

My name is Brandee Stafford. I am a certified Peer Recovery Coach here at Daviess Community Hospital (CAPRC 1), a Treatment Facilitator for Daviess County Community Corrections teaching Anger Management and a Work Readiness class at the jail, and an aerobics instructor for the YMCA. I am a person in long term recovery. There are many different pathways to recovery and within my job I support whichever recovery pathway a person chooses, but my recovery path has been and will always be my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So let me tell you about my Jesus and what He has done in my life. I believe in miracles because I have experienced one within myself.

I was not raised in church. My parents got pregnant with me their senior year, turned 18, got married then had me. My dad was in the Navy, so we moved around a lot. My parents divorced 3 years later. Soon after that, my mother got into an abusive relationship with a raging alcoholic and had my brother when I was 4. We moved in with him, and that's when things went bad. I witnessed a lot of terrible things and longed for the day I could live with my dad. Unfortunately, he passed away when I was 9. Circumstances surrounding his death were unclear to me. They told me as a child he was cleaning a gun and it went off in his face, but then told me as a teenager that he committed suicide. I still don't know for sure what happened to him, but the bullet went right between his eyes so it was a closed casket and I had no closure. It made my childhood very rough. I was grieving and at the same time, I was always worried that I would come home one day and my mom would be dead too. I worried myself sick and began having ulcers and acid reflex. One day my mom was beat for the last time and finally left him, so I started at a new school and still had stomach problems. I had to leave class and talk to counselors which made the other students make fun of me every day.

When I was 11, my mom began dating an 18 year old which was very awkward for me. When he moved in, the traffic in and out of our house was crazy. It was obvious to me that he was selling drugs. The summer before I started junior high, he smoked pot with me, and one of his friends offered me my first line of meth and said it was like drinking a pack of Mt. Dew. I started hanging around all the wrong people and had no discipline at all. I had the "cool parents," so of course I started having all kinds of new friends. I loved that I no longer cared about the things I worried about before and became social instead of shy. When I started junior high, I was a totally different person. I was very rebellious and no longer cared what people thought of me. If someone made fun of me I would get in a fight and get kicked out of school. At home, they would applaud me for standing up for myself which felt great.

Things spiraled down from there. What started as a weekend thing became an everyday thing. I would come home and my friends would be partying with my parents when I wasn't even there. That's just who my mom was. She loved everyone, opened her home to everyone, she never knew a stranger. She had a very big heart, was loving and nurturing, but the choices she would make made our lives tough. I became determined to do something different with my life than the example she had made. My mom and her boyfriend broke up and she started seeing the man who lived across the street, who she eventually married, which made her ex-boyfriend very angry. He made our lives miserable. My step-dad moved to Florida to get away from it all. When I turned 18, the summer before my senior year, my mom followed him. Social security checks started coming straight to me, so evidently she thought I was ready to handle life on my own. I came home to an empty Jamestown apartment and a whole lot of overdue bills. Determined, I found rides to school, paid the bills, paid for my senior pics, paid for my cap and gown, and applied for college on my own. I didn't see her all year, until my graduation day. I was on the floor with my classmates. I looked up and there she was. She was so beautiful. Better than I think I had ever seen her look. I started bawling my eyes out and instantly forgave her for everything. She said she needed to get away to get sober and by the looks of her, it was true. We talked every day and were closer than ever. She and her husband moved back.

I started attending college at USI. Throughout the week I did great, but on the weekends I was drinking and smoking pot. I stayed there for summer school to stay away from Washington and the harder drugs. My second year in college, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer and wanted me to come home to take care of her, so I quit school and came home. It was in late Stage 4 and it was awful. She lost her breast, her hair and endured a lot of pain. She fought for 2 years and we thought it was gone. Her hair started growing back, and she was doing much better. We were best friends, and we spent every single day together. You could be in a bad mood and walk in the room and my mother would instantly brighten your day and make it better. She was one of a kind.

