

Nikki: Graduate, Volunteers of America's Mather Community Campus

Shelter from the Storm Fundraising Breakfast | April 20, 2011

Volunteers of America Greater Sacramento & Northern Nevada

Hi, my name is Nikki, and I want to thank you for coming today and listening to the stories of men and women all of whom had lost hope. My story is like many, I grew up in a family that was affected by addiction. As a child, I had many mixed messages and uncertain feelings. Due to the addiction that had overcome my family, my parents couldn't take care of themselves, let alone prepare me for my future.

I suffered from feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem, and I turned to drugs myself. I ran away when I was 12 years old, and lived on the streets for quite some time. As I got older, my addiction progressed, my thoughts of worthlessness never went away, I just continued to use and ignore the pain.

At a young age, I became a mother myself, but I thought things would be different. As I brought my daughter Kayla into the world, I did not think about the tools I needed to be a mother. And like many families in the Sacramento area, the cycle of addiction continued.

I was unable to give my daughter the structure and guidance a child needs. I would scream at her, yet I relied on her to take care of things that she was too young to be taking care of. I was raising her the way I was raised.

When Kayla was 7, I had a second child. Her name is Alex, and she was a "pos-tox" baby, meaning that she was born with drugs in her fragile system. By this time, my addiction was full-blown, and I had no sense of reality – nor did I care to.

By the time Kayla turned 9 years old, she was raising her 2-year-old sister and getting herself ready for school. Kayla came to me one day and told me she wanted to live with her dad. I was heartbroken. All Kayla wanted was a normal home, and I definitely was not providing that for her.

You would think I would have snapped out of it and make some changes in my life, but I didn't. I did not know how; because, for me, addiction and dysfunction was normal.

Now it was just Alex and I and things didn't get any better. I don't know how many times the police came to our house with their guns drawn, or how many times I would leave my daughter with people I did not know – never once thinking about my daughter's well being.

It finally came to a head one night at around 2 a.m. My then-5-year-old daughter, Alex, was at home sleeping, and I remember kissing her goodnight and telling her I would see her in the morning. She always made me lay down with her before she went to sleep and promise I would be there in the morning. After she fell asleep, I left as I often did. However, I had no idea that would be the last time I would see my baby for three years.

I was arrested that night, and during my time in jail, the vision of my baby girl flooded my mind. I could just see my baby being woken up by police, looking around for me, or another familiar face and not having one in sight. I could only imagine the fear and loneliness that she would feel.

Back at the police station, the officers told me to give them a phone number of a relative who could care for Alex, or they were going to call Child Protective Services to come and get her. From that moment on all I could think about was my little girl and the traumatic incident that had taken place.

I would like to tell you that I quit getting loaded at that point, but that is not true – I continued to get loaded for a couple of more months. Then, finally, I went into recovery and began learning the tools I needed to stay clean.

I graduated from the recovery program and was accepted into Volunteers of America's Mather Community Campus, a transitional housing and job-training program. For the next two years, I learned everything I possibly could in order to change my life.

Volunteers of America provided me with a wonderful place to stay, and equipped me with the tools to live, to be a good parent, to manage money and to hold a job – all of the things I was lacking.

After being in the program for a year, my oldest daughter, Kayla, returned home and I got to start a real relationship with her. She attended my graduation from the program, and it was one of the most powerful experiences I have ever had.

All the girls in the program were encouraged to exchange spiritual gifts with one another, and then family members were invited to say something if they wanted to. My daughter spoke up with a tear in her eye and said, “Mom, I am very proud of you, I never stopped loving you and I forgive you.”

After I graduated from the program, I received the best Christmas present ever. On Dec. 23, 2005, Alex finally came home to me. It was like my heart had been mended back together. After so long, I had both of my daughters back in my life.

I was so grateful for Volunteers of America because they taught me how to be a mom, an employee, and a friend. They assisted me in breaking a cycle that had affected my family for three generations.

Today my girls and I are like three peas in a pod. I get to teach them all the things I was not taught as a child. I have eight years of sobriety, and lead by example. I learn new things every day, and I hope I never stop learning. I would really like to thank Volunteers of America for not giving up on me, for consistently guiding me and always giving me positive feedback. For that I am forever grateful.