

EIGHT

3:15 P.M.

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PROLOGUE

I open this memoir with Chapter 1, *Special Visit*, which is about the event of my loss. Chapter 2, *Beyond 3:15 p.m.*, sheds light on my life while incarcerated. I continue with Chapter 3, *Titanium*, in which I go into depth about how surreal my addiction is. In *Memories*, Chapter 4, I explain some of my heartache. Chapter 5, *My Turning Point*, I focus on the change and where and how it gets its power. In my final chapter, *3:15 p.m.*, I return to the beginning. I paint the whole picture by elaborating on my motivation to change by using a compilation of paired narratives and poetry in which I share this short story of my battle with addiction. After landing myself in prison, I suffered even more of a loss. Having hit rock bottom, I became vulnerable and now I start to face my demons.

I learn to accept my struggles and I start to overcome them. Turning my life events into my testimony, I learn that doing what I think is the best thing is not always the right thing. But how a person learns to live with her choices throughout her life afterwards is what matters most. Understanding and accepting the outcome versus just learning to live within the outcome's means... Self-worth and prospering or self-pity and settling. We all have the opportunity to overcome our struggles, to learn from them, and to improve.

SPECIAL VISIT

I'm drained. I woke up September 14th in county jail with the mindset of "another day another lost dollar." My morning went by slowly, as it tends to when incarcerated, with the only worry on

my mind being, “how am I going to get out of this one?” I have cold sweats. I sleep.

3:15 p.m. My appetite has become unbearable. I force myself to get up and eat. Hoping to feel some energy.

“Lujan...” I make eye contact with the corrections officer who called for me. I start to approach him with a look of hate on my face. Thinking, “what in the world does this clown want?” He tells me I have a visitor, which changes my attitude slightly. I was hoping it was Luke, the father of my kids, with good news about posting bond or just a simple “hello” from a familiar face. I take about five steps and stop in midstride...

“Wait!” I look at the correction officer with that look of hate I had in the beginning, remembering, “we ain’t got no visiting on Thursdays.” Instantly my stomach cringes, thinking something’s wrong. He looks at me with worried eyes and says as calmly as possible, “You have a special visit.”

At that moment everything goes silent. Every electric door, radio and hundreds of voices go silent. I hear only my own thoughts, “one of my sons got hurt...Is it the feds? Luke.” As the guard nudges me forward I start to walk. My surroundings become real again. But my stomach is hurting even more. I feel the panic. My heartbeat is rapid. I can’t breathe. I look up at the corrections officer in hope of some kind of comfort. His face shows nothing. My thoughts slow down once we reach the main hall. I can start to see people in the distance. But I can’t quite make them out. As we walk closer, that bad feeling comes back, but tenfold this time. The people around me come into focus: they’re all sergeants and the Lieutenant, and they’re all in their street clothes. Now I know that something’s wrong, really wrong.

Once I reach the visiting room, I stop completely. Afraid. Afraid of who is on the inside. I look back at all the officials that are standing in awe behind me. Not one has a look on their face that is familiar to me. Still afraid, I enter. I see my dad. He’s in his work clothes, pacing. I approach the phone, the only connection between us. As I look up to see the look of horror, sadness, and worry in my dad’s eyes. I hesitate. Then I say “hello.”

My dad holds back tears, puffs out his chest and takes a deep breath before he answers me. "Sit, daughter." I refuse. And he says, "Listen, I need you to be strong. Please sit daughter." I still refuse to sit. Panic flows over me. "What is it? What's wrong?" My dad's voice is shaky but he remains strong and says, "I'm so sorry. Luke is no longer with us" In shock and in confusion I ask him again but this time with anger. As he tells me that my Lucas was shot, I stand completely still. My thoughts begin to race again. "It's not true...I just talked to him last night...It has to be a mistake...He's at home with our kids..." I'm looking not at my dad, but through him when the hurt comes. Pain from deep inside, like my chest is caving in. It gets hard to breathe when the tears start to fall. From that moment on my world becomes clear. I start to feel again. Reality is no longer an illusion. And memories become my treasures. Tomorrow isn't promised.

Months pass and my condition gets easier. My 8 x 10 cell becomes home. And my addiction is a daily obstacle. It becomes a battle. A battle I'm learning has had the upper hand throughout my whole life.

