



Coffee Table Wisdom

By Michelle Miller

Since I can remember, I've known what marijuana was, it being the drug of choice for both of my parents. They would roll joints on the coffee table while I played with my younger brothers. During this time, I would have reoccurring nightmares that my parents would leave me in the car while it was still in drive and I would have to climb or fumble over to the driver's seat to control the situation. I felt like I had to be the mature, responsible adult that my parents were rebelling against.

Oftentimes, there wasn't much in the way of food in our household; our main meal being rice and beans. Once it got so bad that there was only a can of crushed tomatoes.

Not only were supplies in low demand, but so was the love between my parents. As the oldest, I was used to hiding my brothers in another room to play games to try to shut all the fighting out. My parents would try to pull me into the fights by taking sides with one of them. It was difficult, but I always took my mother's side, since if they did split, she would take us kids to her mother's house where real food was. I remember one night when the fighting took a cruel turn and my father took out his small handgun. I am still not sure how that fight ended since I was preoccupied with how to get my brothers in a safe position. Just thinking about that night makes my pulse jump.

My mother signed over custody to my grandmother right before she was sentenced to rehab because she had a needle hidden in her bra. With my grandmother, I was able to hide in my books again

as my life normalized. I no longer had to take such great responsibilities. I took great pleasure in school achievements and went to college.

I majored in psychology in college in part because I wanted to understand the human mind. I wanted to control my own life, because I saw how there was no control in my parents' lives. Then, I learned that something was really wrong my father, but no one told me what it was. I heard words such as bipolar and manic psychotic being discussed about my father, but never in conversations with me involved. Shortly afterwards, I became interested in medicine.

I thought after the diagnosis, my father would get better. But part of illness is that when you feel better you stop taking the medicine. And so begins the cycle of taking the medicine and feeling better to stopping treatment in secret and signs and symptoms reappearing. This happened for a few years for my father.

I consider myself to be very lucky. Even with my background, I've been able to travel down this unexpected path, one that many want to follow but that few actually do. I hope to be able to serve as a role model that just because you are from the wrong side of the tracks, you can go anywhere you want to in life.

My parents are the reason that I am in medical school. They were the example to me of what not to do with my life. They are both recovering drug abusers.