

# The Things I Have Survived

by Ashley Compton



If someone were to look at me today at age 17, they would have absolutely no idea what I've been through; what my past held. They wouldn't know that I was once on the verge of death, seen things no one in their entire life should ever have to witness and that I have already been a mother.

My mother is a drug addict. She has been for 20 years now, and it is suspected longer but it's not proven. She was doing drugs when she was pregnant with me and this caused me to have seizures which placed me in intensive care for two weeks. I also went through withdrawals from all of the drugs in my system; I was struggling to survive. People say all the time that they can not remember anything from their childhood, but I can't say that, I wish I could. I remember almost everything. Everything from placing a coat over my mom while she took another hit from her joint; trying to be hidden from the rest of the world, to waking up in the middle of the night, only to realize that once again, I was left alone.

I remember one night being left alone and waking up to an empty house. I was so scared. I remember sitting on the couch and looking out the window. I saw this man approaching the front door. I, not knowing who it was, tried as hard as I could to push the couch up against the

door, while sobbing terribly. I remember hearing the door handle shaking and seeing the door open. I couldn't begin to tell you the amount of fear that was in my frail little body. When the man walked inside the house, I was relieved to find out that it was a man who roomed with my mom. He had asked me why I didn't try and call the police; I just stared at him with a blank look on my face. I was too ashamed to tell him that I was never taught. Those three vital numbers only take minutes to teach, but my mom never took the time to teach me them; she didn't care. She only cared about her drugs, not the number one priority she should have had in life, her daughters.

From the time I was three years old to when I was five, I was a mother to my younger sister. I took care of her in every way, shape and form. This isn't any job for a young child to take on, but I had to do it. I had to be the one she could come to when she was scared and needed to be comforted. I felt as if it was my responsibility.

One night while my mom was putting my sister and me to bed, she had told me she was going to go take a bath. My sister's room was right next to mine. As I lay awake listening to the running water of the bath, I suddenly heard it shut off. I found this to be weird, so I slowly opened my bedroom door and walked to the bathroom. I was expecting to find my mom in the bath tub but no, she was nowhere to be found. I heard a car outside, so I looked out the window and saw my mom driving away. After I realized that my mom had lied to us, I heard my sister crying. Her bedroom door was locked so the only way I could comfort her was to reach under her door and hold her hand until she had stopped.

July 25, 1999 was the day that my prayers were finally answered. I remember this day like it was yesterday. It was a warm morning with the sun shining brightly through the clouds. I was wearing a pink and white dress that I absolutely loved. My little body was full of mixed emotions anticipating what I knew was lying ahead. This day marked my

grandma's birthday; but more importantly, it was the day when my grandparents received full custody over my sister and me. This day marked the day when my life would be changed forever. I was welcomed with open arms full of nothing but love. I don't know where I would be today if it weren't for my remarkable grandparents. I know I wouldn't be where I am now, that's for sure. I would probably be a 17 year old girl who was struggling to get through school. A girl, who instead of worrying about having enough money to attend college in the fall, would be worrying about whether or not she'd have enough money to supply her repulsive drug addiction.

As I sit here today, I am watching my little sister go down an even worse road than my mom did. She is 15 now, and not only has she done drugs and consumed excessive amounts of alcohol; she has done so many hurtful things to my family. She says she can't remember anything bad from her childhood, but I hope one day she opens her eyes. I hope she remembers what she's been through, so she doesn't end up making the same life altering mistakes my mom has.

Yes, there are times when I wish I didn't have to grow up so fast, and yes there are times when I wish I could have done all the things little kids do, but I know deep down inside that this was my fate. My childhood taught me not to take one moment of life for granted. And I am so lucky to have caught onto this so young in life. It may be hard to understand how this experience would change a lonely and deserving child into a confident and driven young adult, but I can't put into words how this experience has changed my life for the better.

*The editors and staff of Alert Magazine wish to congratulate Ashley on winning the essay contest and encourage her in pursuing her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.*  
Sincerely,  
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