Around this time, I met someone. We got engaged, moved in together, and had my oldest son. I was happy with my life, my pregnancy, and my home. After I had him, my mom would come to stay the night on the nursery floor to help me get some sleep. I was in a lot of pain from my emergency C-Section and my script ran out, so my mom offered me some of her OxyContin.

My fiancé, my brother, my step-dad, and I were all taking them. I was hooked. Her cancer came back full force, in her bones this time. Her husband left and my brother went to jail, so she lost her desire to live. She started taking anything she could to ease her pain. One day, she got ahold of some methadone. Her fever spiked and she was delusional, so I rushed her to the hospital. The mixture of the methadone and her chemo treatment put her in the ICU. She had her 42nd birthday in there and died a week later. I blamed myself. I wished I would have helped her get healthy and not taken her pills...why did I take her pills?! I started getting more heavily into drugs, doing anything I could to numb the pain, and I mean anything I could get my hands on. My fiancé and I had split up, and I was living in my car. That is when my deep dark addiction began. I met someone, tried moving away, ended up getting pregnant with my second son, splitting up with my boyfriend, and I ended up back in Washington, living in Jamestown once again. Someone called CPS on me, and my kids were taken from me a week later. I lost complete control of my life, ended up homeless and using a needle. It seemed as inflicting pain upon myself took away the pain in my heart. My heart literally ached and I felt completely worthless, but I couldn't stop myself no matter how bad I wanted to.

I was like Paul in (Romans 7:15-25), "For what I wanted to do, I did not do, but what I hated, I done. It was no longer I who done it, but sin living in me." Sin will take you farther than you ever expected to go, it will keep you longer than you ever expected to stay, and it will cost you more than you ever expected to pay.

I would go visit my kids and treasured every moment we spent together, but leave them heartbroken and couldn't wait to get high to take away the pain. I hated the person I had become and thought maybe my boys would be better off without me. I just about overdosed one day, and found myself waking up and gasping for air. I was out a whole 24 hours. A good day for me was having pain pills in the morning and throughout the day, a shot or two of meth around lunch, and then a xanax and a joint to calm down in the evening. I was very dependent upon these things and felt like I was going to die if I didn't have them. I did anything and everything to get drugs. What a miserable life to live. I tried checking myself into rehab a few times, but I stayed connected to people who would bring me drugs while I was trying to get sober. My family had pretty much given up on me and I started turning to self-help books, staying up high all night to read.

Some talked about Jesus, and I started writing Him poems, but I never once cried out to Him. I felt like He was disappointed in me and that I had to get better before I could stand before Him.

Finally, I got caught with a syringe on me and went to jail. I got 6 months house arrest. What once was in the darkness had been brought to light for all to see and that's when the devil lost his hold on me. I had hit rock bottom. Sometimes God lets us hit rock bottom, so that we discover he is the rock at the bottom...The solid foundation to rebuild our life upon which is exactly what I discovered. I humbly fell to my knees and I gave up trying to do things in my own strength. I cried out to God and surrendered my all to Him! My cousin invited me to church the Sunday before I started my house arrest. The message was, "Come as You Are," which felt like it was directed right to me. At the end, the pastor invited anyone who felt like it was time to be baptized and die to your old life to come up. It almost felt like I had been pushed out of my seat, the feeling was so strong, so I went!! I was born again on March 4, 2012... I have been clean and sober ever since! As I went under that water and died with Christ, I died to my old life, and when I rose again, I became a new creation – a child of God! I envisioned it as it was happening and I felt all of my shame and guilt just wash away!

