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A Moment in Time I'll Never Forget

There have been problems in my family ever since I can remember. The yelling, screaming, crashing plates, slamming doors... it was all part of the routine. I remember the daily fights, my dad being alone in the garage until past the time I went to sleep. I saw him maybe a couple hours a week, if that. But the worst part, is while my mother sat suffering because her husband was never around; I was secretly ecstatic... as long as he was in the other room; it was quiet- for the most part. As I grew up, the visits to the garage were less and less frequent. The drinking took place in the living room, the kitchen, the bedroom, my room, the backyard. Beer bottles littered every room. I hated them... I hated him. Days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months, months turned to years. The moment that changed the way I will live the rest of my life, happened a couple months after my fourteenth birthday. It was mid-December. I'll never forget the next month, every painful detail of it, for the rest of my life.

It started out any normal day, well, normal for my family. I sat in my room with my sister watching TV. The volume was at a semi loud level, to block out the yelling from the other rooms. Nothing violent, just ... well, almost violent. I looked out the window, and the sun seemed to be telling me, "Things will get better." I just got that feeling that things were going to be okay for us. That we could be a family, taking trips to the famous San Diego Zoo, the bowling alley, and the movies. Anything, anything which would make us... normal.

My sister and I were watching some old cartoon, she liked those. I thought back about the times when we would sit in my room with the door locked, just brushing each others hair. Painting each others nails, telling each other stories. My thoughts were interrupted by the *bang, bang, bang* at the door. Jesus, I thought... what now. I noticed that my thoughts had taken me all the way into the darkness; it was almost 10:30PM. I opened my door and was pushed out of the way immediately. My dad came into my room, picked up my sister and walked out. He tucked her into bed, kissed her forehead and walked out. I was still standing at my doorway, and as he walked by me I smelt the liquor on his breath. That's when it all happened. "You ungrateful child", he muttered under his breath. I knew it was about to start. My mom was at work, my sister was in bed... the fight was about to begin; it always did on nights like these.

At first it was just the normal bickering back and forth, the angry glances, the threats. Whatever, I thought, asshole. The bickering turned into yelling, the yelling turned into more serious threats. Before I knew it we were in each others faces... and soon after that there were fists involved. I knew I deserved it, I had a mouth on me, and I was throwing cuss words left and right. But he deserved it, he deserved more. We were going at it, I knew the neighbors could hear, like they always could- yet always pretended they couldn't. Things started to get pretty bad, that is, until we heard the sirens coming from a distance. We didn't really notice them, until we saw the flashing lights outside our house. I pushed my dad as hard as I could and ran out the door, expecting the cops to save me, to protect me. Instead they tried to HANDCUFF me. It wasn't what I expected, so I ran. I ran as fast as my legs would take me. I ran until I couldn't run anymore, until all I could do was sit against the stone wall along the street. Until I fell asleep.

I woke up to a light in my face; I wasn't scared, I was mad. I was mad at my dad for making this happen, I was mad at myself for letting this happen, I was mad at the cops for coming after me when he was still there, untouched. I remember a woman came to me, called my name, and lifted me off the ground. She saw that I was crying, not by sadness, but by anger; and she half hugged me- half stood by my side. Then she handcuffed me. At first I tried to pull away, but I was just so tired. I had no where to go, no where I wanted to go. I wanted to sleep, that's all. I got put in the back of the police car, and we started driving. I looked at the clock; it was nearly one in the morning.

We drove for about an hour, the whole time I was slipping in and out of slumber. A couple times I spoke to the woman in the front seat, other than that it was silent. It was raining hard outside by the time we pulled up to a building that seemed to be in the middle of a forest. Trees were everywhere, just a small cement road coming from the middle of no where made it seem real. Then my parents pulled up. My heart stopped, and my face flushed with anger. "You didn't tell me they were going to be here, what the hell!!!" I screamed at the police officers holding my shoulders. My mother stepped out first, tears running down her face. I didn't look at her. I hated her; I hated her for not being there, for allowing this BS to happen. Then out stepped my dad. I screamed at him the foulest words I could think, and this startled the officers, who carried me into the building. That was the last time I would see my parents for nearly a month.

Inside the secluded building, it was freezing. We had to wait for the doors to be unlocked; we had to pass security cameras, and guarded fences. Great, I thought, I'm in Juvy. We entered the main room and the officers took off my handcuffs. I had to take out my hair clips, bobby pins, and rubber bands. Off came my shoes and my belt, my rings and bracelets were taken and put into a small yellow envelope, with my name clearly marked. I was led into a single room with a single bed. No sheets, no blankets, no windows. Only mirrors. They were watching me. I lay on the bed, shaking from the cold, until I finally fell asleep.

I was awoken at 6 in the morning by a doctor I was introduced to quickly last night. He asked me questions, and snapped at me when my answers were not what he wanted to hear. So I stopped talking altogether. And that made him furious. Finally I heard the sirens again, I thought, poor kid, I wonder who's next in this hell hole. Then I realized the sirens weren't from a cop car, it was an ambulance. The next event happened so fast I barely remember. I was standing in my socks and clothes from the previous night. A stretcher, pushed by two men was brought in the room. I was picked up, laid in the stretcher, and tied down. A blanket was put over me, and I was left there, staring into the bright light on the ceiling for a couple minutes. I couldn't help but think about the sun just from the day before. Things are going to get better... ha.