TRIP TO THE MOON

Have you ever traveled to the moon?
 So high, above all
 Like an inflated balloon!
 Once gravity takes its toll,
 You'll go on ski mode
 Ready to do damn near anything.
 Even sell your own soul.
 Then you're up again, floating above ground zero.
 You feel so untouchable
 You start to feel something like a hero.
 But once you fall...
 You're out looking for that fix!
 Used to be beautiful, now look at you.
 They've mistaken you for a trick.

Round and round you go.
 It's really never ending.
 Why fight it, there's no more use in pretending.
 Taking that trip to the moon, wasn't all you
 Thought was in store.
 Now it's got you, your whole world.
 Numbing you to your core.
 Just one more trip, is what you insist.
 Your life, family, freedom you're so willing to risk.
 Please try to remember going up only means coming down.
 But if you're curious about that trip.
 Just ask around town.
 So give me a call when you're ready for life changing fun.
 You won't ever forget my name once it's all said and done.
 It's unbelievable and exciting
 Kind of like cheating death...
 So hurry up and hit me up!
 They call me Crystal Meth.

BEYOND 3:15 P.M.

A moment of truth and desperation. My willingness for change sprouts. Somewhere inside me called out for help. My initial thoughts, "My life? My faith? My existence?" I lay there motionless and bitter for weeks. Not able to sleep but with zero ability to function. I had so much to say but there wasn't a fight left in me. 3:15 p.m. became my motivation.

Once the cold sweats started to fade and my focus came back, I started to question life as a whole. When I did find sleep, I would wake up with anger, with a sense of loneliness that was unbearable. Surrounded by brick walls of concrete. With not another human in sight. Just the faint sound of footsteps. No one to talk to and zero comfort. *My life seems to end! So why am I still breathing?*

Life becomes nothing more than motion without feeling. I become cold and numb. Consumed with hate and self-pity. Inside

dying a slow death. I start to fight. I learn that fighting helps to feed the demon who lives inside me. My fists become guns and my words are sharp as knives. Being forced to live in a rigidly structured system and being told what to do is shaming. I learned very quickly about all the different kinds of people that exist. I had a choice: either fall in place or become more than just a number.

My prison number, 2721, becomes my being. It is my worth.

LIFE OF A CON

No worries
 No one else
 Only the sheer complacency of one's self
 Self-image, betrayal
 At one point broken down inside, even frail
 TRY!
 Shit...
 Everyone's aiming for you to fail
 Does anyone know the meaning of "Truth"?
 Doubt it.
 No understanding, it's funny 'cause growing up
 I was taught to value those the most
 I won't hold my breath for that happy ending
 If I did!
 What would be left of me standing?
 Only hardened by loneliness
 One touch, warm embraces
 Just concrete and darkness are the reality I face
 Piles of regret!
 Nightmares of being lost
 I'd turn back time for family
 At any cost
 Just one more day, week, month, or year
 Will they remember this face staring back at me in the mirror?
 No recollection, shady is what I fear

Only time will tell, who all stays genuinely sincere.
All I can do is just keep on ticking
Thrive, don't stop!
The life of a con.
The life I've been living...

TITANIUM

Life as an addict before I was forced to be sober: being “normal” was an abstract and unattainable concept. Before I would have to come up in order to come down. Only when I'd reach my peak is when I'd find comfort in sleep. I've been living this way my whole life. I truly believed there wasn't any other way.

I've wasted months on fighting and causing hate and discontent. Well, all along “The Change” was growing inside me. Planting its roots deep within me. Becoming semi-known but not quite apparent. I begin to feel its presence. I start to feel torn between the person I'm known to be and the person I will later become. Not yet able to stand sturdy. My thoughts become unstable. Between. Wanting help? Giving in or giving up?

Just the thought of having the capability to *be more* frightens me. *But why? I'm built out of titanium!* I once had a life and I once had a purpose. But I also lived for money and I also functioned under a daze. Once living life as if we would all live forever. Before 3:15 p.m. I couldn't imagine “change,” never!

I did have plenty of down days where I would sleep to dream. Hoping to dream of other times. Like feeling Luke's warmth or watching my kids laugh as they played. Just the sheer simplicity of being a mother. At one point it was hard for me to separate “reality” from the “past.” The effects of my former lifestyle tainted me. As much as I thought of embracing the idea of a turning point, change was still hard to grasp. Addiction is real. The game is real. One will never know until their entire existence is erased. Try to imagine being buried alive. Once you're trapped you in a box, either you become broken and you die starting from within, or you learn to change and you become reborn.

