

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly Mother

by Chantel Fleming

At the age of 12, I finally started to realize that my mother was not a mom. She barely knew how to take care of herself, let alone her two children. I grew up knowing she didn't care about me, but once I actually saw her "shitfaced" drunk, my whole life changed. My mother was, and still is, a raging alcoholic and no matter how hard someone tried to stop her she would always relapse. It wasn't until I became an adult that I saw how cruel she was to me. She made my life a living hell, and I never even realized it.

To say my mother had an easy childhood would be like saying the grass isn't green. Before I was born, she had two miscarriages. One was because my grandfather beat her. The second one was because my biological father beat her. It's a miracle I was born and surprising I'm still alive today. I don't think I will ever understand why my mother chose alcohol over her own family, but honestly, I'm afraid to know. Why was it that my mother's only escape was to be numb by drowning herself in booze? Little did she know how big of an effect this would have on my life.

As a baby, my mother would pawn me off to my great-grandmother, who I called Mamaw. If I didn't have this wonderful woman in my life, I would have ended up just like my mother. Mamaw gave me all the care I never got from my mother. She bathed me, bought me new clothes for school, and took me places I enjoyed, like McDonalds. We loved to enjoy an ice cream cone on a hot summer day. I spent every weekend, school break, and occasionally nights during the week at my Mamaw's when my mother got too drunk and shamed me.

When I was two, one of the last times my mother and “real” father were together, they argued, drunk of course, and for some reason I remember this day like most children remember happy special memories. As my father and mother were yelling at each other, I somehow got entwined in the madness and my father pushed me into the wall. I hit my head so hard it dented the dry wall. He told me to “get the hell out of the way!” That was the only time I remember my mother getting me out of harm’s way, and we left. Escaping the madness we had both encountered.

When I was in the 5th grade, I was bullied for coming to school with orange skin. All I wanted was to be tan like my mom, so I used her self-tanning lotion. Before heading to school, I felt so confident. I had dark, tan skin just like my mom. A normal mother would have told her child that she looked like an Oompa Loompa and should wear something to cover it the best she could. Instead my mother laughed at me and sent me to school in shorts and short sleeve shirt. That was when I learned to never trust my mother. But even as the years went on, all I ever wanted was to gain her acceptance.

Throughout my middle school years, I struggled with self-harm on a daily basis. I wanted to be anywhere but home because that was not home to me. It was hell. But on top of the alcoholic mother at home, at school, I had to deal with the non-stop bullying. Boys constantly flipping rubber bands on my skin to the point they developed welts. They would pull my chair out from under me, my butt hitting the hard floor. Just to look up and see everyone laughing at me. To them they were joking, and it was all fun and games. But to me, this made me want to die. I struggled so much within myself and I had no outlet. My best friend of 4 years thought I was doing it for attention. Even though I did my best to hide the cuts on my arms by covering them with sweatbands.

I honestly didn't realize why I cut myself at the time. Looking back on it now, as an adult, I feel so sorry for that little girl who was so misunderstood and had no one to turn to. Through those years, my mother also dealt with her own issues of self-harm. One night, when my stepfather was gone, my "real" father came over. It was around two in the morning when I heard them arguing, having all those horrible flashbacks of being a toddler again. I then heard my mother wailing in pain and crying out for help. In fear, I went into the living room to find that my mother had stabbed herself with a kitchen knife. She had blood all on her hands with the knife still lodged in her stomach. My father was on the phone with 911 as my mother was screaming, "No! Don't call the cops! They'll take me away!" At this point, my father saw me standing there in shock and not moving an inch. He scurried me back into my bedroom, shutting the door behind him. I stayed awake listening to the pain my mother was in, crying along with her out of fear she was going to die. In the morning, I got to visit her in the hospital to make sure she was okay, but after that no one was allowed to see her for a week.

Every time my mother had come home from the hospital, she would clean up for a month or so, but it wouldn't be long before she was back to her normal habits. I'll never forget the time my mother was so drunk and so abusive that my stepfather had to load my little brother and I into the truck and stay the night at my step uncle's house. I was a sophomore in high school and had just come home from color guard practice. We had been practicing a routine to show our coach for a final grade at the end of the first semester. My mother was in one of her drunk "woe is me" moods and was complaining about everything in sight including me. I tried my best to stay in my room, but she loved barging in there expecting me to join in on her "fun time." This time I didn't want to. So, she tried to guilt trip me and told me I didn't love her. I, of course, told her that was far from the truth. That I loved her so much that I had decided to stay with her

instead of being adopted by my cousin and her husband. This came as a shock to her; she had no idea my cousin wanted to adopt me. She blew up in my face telling me she hated me. That I should go and live with them. She continued to say these terrible things for hours. Pointing her finger in my face. Yelling in my ear and letting me know that I was worthless, fat, and ugly. I then went into my room, found some broken glass I had kept from a mirror I broke, and cut both of my arms countless times. My stepfather came into my room and found me balled up in a dark corner of my room. Blood running down my arms. This is when we left. After that night, I made the decision to never listen to mother while she was drunk again. I had vowed to myself that as soon as I turned eighteen, I was getting the hell out of there.

My mother made me promise not to tell my stepfather where she hid her liquor. In my shoe compartment under my bed, deep in the back. Little did she know, that when she was so plastered that her memory failed her, I secretly empty the bottles down the kitchen drain. Nothing could be worse than living in a house where I felt no love. Where I lived in filth and didn't understand that I was supposed to shower regularly. Where my mother never kissed me goodnight. Where she never came to any sports or school activities. I was the only one who looked after me when I was in that house, and on top of that, I had to look after everyone else.

The only time my mother made sure we had a clean house was when we were having company. I remember countless times of having moldy food sitting on what was supposed to be the family table, but was used for holding dirty dishes, trash, and smoked cigarette buds. My bedroom was right by the kitchen. Which is where my mother loved to be when she was drunk. Blaring her stereo so loud that I couldn't think. Listening to the song "Crazy" by Gnarl's Barkley. It was like that song was made for her. To me, she *was* fucking crazy.

Occasionally, on our way home, my mother would have to pull over to use the restroom. Only, she wouldn't stop at a gas station. She thought it was funny to pull over in a cemetery and urinate on the graves. The cemetery was only five minutes from our house. I never understood why she couldn't make it just a little farther. I was certain she was going to be haunted by one of their ghosts.

Our relationship now, as mother and daughter, is nothing like what it was when I was a child. Mostly because I have my own children now and I try to have her be a part of their lives. My mother taught me how not to raise a child. I figured just do the complete opposite of what she did, and everything should be okay. What do you know? It's working. Becoming a mother has been the greatest gift I could ever receive. I honestly don't think I would be the mother I am today without all the chaos I succumbed to as a child. Don't get me wrong; there are times when I feel like I have failed as a mother. Times when I have to take a step back and think before I act or say. I might not have had the greatest childhood, but I'll be damn sure that my kids never have to go through what I did. I hope in their eyes I will always be their mom; not just their mother.