Finally the men came back. They then pushed me out to the ambulance, folded the stretcher down, and lifted me into the vehicle. The doctor from a couple hours ago appeared and told me, "Good luck, Christie." And they shut the door. On the ride to who knows where, I got my blood taken, multiple "procedure" tests, and my pulse counted a couple times. At seven in the morning we stopped driving. My stretcher- my prison bindings- were pulled out of the car, and then I saw it. I didn't know it at the time, but the ugly building was the home I would be staying in for the next month. The grass I glanced at was the last grass I would see until I was released. I was wheeled inside, through the security gate, through the desks of nurses, through the magnetically locked

double doors, until finally; I reached a section of the building that reminded me of a corridor of a hotel.

I was finally let off that stupid stretcher and glared at the men who were pushing it, the men who didn't seem to have problems ramming me into the doors, or letting the blanket fall off, so I was covered in pouring rain. I was introduced to the head nurse, who immediately made me take out my facial jewelry. "Harm to the residents" I was told. I had my blood drawn again, my picture taken, and my finger prints stamped. I officially had a file. I sat around for a couple hours while the rest of the residents woke up and wandered out of their room. Girls and boys, young and old wandered out. The oldest, was a girl named Nina, who was almost 18. Which meant almost released, I would soon discover. The youngest, however, was a 5 year old girl, who I learned later, liked to hit people with the anger of a mad man. I was paired up with a 12 year old black girl, who tried to do the deed, by swallowing Windex. She scared me, at being twelve, she was monstrous. Huge, tall and wide, with the eyes that seemed like death it's self. Later that day, however she was moved to another unit because she punched a nurse for not letting her use the phone.

My month in the "Crib", they liked to call it, was pretty much routine. There were about 20 residents, and about 30 guards, who switched all throughout the day and night. I got my own room for a while, my own bed, my own shower. That is, until Jessica came in. This girl was crazy, a run away, 21 times and counting. She was 16, with tattoos and piercing all over (which by the way, she refused to remove, so she was locked in our room during the day). Each morning I would be woken up at 8A.M., to walk in a single file line to breakfast. I sat with basically the same people everyday. I had made friends there too, close friends. We could relate, unlike anyone from the outside. We talked about life, love, hate, depression, problems and even solutions. Breakfast was our time to talk. After the buffet (we were forced to eat just the right amount, there were bulimic girls there that were monitored) we would walk the single file line back through the 3 sets of magnetized double doors, into the "Crib". They called it the crib, because no matter what you were doing, you'd be watched.

After breakfast we went back into our rooms, and had a relaxing hour. And after that silent hour, we walked the hallway to the "Rec. Room". It was a good sized room, with basketball nets, soccer goals and huge bouncy balls. Each day, my friends and I would compete in basketball. One guy would always win, he was so good. I remember one day, I got pulled out of rec., and lead into the meeting room. I thought it was my mom at first and turned to stomp back to the game I left. But then I heard my grandmother's voice. Tears came to my eyes, and I slowly turned around. She ran at me, hugged me, and cried with me. We sat holding hands and crying for about an hour, until visitation hours were over. I didn't want her to leave. She had brought me my make up, my clothes from home, and my teddy bear I grew up with as a child. My parents never visited, never called. Except once, to ask if I planned on ever coming home (sarcastically, of course. This was as big of a vacation to me as it was to them)... I replied no, and quickly hung up.

The month I was there went by too fast. It was my break away from reality, my paradise in the storm. I loved it there. I came to know the head nurse by name, but I called her Momma, because she was like one to me. The kids I met there came and went, but I collected numbers throughout the days. A couple people were there with me the

whole time, one girl in particular, who I still talk to this day. She got out a couple days after me, she cleaned up real good.

One hot day in January, during a basketball game, Momma came into the Rec. and said, "Christie, it's time." I cried "No, no, no, no" over and over again, tears coming to my eyes. She came and hugged me and lead me out the door, I looked back to see everyone watching me, everyone crying, everyone trying to remember my face, because it's the last time they would ever see it. I walked into the conference room, and there they were. The people who had put me here, who had changed my life... my parents. And just as fast as I was put in there, I was taken out. I signed a paper, I collected my things... and I was walking out the door.

As I walked outside, the wind hit my face, and I stepped in the grass. The first time I was able to do that for a month. I looked back only once; I looked at the window I knew everyone was staring out of. I knew they were gathered around that window crying, and waving, as we all did every time someone left. I couldn't see them, because the heavily tinted, barred windows, but I knew they were there. And I waved. I wasn't sure if they saw me, or if I just looked stupid waving to an old ugly building, but it was my last goodbye to the moment that changed my life.

Things are better now. When I finally got home, my parents and I didn't talk for a couple months, it was just weird. They stopped drinking though. I stopped picking fights, and my dad stopped fueling them. After the silence broke, I finally had the family I've always wanted. My sister and I can sit with the door unlocked, with the windows open, with our music up, singing along. We can call out to our parents to show them how we did each others hair. We aren't afraid of them. Sure things aren't great around here, there's still a lot that's needed to be fixed, but for the first time, as I write this, I know things will get better. Hey, what do you know, the sun is shining down on me from outside my window.