



Angie's Choice

By Shayna Lloyd

IN MY LIFE, there are not any two people that offer more guidance and support than my parents. Whenever I am struggling or in need of reassurance, I can look to them and know that everything is going to turn out alright. They are both models of the type of person I want to be in my life, although for different reasons. Where my father is the comedy man, my mother is the intellectual. Where my dad is sensitive and responds with feeling, my mom is steady and calm. Both influence me greatly, although when it comes to drugs and alcohol, no one experience has shaped me as much as the first time I ever saw my mom cry.

It was almost ten years ago, but I still remember the uneasiness I felt the night that my mom answered the telephone call from my grandmother to hear that her sister was dead. I watched as my mother, the one who was never visibly upset, who never cried, covered her face with her hands and allowed short sobs to escape from her mouth and the words, "No. No. Not Angie. No." I didn't believe it either. My aunt Angie was young, in her early twenties, only a few years older than my oldest sister. I was only seven, and the idea that someone so young could be gone defied everything I believed to be true about life... nobody was supposed to die until they were old and wrinkled. That wasn't how it worked.

When my mom got off the phone and my parents told me we were to pack our bags and make the nine hour trip to Portland, Oregon that very night, I didn't argue. In my short life, I had never seen that kind of pain and devastation in any-

body's eyes, let alone my own mother's. I would have done anything to make her feel better. My mom's explanation for the trip was that she had to be there for her mom. Sometimes it's hard to remember that moms are daughters too.

The same feeling would continue when we reached my mother's family's home in Oregon. My grandmother's face was streaked with mascara in the days we were there. I remember my dad, quiet and shaking his head while family members came in and out of my grandma's house to grieve and cry together. It was strange being in a house full of family with my sisters and me not being the sole focus of attention. It was my little sister's fourth birthday, and I remember her sitting at the table with her birthday cake quietly singing the "Happy Birthday" song to herself. To this day, that in itself is probably the saddest memory that I have.

Amid the sadness and confusion of those few days, I remember whispered words of "heroin" and "drugs" floating around, although none of it meant anything to me. I did not understand Angie's death. I suppose I still don't understand it, but at least now I can comprehend the "how".


My mother's sister was a drug addict who had been clean several weeks prior to her death. Angie had been doing well, but one night she decided to shoot heroin before going out. She was found dead in bed with the needle still in her arm. As if the loss of my mom's sister wasn't enough, my grandfather died a month later of liver cancer and his wife of heart

failure soon after. Both of them were former drug users as well.

Now it is clear to me that my mom grew up in an environment completely different from the safe one that I was lucky enough to know. Where she was raised in a world of drugs, the city, and an unstable family, she found a way to get out and provide her own family with all of the care and stability she never received in her life. My mom is strong in a way that I never had to be. Those ten years ago, surrounded by all of that death and grief over drug and alcohol abuse... I was shocked, and I didn't understand. My mom was sad, but she understood, and it was the push she needed to do something that made me look up to her even more than I already did.

The death of Angie, and later her parents, was the catalyst for my mother to make a positive change in her own life. My mom quit drinking alcohol and she has not had one drink in seven years. I am so incredibly proud of her, for first breaking away from the life that her own sister chose to embrace, and then for taking it one step further and not drinking alcohol.

Seeing firsthand the pain and devastation that poor choices can cause made me make the decision from an early age that I would never use drugs or drink alcohol. I can't think of anything else more abhorrent to me than doing something that damaging to my brain and body. When I think of the future and the many things that I want to do, I know that I could never ruin the potential that I possess in such a meaningless way. Angie was only a few years older than I am now. She will never get to reach her career goals. She will never meet the love of her life and get married. She will never be the role model for her children that my mother is to me. She will never grow old, and see wrinkles when she looks in the mirror. She will never again be able to look toward the future, or say "I will."

I will. 

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Shayna Lloyd is a recent high school graduate from Montana. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.