

# CASA MYRNA

5<sup>th</sup> Annual Community of Conscience Breakfast  
Wednesday, May 14, 2014

## **Trinity White's Remarks**

Good morning. My name is Trinity.

I have lived at the Teen Parenting Program for over a year. I have a three year-old son, named Tayjhaun. I would like to tell you my story, and how Casa Myrna is supporting me on my journey. But first I need to tell you about the past.

At the age of 14, life didn't matter to me anymore because I lost the only man in my life that I loved: my father. His name is Mark James Stevenson, and he died on June 6, 2007. He wasn't just my dad: he was my role model and the biggest support in my life.

I have two older brothers and two older sisters, and my dad was also close with them. When I lost him, I lost myself; I wasn't the same Trinity anymore. After his death, I felt like there was nobody around for me to express my feelings to; I went numb. I even wanted to end my life. For a long time, I held on to the belief that I had caused my father's death because we had a bad argument the day he died, and that was the last time I spoke to him.

After he died, things got worse at home; there was no real bound between my mother and me, and we fought a lot. Things were bad at school, too; I was fighting and drinking alcohol. I now understand that this was how I was coping with the anger and sadness about my father's death.

Eight months after my father died, in February of 2008, I started dating my son's father. I felt back to life again. That didn't last long: four months into the relationship things got bad. I had moved in with him at his mother's home by then. He would bring girls around when we were together, and I was having conflicts with girls at school over him.

He would control me and isolate me by making me stay at home, and also check up on me constantly.

I got pregnant within the first year of our relationship. He didn't want to have the baby, saying we were too young. He was right that we were young -- we were both 15. But I was excited about having a baby, and wanted him to feel the same way.

In January 2009, when I was seven months pregnant, I lost the baby, a boy. I remember wondering why bad things kept happening to me. Even though my boyfriend was with me at the hospital, he was completely unsupportive at that moment and afterwards.

After I lost my baby, he kicked me out and I went back to my mom's house. My boyfriend told all his friends that I had lost the baby, and they laughed at me and made fun of me. I know that sounds incredibly evil and immature. But he did this to me. But I still kept begging him to take me back. He finally did and I moved in with him in Weymouth, where he was living at that time.

His behavior got more violent - - physically and verbally. I now can clearly see in him the definition of abuse: he exerted power and control over me, these got progressively worse and escalated over time and the abuse was a lot more than just physical hitting.

I got pregnant again, and on June 10, 2011, when I was 18, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy name Tayjhaun Adel Brown. Tayjhaun changed my life and I felt like a brand-new person. Being a mom motivated me to focus on finishing school and think about my future. I wanted to better my and my son's life. And I wanted to live up to my promise to my father that I would get my high school diploma and go to college.

Even though I felt motivated, it was very hard to go to school and be a new mom. My boyfriend never helped with Tayjhaun. I would be up all night with the baby and go to school exhausted. I would pick up Tayjhaun at his grandmother's house in the afternoon, I would want to take a nap, but he would never watch Tayjhaun so I could do this.

We would get into arguments because he would think I was cheating on him. When I would take a shower after a long day at school, he would accuse me of doing this because he thought I had just been with another guy.

Thing continued to get worse. Once, after I asked him why he had been talking with another girl at the store, he hit me. And his mother hit me, too. I remember feeling like she was defending him by doing that. Tayjhaun, who was just a baby, saw this, and couldn't stop crying.

He then told me he would kill me if I took his son away from him. I called my mom and she came and got Tayjhaun and me.

But I still loved him and wanted him to love me. And I still wanted him to see Tayjhaun to try to have a relationship with his son. I now understand that I was trying to replace the love I lost from my dad.

He would call me repeatedly, leaving messages and texting me. A lot of these messages were threats to never take his son away from him. This was more of the control and power that he held over me. I couldn't stay living with my mother, so I moved in with my sister. She has four kids of her own, so this was not an ideal situation.

One day I did call my boyfriend because I needed some money for diapers and formula for Tayjhaun. Again he threatened me. And he also came over to my sister's home. He was ringing all the doorbells in the apartment building until someone buzzed him in. He said he couldn't stand me, and he picked me up and held me over the second-floor banister.

He looked at me with the most evil and hate in his eyes. I truly believed this was my last moment alive, and I just thought about Tayjhaun and my father.

Tayjhaun saw this and started crying and yelling, “Mommy, mommy!!” He put me down and started to choke me. I was fighting back, but I didn’t think I was going to make it. When my sister told him she was calling the police, he finally let go of me.

