

## Juvie Saved Me

Nadia Bushinski

I love to sleep. I love the feeling of lying down on a freshly cleaned soft and silky bed sheet after a long day of a busy life. I love the stress relieving scent of eucalyptus that flows through the air slowly from my diffuser that lies atop my nightstand. I love the warm, herbal, gentle sips of chamomile tea before bed as I read a novel. Sleep feels so natural. A time dedicated to doing absolutely nothing except resting our busy minds and our tired bodies. No matter how trapped I felt during the worst days of my life, sleep was always a time I felt safety and comfort; an escape from my reality. But during my time in Juvie, where I shared a room with young teenage girls convicted of murder, the thought of falling asleep terrified me.

Let me explain; I was on a wretched path during my early teenage years, going nowhere fast. My priorities included getting inebriated at the biggest parties each weekend, seeking attention from upperclassmen to make myself look “cool,” and skipping classes to go shopping with my friends using our parent’s stolen money. I never thought of the future. The only thinking I did was deciding what lie I would tell my parents so I could go out and commit petty crimes.

Finally, my actions caught up to me and I found myself in a heap of trouble: six months of probation, no consuming alcohol, skipping class, staying out past curfew. Basic expectations for a sixteen-year-old girl, seems easy enough, right? You see, the problem with myself was that I saw no problem with myself. I brushed everything off. That’s why I took a few shots of vodka that one chilly fall night. I knew I had rules to obey, and I knew I had a meeting with my probate

officer the next morning, but I would be sober by then and she would never know. Perhaps, if my parents hadn't recorded me slurring my words as I stumbled into the front door at midnight, she never would have. "Rules are rules" my probate officer said to me as I resisted the officers putting me in handcuffs. My heart still aches to remember the look on my mother's face, which is most often seen painted with a smile, as they dragged me to the police car and sent me away.

During my three- day sentence, I didn't speak once. I thought the human body could only produce so many tears before they ran out, but mine never did. Just yesterday I was the life of the party, today; I was a prisoner. I spent every minute full of unbearable regret. I thought of everything, and for the first time in my life, I began to think of my future. Where would I be in five years if I stayed living like this? Who would stick around if I kept hurting them? The answer was simple. I knew this was not who I was. I knew I did not belong there. I knew it was time to change.

My mom picked me up the day before Thanksgiving. I remember it felt wrong to hug her. I didn't feel I deserved her forgiveness and open arms. I didn't speak the whole car ride, not because I was upset but because I had no idea where to even begin to apologize. I could feel my mom's concerned eyes on me as I stared out the window at a moody Lake Michigan. I turned my gaze over to her with tears in my eyes, she grabbed my shaky hand and broke the silence by saying nothing more than three simple words "I love you." For the first time in 72 hours, I felt safe. It had only been three days, but coming home felt like the first time I had ever seen my family or felt the warmth of a wood- fire stove or smelled a home cooked meal. This was where I belonged. These were my people. I had to turn my life around for them.

I almost immediately began seeing a therapist. She was a remarkably interesting lady who practiced meditation and could see right through me. She knew what I needed help with before I even asked, and we got straight to work. I began getting my grades up in school and eventually my probation ended. My charges were expunged. My dad took a job downstate, and we moved during the frigid winter of 2019. I had a clean slate and every opportunity to reinvent myself.

Today, five years later, I can confidently say I am a changed person. Today, I am someone who thinks before they speak because I have been someone who spoke out of anger and hurt many people. I am someone who cares so much about their education that they would work two jobs just to be able to take a couple classes because I have been someone who did not turn in a single assignment and failed several classes. I am someone who would rather spend their Friday night at home painting their nails cherry red than go out to bars because I have been someone who got sent to juvie for drinking alcohol. I am someone who holds the door open for others, because I have been someone who would slam it shut behind me.

Juvie saved me. It was the wakeup call I did not know I needed. I have spent every single day of my life for the past five years bettering myself because of it. And some nights, when I lay my head to rest on my plush cheetah print silk pillow, I think of the time I spent in Juvie as a young, scared girl, lying awake on a stiff metal lined bed wishing I had done everything differently, and suddenly all the “negatives” in my life disappear. I forget about all the things I failed to do that day, and I remember how far I have come, and much further I will go.