

## Who Am I ?

My name is Maranda Leonard. I have been through many adversities in my life: when I was nine months old I actually died for a short period -during the emergency heli ride - from the Rotavirus, leaving huge medical bills; my parents got divorced when I was five years old, and I was led to believe this was due to me (and those medical bills); my mom had custody of my two siblings and I, and we saw my dad some weekends.

The constant switching between parents, the blame for medical debt, and the guilt and weight started to show in my schooling. And, of course, this also affected the way I acted and I became a problematic child. I started going to counseling every week which started to interfere with my schooling. School started to get harder for me. Less than a month later my mom met another man and this is when the physical abuse started.

Alcohol, aggression and pure mean became normal with a “functional drunk”. My older brother always took the brunt of any punishment our step dad decided we deserved, and was eventually kicked out of the house. He was fourteen when they sent him to my father's house.

My mom stopped letting my father see my sister and I. For a year-and-a-half, we believed that our dad wanted nothing to do with us. Before long, our mother found out she was pregnant with twins. She was about to start a new family with our (soon to be) stepdad. My mother then decided she no longer wanted any of her children from her first marriage and gave full custody to our father.

At first, I thought living with my dad, his new wife and her daughter would be ok. I was so wrong. I thought my stepdad was bad, but his abuse is nothing compared to what my stepmom and step sister did to us. From the age of eight years old, I knew better than to talk about my home life, and if anyone asked where my bruises came from, I was to lie.

When I was fourteen years old, I tried to commit suicide. I was tired of lying to everyone, pretending I was ok and happy, isolating myself from everyone, feeling alone with all the pain and misery I felt. I didn't see anything worth living

for. I was admitted into a mental facility for a month, and told I was just a troubled child that needed medication to help with my issues.

School has always been my safe place. It was six to seven hours of freedom without the fear of abuse. But a lot of my problems at home reflected in my work ethic and attitude in school. I was mean and rude to everyone. My grades were awful, and I took my anger out on the people who tried to help me. The anger came from home, where I was told three things; “ You are nothing, You will never succeed in life, and no one will want or love You”. I believed all of that for years. I was failing classes, my attendance was horrible, and I was doing exactly what these powerful women at home wanted.

Suddenly it was the first day of my senior year, the year I was supposed to graduate (but would not have enough credits). That day I was walking down the hall and no less than five teachers stopped me and told me they were there for me, that they had faith in me. They believed I could be successful and that I would go far in life. Hearing them say these things woke me up from the nightmare I was living. I started treating people better and my grades improved drastically. I started to ignore the words and fists thrown at me when I was at home.

I finally moved out and am staying with my friend and her family . If it wasn't for my friends or their families, I would still be stuck there. My friends have been there for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on or when things were really bad at home. They were there to tell me everything was going to be ok.

I am now working on building a relationship with my mother and her three children from her second marriage. The hard work I've done is paying off. The relationship with my mom is getting better, and she wants to see and talk with me almost every other day. I get my diploma this spring, proving to myself I can succeed. Even though I have had many adversities in my life, I have learned how to move past them. I am stronger, happier and more determined to be successful. I believe that I can handle whatever life throws my way with a little hard work and patience.

This fall I will be attending Matsu College and pursuing a degree in Applied Sciences in Human Services. I plan to become a social worker and help children who are in abusive situations. I want to show them they are not alone and that others have been through the same things they are going through. I feel that if I can

assist these children who desperately need help, it can be a positive impact in their lives. Social workers do different things, but ultimately social workers protect vulnerable children and support families in need of assistance. They also help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. I want to be the social worker who understands what abused children go through and give them good advice on how they can learn from their negative experiences in their life. I want to show the kids there is a better way of living life and that opportunities always exist!