When the police arrived, I didn’t press charges because I was so scared and also because I still loved him. That night, my sister said to me, “What if that was your last moment?” That moved me, and I went to court the next day to take out a restraining order against him.

I felt depressed and hopeless at that time. I remembered my promise to my father, but I was having a hard time making it a reality. I also felt scared: even with a restraining order, my boyfriend knew that I still lived at my sister’s home.

I first called Casa Myrna’s SafeLink Hotline in June 2012, after I got the number from my worker at the Department of Transitional Assistance. I kept calling SafeLink to check in about shelter space; I actually had the number on speed dial! In November 2012, I got a call from Casa Myrna that there was space at the Teen Parenting Program. We moved in on November 18, 2012.

When we arrived, I was so surprised to see how near the house was to school and Tayjhaun’s daycare. I was so happy to get to the TPP. But I was also scared and sad because I was used to living with my family. At the Teen Parenting Program, I was going to be living with people I barely knew.

I was also used to being in a room and closed in; that is how my boyfriend made me feel. And that is what I did at first when I got to the TPP.

But then I started talking with the other girls and wondered, “Am I the only one who has been a victim? Am I the only one who has gone back to that situation over and over again?” I wasn’t the only one: we had all experienced the same things.

Once I moved to the TPP, I began to go to school regularly, take my classes seriously and find the help I needed to be successful. I work with a counselor at my school who helps me balance my school work, meets with my teachers and checks in with TPP staff. This shows that someone cares about me and wants me to be successful.

Tayjhaun also goes to daycare every day, which is great for his routine. I always look forward to 4:00 p.m. when he comes home and I get him off the van.

The staff at the TPP are always there to keep me focused and guide me to become a successful woman and mother.

One of the most important parts of living at the TPP is attending groups each night. I learned the signs of an unhealthy relationship and quickly recognized these in how my boyfriend treated me. He:

- told me what I could and could not wear;
- told me who I could and could not be with, including my family;
- called my phone and texted me constantly; and
- apologized for hitting me and then hit me again.

I now understand the signs of a HEALTHY relationship: respect... kindness... collaboration... and love and affection.

In Parenting Group, I have learned that yelling at my son is not going to make a negative behavior stop. I have also learned that you can spend time with your child without spending money - -and that the time and attention that I give Tayjhaun are what he, and I, really need.

My relationship with Tayjhaun is getting stronger. I am trying to be a more active mom - going to the park or taking a walk in the neighborhood with him, reading together and having Tayjhaun help me cook and do laundry.

My favorite group is Goals Group. I used to give up if I felt I couldn't do something, or wait until the last minute, stress out and then not finish it. I have now learned now to set a goal for myself each day, and to break things into smaller tasks so they are not overwhelming.

My goals right now are to get my high school diploma... go to college...find housing. To achieve these goals, I go to school each day, do my homework, complete college applications and meet with Jacquie, Casa Myrna's Housing Specialist to work on housing options.

I am proud that my strategy is working: I am finishing up my high school classes this term, taking Advanced History, Literature, Physics and Technology. My GPA is a 3.1, and I am working to get it up to a 3.5. I will do a Capstone Experience in July and then receive my diploma.

I recently applied to UMASS Boston, my first choice for college. I hope to study Accounting or Business Management. Ultimately I would like to pursue my Ph.D. in Economics. I am so excited to be getting closer to realizing the dream my father had for me.

And I recently starting working on the weekend at Café Bistro at Nordstrom at the Natick Mall.

I just turned 21 last week. My birthday has always been a tough time for me when I miss my father. But this year I am feeling stronger than I have in many years - -strong from all I am learning about myself and what I am achieving, and strong for what my future holds.

When Casa Myrna asked me to tell my story last fall for the TPP's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I was nervous and I wasn't sure I was ready.

But then I realized that telling my story could affect others: I could reach other survivors who need to know that they are not alone and that there are options out there for them and their children. I didn't have anyone talking to me about domestic violence when I was experiencing it, and I know that could have made a difference. I want to be a support to anyone who needs to get out of a situation like I did.

Telling my story has also helped me: by letting it out, I can finally breathe and live again.

Every morning when I get up, I say a quote to myself: TO MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR THE FUTURE, YOU HAVE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER NOW.

Casa Myrna has helped me believe this.

Thank you very much for coming today... and for your support of Casa Myrna.