

Cassidy

My story isn't the typical addict story. I didn't have a traumatic childhood or a past from which I was trying to escape. My childhood was pretty much picture-perfect. I was given up for adoption at birth, and my parents adopted me when I was 8 days old. I was very wanted and very loved. I had everything you could imagine: family vacations, a nice, loving home, parents who made sure I had anything I wanted or needed. I was always a high academic achiever. I played sports, was captain of the dance team and a cheerleader from grade school through college. No one would have ever thought that addiction would hit someone like me.

I realized I had an addictive personality starting in middle school, smoking cigarettes. I loved everything about them. I smoked pot a couple of times in high school, but other than that I didn't experiment with anything else for the longest time. I started college right after high school, just like I was supposed to. I still had good grades. I partied a little here and there, but nothing major.

At one point I had to have a wisdom tooth pulled. The dentist gave me a prescription for Vicodin. That is where my hell began. This was before the laws became more strict regarding refills. As soon as I took it, I realized that I loved the way I felt. It was like a warm fuzzy hug from the inside out. I felt like I had more energy when I took them. I wish they had made me sick like they do for some people, but they made me feel fantastic. As soon as that bottle ran out, I immediately wanted more. My dentist gave me several refills before he finally said he couldn't give me any more.

It took me a long time to connect the dots — running out of pills, feeling like total crap, and feeling immediately better when I would get more. I still can't believe it took me so long to realize what was happening. I knew nothing about opiates at the time. Well, fast forward a couple more years, and it went from Vicodin and Percocet to Oxys and whatever else was available. It spiraled out of control fast. I was miserable. I hated what my life had become. My life was consumed by making sure I had my next fix.

Then, in June 2010, I found out I was pregnant. Imagine being strung out and finding out you're expecting a child. I was terrified. I had no idea what I was going to do.

I was still actively using in my first couple of months of pregnancy. I was too scared to stop everything cold turkey, thinking the withdrawal would be too much for the baby. What kind of awful mother does that to her child? But my choices were to stop and risk losing the pregnancy, or try to use as little as possible to just not be sick, and pray that my baby would be OK. It was an awful decision to have to make, but I did what I thought was best at the time given my options.

A friend of ours who was in recovery connected us with his doctor. This doctor was an addiction medicine specialist, and he also happened to be an OB-GYN. He was well versed in treating pregnant addicts. He performed my first ultrasound and gave me a prescription for Subutex. I

stayed on Subutex for the remainder of my pregnancy. On March 15, 2011, my daughter was born.

She was full term, healthy and absolutely perfect. And by the grace of God, she never went through any kind of withdrawal from me being on Subutex. After I stopped nursing her, my doctor switched me to Suboxone.

I will always carry a tremendous amount of guilt for things I missed out on with my daughter because I was too sick to be present.

I have now been clean for over eight years. I have a home and I work full time helping others who are fighting addiction. My daughter is now 9 years old. She is absolutely amazing in every way. She is truly my life saver. She now also has a 4-year-old little brother.

My goal now is to play whatever role I can in helping the addiction crisis in my state. I believe that it is much worse now than it was when I was using. I am thankful to be able to be a part of the solution rather than the problem. My life certainly isn't perfect; I still struggle with depression and anxiety, which was probably made worse by my years using. I will forever carry a tremendous amount of guilt for the things I have done and the moments I missed with my daughter. There's a lot of freedom in knowing that I can get up, function and get through my day without having to rely on having something or enough of something to be able to make it through the day. That, to me, is true freedom, and I am thankful for it every single day. We do recover.