I had to do my house arrest in the home of a friend who was also an addict. They were cooking meth in the basement and I could smell it coming up through the vents, and only by the grace of God was I able to stay sober. I kneeled and asked God for his help every morning and read His word most of the day. I posted Bible verses all over. A few I really had to focus on was (Proverbs 3:5-6) *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."* And (Galatians 6:9) *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up."* I had to stop trying to understand why my life was the way it was, and trusted that God has a plan for it all. Do well and He will guide me. During that time, I only watched TBN and listened to Christian music. The thought of drugs made me sick, he took that desire from me and replaced it with His desires. He helped me to face my pain and grief instead of running from it. He loved me just the way I was. I was so thankful for Him in my life. I didn't have a father growing up, but now I finally had one that loved me, and I wanted nothing more than to make Him proud!! *God loves being a Father to the fatherless. I asked him every day to change me.*

He started dealing with me about my smoking 2 months later, and by His grace, I was able to quit that too. I just envisioned every time I took a drag, that I was choking out Jesus which made it easy for me. **You don't have to be perfect as a follower of God, you just have to have the desire to change and he will work with you.** At my one year sober mark I decided to go out and celebrate and ended up pregnant with my youngest son. After that I decided I would be a single mom of three boys, not date anyone, and focus on my kids and Jesus. I grew so deeply in my relationship with God during that time, and I always said that Jesus was my spiritual husband and decided to stay pure and wait for the man God had for me. I believed with all my heart that if I was patient and waited on God that in His timing, he would bring me a man who loves Him and that we would have an amazing marriage that honors God because we chose to do it His way.

That's exactly what he did! Grant and I got married on May 11th, 2019. We dated for a few months, got engaged on my 6 year anniversary of being sober, and got married a year later, staying pure the whole time. It makes the man even more attractive when he is willing to wait for you... and way more trustworthy. During our engagement, we began building a home for our blended family of 7 and it was finished the week of our wedding. Grant and I stayed at our new home for the first time on our wedding night which was our first time together as well. How awesome is that? We are united as one and continue to grow together as a family, keeping Christ right at the center of it all. It's absolutely beautiful having a Christ-centered marriage, because if you want to be obedient and pleasing to the Lord, you're naturally going to want to be good to your spouse. The day I went to look for my wedding dress, my aunt Michelle, which is my dad's sister, said she wanted to buy my wedding dress in place of my dad (and come to find out it was on the exact day that my dad passed away, and we didn't even realize it until after). My aunt Michelle has accepted me into her family, and treats me and my kids as if we are her own. It always bothered me that I wouldn't have my dad to walk me down the aisle and give me away, but my oldest son, the one who took the brunt of my terrible choices, got to walk me down the aisle and give me away instead, which was a real tear jerker. Since I have given my life to Christ, everything I've ever needed, He has always been there for me! He has restored me and my life to the fullest! It makes me drop to my knees in thankfulness every day. My transformed life has spoken into the lives of my children, and I have broken the generational curse on my family. I've been blessed with a God fearing husband and we get to raise our boys up to know the Lord.

I am happy and healthy and completely peaceful. I am an overcomer by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of my testimony.

God has opened the doors for me to go into the jail and give my testimony to men and women who have experienced some of the same struggles in life I did. I got offered a job at Community Corrections teaching Anger Management and a work readiness class at the jail, and I also became a full-time Recovery Coach here at Daviess Community Hospital and I love it! This is my purpose and my passion and it is the reason all these things took place in my life. They get to learn from my past. In fact, they even offered me the job because of my past! So not only do I get to work beside some pretty amazing people (including my little brother that is now a recovery coach here at the hospital with me as well), but it is also such a blessing to be able to help recoverees by encouraging them and giving them hope for their future. There is just something so comforting about the words, "Me too!" I'm uniquely qualified to speak into their lives! Often the things that you think have disqualified you in life are the very things that qualify you to be used by God. He has used the hard times in my life, the mistakes of my past, and He has turned them all for good. I also went to an expungement clinic for my background, so not only are my sins erased, but my record is too! His word tells us that He works all things out for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Praise God!! It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me! I live by faith in the Son of God who died and gave Himself for me. Thank you, Jesus!! 😊