When I start to reach out, I start to feel incompetent. I've never ever shown weakness. Never lowering myself to ask for help. *Where do I start? Who do I ask? Who can I trust?* Once I began to accept my situation for what it was, my mind became a battlefield. Between reaching the "light" or staying in the "dark," while all along learning to live without my daily dose of poison. Finally, I start to see the world in its true colors by developing a deeper understanding of the meaning of the word, *loyalty*. Because people in general eventually fall off. Friends disappear and family members become distant, no matter how much of a bond you once had. It's life. It happens. This abandonment alone did damage. But at the same time it did me justice. In a sense it helped me become independent and I began to stand on my own two feet, finding courage and a way to take back my life.

MY RHYTHM OF LIFE

I'm trying to find the rhythm of life
 But the rhythm of life is faint
 As fucked up as my life is...
 I feel justified like them brothers in *Boondock Saints*.
 Memories fade like the smoke of a 'rex
 The lifestyle,
 Chop the game.
 Nowadays shit's so complex!
 Loyalty!
 Gone!
 Yeah, I'm your homegirl
 Verdict...
 ... Guilty!
 Not for long.
 Some say society's morals just ain't the same.
 I say solo, silent, and savage,
 Is the only way.
 Keep it simple homegirl,
 Never lose your sight.

In our addiction, yeah, we may have lost the fight!
Have we lost the battle?
God only knows.
Come... Jump on the saddle
Take a chance and see what life unravels.
Life of solitary
Life so numb.
Trigger thoughts dark, psychotic
Enough to make most socially dumb.
The rhythm of life can be like an old wound from the
 Enemy's knife.
Faded!
Lite!
Shhhh!
You can hear it in your hood... most nights
You can say I've grown quiet, patient, even still.
Don't kid yourself, homie
I've been steadily on that revenge diet!
I'm jaded...
Full of life's own riot.
I've done searched high and low,
For my own rhythm to give
Trying to drown out this demon.
It's tiring!
It's my turn to live.
No more chances.
No more games.
I throw up deuces to these mark ass lames
I'll find my rhythm.
I'll find my way.
I'll put a stop to this cutthroat charade.
All I know homie,
Is for me...
It ends today!
My rhythm of life.

MEMORIES

Some days I would wait for my last name to be called out. My first name no longer exists. I become accustomed. Not only accustomed but accepting. “Inmate Lujan, report to visitation.” For the most part every Wednesday and Saturday I line up excited but nauseated, awaiting visitation with my kids. These days become my connection. My connection to being human. My connection to any kind of life. My time with my kids not only brings me happiness but it also brings me sadness. Their eyes staring back at me were not only a reflection of myself but a spitting image of Luke. A combination of us both.

I can still picture my last visitation with Luke. A Monday before he died. His presence still lingers. I tend to daydream and often, I try to see his face: the unique shape of his teeth, his lips thin and like silk, or how his eyelids would lay over their corners as he smiled. Lucas could completely light up a room. He had a charm that was magnetic. When does a person lose admiration for someone they’ve loved? Do the butterflies ever fade?

It’s been a while since I’ve stared into his eyes. But I can still remember how green they’d get when he was upset or sad. How the very middle of them would become more yellow when he was most comfortable and happy. My memories painting my canvas, my canvas of happiness I hold dear. 3:15 p.m. took him away from me. But 3:15 p.m. is now inspiring.

Can memories help you cope?

Can memories bring you hope?

Through memories can you relive?

Can memories keep you captive?

MY TURNING POINT

After the twister of memories and emotions fade, my life storm begins to calm. Leaving me feeling defeated. Like an empty shell. But “The Change” that I know lives inside me is strong. Strong enough to start taking over. And I let it. No holds barred. I

just release my demon. I give my all to my newfound commitment. What do I have to lose? Absolutely nothing! They've done took my everything. I remember my father once said, "They may chain you but they can never chain the heart."

This commitment is hard. I try hard to understand my fears. I not only start to understand them. I submit. Submit like a beginner wrestler powerless under their opponent while giving the match their all.

Time to tap out! I start to use my visits with my kids as fuel. Fuel to become better. A better sister, a better daughter, a better mother! Using my heartache as my anchor. Finding more ability and exploring my true potential. I thought I was strong, but it wasn't until now that I truly believe that. Forcing myself to feel my emotions was hard, hands down one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life. But I found that using knowledge was power. Even more powerful than using your fist or a weapon. Knowledge became my friend. I not only leaned on it; I began to rely on it.

