiness Certificate), Core (the National Center for Construction Education and Research Core Program), and the Intensive Treatment Unit (for addictions), where I learned who I really am without all my many masks. Now, I am leaving as a certified welder with 12 college credits and one college credit for a writing class. Thank you, Jesus, for my many blessings and opportunities! If you never give up, you can never really lose!!

MY POND

LaTasha Lynn LeBeau

My pond is quite large and swampy looking and smelling.
My feet are sinking in the mud as my toes are spreading apart, the milky muck slimes through each one.
My body so heavy and the muck is getting deeper.
It is so quiet – all I can hear is frogs croaking as the mosquitoes suck my blood one by one. Making me smack and scratch – causing more scars with my nails all over my body.

I try to keep moving around the edge of the water but with each step it's getting harder and harder to pick my legs up and my feet out, one by one.

Finally, falling over head first, slamming my face off the water as a snake wraps around my neck squeezing tighter and tighter.

I feel the air seeping out of my chest – oh no is this the end?

Will I ever survive if I never see them again?