

Painful Past Turns into Positive Future

Senior Maggie Peterson survived in the home of two drug addicted parents

LexiWalz

“I never realized the environment that I was growing up in was dangerous or unsafe. I knew that moving from house to house wasn't the norm,” senior Maggie Peterson said. She lived a rough childhood. After her dad moved out when she was only 4 years old, her life became devastating.

Growing up, Peterson said she was constantly surrounded by the wrong people in the wrong environment. “There were times that my mom would fight with her boyfriends. Many times my dad would go into drunken rages. I never lived with my father, but he was in and out of my life, complicating things.”

Living in Section Eight housing, a housing system for people on welfare, made it tough on Peterson and her family.

“It would be the first of the month when we would get the welfare check which was about \$300 a month. People say you can't survive on that small amount, but you can, and we did. When the check came, drugs and drinking followed,” Peterson said.

Peterson's mother suffered from emotional abuse as a child and her dad's father passed away when he was young. Peterson explained that these events led up to her parents' use of drugs and alcohol. In her younger years, she said she didn't realize the environment she was in. “It's like the elephant in the room saying. You see it; you don't talk about it.”

As a child, people started noticing Peterson wasn't happy anymore. “I remember a teacher at my grade school told me my eyes didn't smile anymore. At that point, I started to realize that the lifestyle I lived was not right.”

Peterson received a call telling her that her mom was in the hospital in critical condition. “At that point my body went numb. When I got to the hospital, the doctor came to the lobby and told me and my family that my mom's condition was ‘touch and go,’ meaning at any point my mom could pass away; any wrong move could have been her death. I went into her hospital room and grabbed her hand and said ‘I love you.’”

She miraculously made it out of ICU, but the drug use returned. One morning, her mother was acting strange: she was doing the laundry with shampoo and dialing people's addresses as their phone numbers. She started



Peterson with her mother, father and older sister.

“If your parents are addicts or anyone you know is, you can make it through. It takes a lot of strength to make it through, and it is extremely hard, but you can make your own life and not follow in their footsteps. Statistics show that children of addicts are more likely to become addicts, and because of that, I'm putting my all into not becoming what my parents were.” - Senior Maggie Peterson

to become angry with Peterson, but she never mentioned her name, only saying “You, I want you dead.”

According to the doctor, Peterson's mother was experiencing flashbacks from her childhood, and that's why she never said Peterson's name when she was threatening her. She then slipped into an almost vegetative state, meaning she couldn't walk, eat, talk or remember. She was placed into a nursing home where she started to recover. This was also the last time Peterson saw her.

In the summer of 2006, Peterson's life started turning around. “I moved in with my aunt and uncle a month before my eighth grade year. I absolutely love it. It took forever to get used to it, but I couldn't ask for a better mother. She and my uncle stepped in as a key part of my life. They stand by me and I love them.”

“I feel honored to be a driving force in Maggie's life. Despite difficult circumstances for many years she made the decision to live life on a positive

note each day,” Colleen Peterson, Maggie's aunt, said.

“My mom's drug of choice was crack. She also smoked weed. I would walk into the kitchen and see her take a hit,” Maggie said. Although her mom never smoked crack in front of Maggie, she would smoke weed right in front of her.

“I have one older sister, and she is my rock. She has stepped up so much in my life to protect me. We both would go into survival mode to save each other and to protect my mom and her secrets.”

Maggie's mother never fully recovered and still suffers from memory loss. On a positive note, she is no longer using drugs. “I still have no contact with my mom, someday I will. It becomes overwhelming. I will speak to my dad when the time is right. It's hard to see the woman you saw as a hero in the situation she's in. It's hard for her to reason



Peterson with her mother and older sister. Photos courtesy of Maggie Peterson.



Through Thick and Thin. Senior Maggie Peterson poses for a picture with her aunt Colleen Peterson, her legal guardian, before Marian's Christmas Dance on Friday, Dec. 17.

with things, since the brain damage occurred in her frontal lobe and it's hard for her to hold a conversation,” Maggie said.

“Maggie has set goals for her future and has worked hard to reach these goals. She will be successful because of her resilience and her ability to love her parents while choosing not to follow some of the paths that they have chosen. Family is important, and learning that you can love and forgive and still mold your own life is a hard lesson for someone

so young. Maggie is an inspiration to me, and I will always be here to support her to accomplish what I know she will achieve in her life,” Colleen said.

“Over time I have begun to accept the fact that my parents will probably never change. I started to see a therapist. It has helped completely; it's the career I want to go into. I'm a firm believer in all things happen for a reason. If this event hadn't happened, I wouldn't be where I am now.”

How you can get **HELP**

Addiction hotline:
866.923.3761

(24/7) individuals and families who are ensnared by alcohol addiction, drug addiction and substance abuse still can obtain addiction help from drug abuse treatment centers.

The Boys Town National hotline:
800.448.3000 is a free resource and counseling service that assists youth and parents 24/7, year-round, nationwide. The hotline receives about 150,000 calls a year.

Graphic by LexiWalz