



I Would Do It Again If I Had To

By Justin Barrieault

I WOULD WAKE UP IN THE MORNING, throw on my clothes, and go make breakfast. Instead of “Good morning”, the greeting I got from my stepdad was “Justin, you stupid little bastard, where is my breakfast?” That is what my life used to be like. Let me tell you how I got there and how I was able to get away.

When I was nine years old, my mother died from liver cancer. It was sudden and both my stepfather and I were completely shocked, stunned and taken aback. However, we were at least able to hold it together for a while. I was able to make it through her funeral without having a breakdown—no thanks to my stepfather, who didn’t even attend. When I got home from the funeral that night, the abuse started. I had always known that my stepfather had a drinking problem, but I always pushed that aside because when he was with my mother he was a perfect father figure. My mom was gone now and any tolerance he had for me flew out the window as soon as I walked in the door.

I was not prepared, not ready to be cussed at and hit. I had just gone to my mother’s funeral, and I thought I was safe in the apartment that she had occupied only a mere few days ago. I was wrong. I went to bed that night shocked and crying, bruised and battered, scared and angry. The next day was different though. The day

after my mom’s funeral, her insurance check came in. We had just received twenty-eight thousand dollars and my stepdad was happy as can be. I wasn’t though. I still wanted my mom to come back.

Within a week my stepdad bought three used vehicles—one of them being a Corvette—and we were now moving into a trailer. The abuse had stopped for one week. The next week, all of the money was spent and I was getting the blame every single day. On school days, I would be beaten before and after school, and the weekends were worse. I would wake up on Saturday and my stepdad would be gone. Sometimes he would return in a few hours, other times I would not see him until almost 11:00 p.m. When he walked in the door, he would reek of marijuana and alcohol. I would be the one he used as target practice until he passed out. He would hurl his fists at me and stab me with his words.

In the mornings if I was able to give him his breakfast, I would only get more verbal abuse. However, if I failed to have it prepared, I would be beaten until it was time for me to leave for school. I would go through the school day dreading and hoping that by some miracle I wouldn’t have to go home. When the bell rang, I would gather up my belongings slowly and take my time walking home. My nights were filled with profanity and mistreatment, ending with me going

to bed crying. I would wake up the next morning and the process would start all over again. I felt so helpless.

I was expected to pay the bills and make the meals. To him, I was the one who was supposed to take care of him now. This ritual continued for months until one Saturday he came home battered and bloody. Blood was dripping from his head and he looked faint and pale. He collapsed on the couch and then I went to work cleaning up his head and bandaging him. Suddenly he started screaming to get out. He pushed me away from him and hurled the words “Get out of my house,” at me over and over again. I was done, fed up, it was over. I left. I walked across the street to call my best friend’s mom to pick me up. On my third attempt I was able to reach her and she told me she would be there in about fifteen minutes.

I went into the house, gathered my things, and went to sit on the curb. On my way out I heard my stepdad mutter an apology but it didn’t matter, the damage was done. I got in the car when she pulled up and we left. I never saw my stepdad again, and I never want to.

I think I dealt with the situation very well. I gave him chances and I stuck by him out of some perverted sense of loyalty. But when I was done, I was done. I can only think of two things that I should have done differently. I should have left earlier. I was a fool to stay with him as long as I did. If I didn’t have the strength to leave, I should have at least called the police. Walking out of that trailer and walking away from a man who constantly abused drugs and alcohol was one of the best choices that I have ever made in my life. I would do it again if I had to. 🚫

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Alert Magazine congratulates Justin Barrieault for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage him in the pursuit of his academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.