

Samantha



I grew up in neighborhoods with a liquor store on every corner, and mattresses on the street. We were poverty-stricken. We wouldn't even be able to flush our toilets, because we couldn't pay the water bill. There was also a lot of abuse, including sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and physical abuse. And, I just felt completely out of place. So my image of myself, and of what a mother should be, was skewed from the very beginning.

Telling you all this isn't about blaming my parents. It's about setting up the foundation of why I turned to a coping mechanism that was very unhealthy – why I became an addict. By the time I was eighteen I was using drugs, big and hard, and they made me feel like I was on top of the world.

If we want to get technical in terms of what substance abuse looks like, it's chronic, progressive, and fatal. And with that, do addicts really choose to have this disease? I would say that once we have it, once that invisible line is crossed, the choice to drink or to use is no longer there. It just becomes a necessity to survive.

Drugs got ahold of me and gave me this false sense of who I was. Even pregnant, I couldn't stop using. Luckily, my son was born healthy. And I ended up having a healthy daughter, as well. But I kept using. I would justify my addiction, like, "I'm a working mom. I'm paying bills. I'm physically there for my kids." But I was never emotionally there for them. I saw this in myself, and I would try to stop using.

I was on the verge of quitting meth in 2002, and I took a trip to Arizona to introduce my dad to his granddaughter. On the way back we were in a fatal car accident. It was about one o'clock in the morning and the car flipped six times, around where Interstate 40 meets the 15 in Barstow.

I was thrown 60 feet from the car. My back, my hip, my tailbone, and my leg were broken, and I shattered my wrist. I know now that it was the grace of God that saved me, so that I could be conscious to tell the responders that there were kids in the car. Because otherwise they wouldn't have known – both of them were thrown over a 50-foot overpass, and there were no car seats.

My two-year-old daughter died in that accident. I was really lost and really, really heartbroken. I just wanted to die. And I was looking at six and a half years for vehicular manslaughter – because, as a parent, you're 100 percent responsible for the safety of your children.

The charges ended up getting lessened to child endangerment. It would get completely dropped off my record, so long as I didn't get into any more trouble. But I just didn't care anymore and I was scared to feel that pain of my daughter's death, so I self-medicated with drugs and alcohol. And I did get into trouble, over and over again. I became homeless, and I was incarcerated about a dozen times.

I hated God, at that moment. I had asked, and begged, and pleaded on that highway for him not to take my babies. And, I couldn't understand how he was able to take this little girl, and keep a piece of crap like me. That was my perception at that time. I was so angry, and I didn't know how to break free. Finally I just said, "Okay, God. If you're there, I need help. I don't know what to do."

I got arrested the next day, and I believe it was divine intervention. I went into my cell, and I started cussing God

out. I ripped him a new one. And then I said I was sorry for everything I've ever done, and I asked him into my heart. I started working through a 12-step program, and I haven't had a drink, hit, fix, or pill since May 14th of 2007.

You're either growing, or your dying. And I began to water myself with positive friendships, a belief in Christ, and other strengths so that I could grow again. I graduated from college and I was offered a position doing drug and alcohol recovery coaching, and then gang intervention. I felt empowered to take control of my life again.

But some things are still out of my control. Like, people who assume addicts are some kind of lower life form, and they won't work hard, or "once an addict, always an addict." Career-wise, because of my criminal record, certain positions are also closed to me, and this has prevented my advancement.

I didn't choose to damage my children. I didn't choose to damage my body. I didn't choose to damage my spirit. I feel that I've already worked hard to pay my debt to society. I've done time for it – behind bars, and imprisoned by guilt within myself. And yet, I feel stuck in society's judgment and, economically, as a member of the working poor.



"The reason I chose a butterfly is that it signifies rebirth into something beautiful. My life has been exactly that."



Samantha turned her life around after years battling addiction, and the loss of her daughter. The butterfly is a symbol of organ donation, and of rebirth.