Feelings are fact: your feelings are the ultimate guide to how you think about things and what you do. We humans tend to react to feelings instead of what we think. Relearning how to think with my head instead of my emotion was challenging. Picture a small child learning to ride a bike for the first time. I would learn from my falls but I would learn ever more by getting back up. Finding the strength to keep pushing forward. Using that strength as my bandages. I was more intrigued with realistic information than my old distorted views of life. I needed serenity to be able to accept the consequences of my actions. Whether or not I felt wrongly accused, I learned to accept them instead of trying to justify them. Unless I am willing to take responsibility for my past, I'll always struggle with forgiveness and I won't be able to continue to move forward.

3:15 p.m. becomes one of my stepping-stones to success.

3:15 p.m. becomes my focus.

I no longer focus on the fortune and fame.

Chop the game!

The true me remains.
 I'm now judged on my interior,
 Being true to myself I feel superior.
 It's time to bring all my emotions to light.
 For my kids' sake it's only right.
 All through my life at times it got hectic.
 I kept my head above water and never
 lost my perspective.
 Living today as if it's my last.
 That street life passes by too fast.
 In the beginning it was hard to understand.
 But now I know, that all along, this was God's plan...

3:15 P.M.

The five-inch thick iron door with chipped orange writing, "N Pod #104" slams shut behind me. I stand there convinced that my heart has stopped. I can't breathe. My chest is caving in like I've been hit by a Mack truck. Barely reaching the stainless steel toilet before my knees buckle. With my head spinning and my world just taken! I fall to the floor... I can't cry at first, but the pain is unbearable. Like I've been jumped by the enemy. I want to scream with everything in me. But nothing comes out. *Please God, give me strength.*

I lie there for hours on the cold concrete. With the questions overwhelming me. *Am I dreaming? What happened? Who and why?* His last thoughts and the question if he was in pain haunts me... When I finally find the strength to make phone calls, answers to my questions become clear. Nothing I could have done would have saved him. My Lucas was addicted, too. For his own reasons and with his own demons. As much as I loved him, it wasn't enough.

I know the effects of meth. It claims your soul. Wrapping its claws around your heart. Numbing any life in you with a gauze-like film that covers your eyes. You begin to see your loved ones,

your friends, and your surroundings under a spell. I believe meth is living life on Earth in Hell.

Lucas was taken from this world without warning. Shot seven times, five of them in his back. Even though he was clearly the victim, he was still judged after death because of where he came from. He was known to get into trouble and he was a convicted felon. Even though he lost his life, they did not consider what pain he went through. Who he truly was or what would have been. All I do know is that he was more than a lover. He was truly my best friend.

Our kids will grow up without their daddy. And I do know my kids love and miss him dearly. As their mother I have only one choice. I need to accept my responsibility. I can only change myself. I can never change the fact that I'm here. But I will reach out for help, seek more knowledge, and someday I'll pursue a career.

That September day at 3:15 p.m. my whole world was shattered. From that moment on, it was *me* who started to matter. It took me experiencing the most extreme kind of hopelessness to truly appreciate my life again. And all the cherished moments I've missed. I now know that tomorrow isn't promised.

3:15 p.m. helped me see!

3:15 p.m. is my lifelong key!

3:15 p.m.

I thought we all lived forever.

Before 3:15 p.m., I couldn't imagine change, never!

Even though 3:15 p.m. took him away from me.

I later on find 3:15 p.m. to be inspiring...

3:15 p.m. gave me motivation

By doing right by my kids through dedication.

3:15 p.m. became my success

It gave me a peace of mind, finally letting my loved one rest.

3:15 p.m. became my focus

I'm gonna continue living life healthy for Lucas.

Through all of my heartache, 3:15 p.m. helped me see.

Forever grateful 3:15 p.m. is my lifelong key.

3:15 p.m. will
forever be...
3:15 p.m. lives
inside of me...
3:15 p.m.

EPILOGUE

I still reside in prison awaiting and preparing for the day I'll be set free. I've faced the impossible and I've found hope in knowledge. I will never lose sight of where I came from, but now I focus on my future. Opportunity might not be around every corner, but it's available if you truly seek it. I now take every chance that I get to improve myself and I put all in my recovery. I truly do use 3:15 p.m. as my anchor. I use my kids as my strength and Luke is now a reminder. A lifetime reminder that tomorrow isn't promised and that today is what matters.