

ESTASIA AND TERESA MCGLOTHLIN

My name is Estasia McGlothlin. I live in Whittier currently and I've lived there for the past four years. I'm Teresa McGlothlin. I first settled in Whittier, lived there for four years. Now I live in North Hollywood. We're sisters, two-and-a-half years apart.

'The scars will never disappear.'

Our story really begins with our mom who grew up in California. We're going to share a little thing that she wrote when she was around 18 years old in 1996:

"My biological father was 20 years older than my mom. At the time of their marriage, my mom was unaware of my biological father's disease with alcoholism. Maybe she didn't want to see it or maybe she was naïve. At any rate, my biological father was disappointed with the son my mom gave birth to. He wanted a girl that he could dominate and control. His son, my brother, was a challenge and a source of competition for him. My biological father could not deal with the new competition that he produced. He started drinking more – vodka on the rocks is his favorite. He became more abusive toward his wife and son as time went on. Then on October 14, 1976, a little girl was born. My biological father pushed my brother on to the backburner, leaving him there to feel unwanted, not cared for and alone. I, the new little girl, was the one my biological father had always wanted. As time went on, my biological father became more abusive physically and emotionally, a cycle that he had learned from his father. My brother, angry and resenting me for all of the attention, started acting out. My biological father grew deeper into his disease. My mom finally divorced him when I was two years old. Even though my biological father did not live with us, he still had visitation rights. He had us on weekends and the abuse continued. I remember the weekends that seemed an eternity and looking forward for my mom to save us from the nightmare that lingered on for many more years to come. At the time, my mom was unaware of the physical abuse. I, at six years old, was frightened to say a word to anybody. My biological father had threatened me not to say a thing or he would kill my mom and my cat Smokey. My brother continued to resent me, not knowing that my biological father was a little "too nice." Nobody found out until I was 13 years old and in rehab just how "nice" he was to me during these abusive years. My mom wasn't around during this life-threatening time. She was a single parent working in corporate America trying to earn enough money to support her two loved ones. When I was around eight years old, my mom got involved with a man who had a severe cocaine problem. For the next couple of years, my mom disappeared into her own world with my new dad and his cocaine. I learned not to trust, want or need anything from anybody. At eight years old, I was cooking for myself, making my own lunch, and getting

myself to school. I was alone in the loneliest world of nothingness. I was a zombie walking through life. My new dad finally went to rehab when I was around nine years old. He lived there for two years to overcome his disease. He rejoined our family. He became the one that everyone was proud of instead of me. I always tried to please everyone and do a wonderful straight-A job in school to get myself acknowledged. Nothing worked. In sixth grade, I threatened to kill myself. I wasn't worth anything to anybody. Nobody would miss me. I was crying out from the deepest part of my soul the only way I knew how. I started using drugs and I became the addict that I hated all my life. Now I have the disease that had robbed me of my childhood. I was alone in a world of darkness with no light coming forth. At some point in my addiction, maybe when I hit bottom, I realized that I had potential. Deep down, my soul wanted to be set free to fly with the angels in the light. At 13 years old, I went to my mom and told her that I needed help. I had a severe drug addiction to crystal methamphetamine. I lived in rehab for a month and a half. That month and a half was the hardest in my life. I had painstakingly built walls so that nobody could hurt me again. In rehab, I tore them down. I started seeing the light. Unfortunately, I missed my childhood and at times yearn for it back again. Today I'm the person I always wanted to be. I still am healing spiritually and emotionally. The scars will never disappear. But they did help me become who I am now. Today I am happy."

'I just wanted her to stop.'

Mom was clean for a couple of years. She was sober for the first parts of our lives, probably until Estasia was born. It's also because our parents were getting divorced. There was a lot of other things that were happening.

Our mom had Teresa when she was 21 or 22 and me when she was 24. Dad was 27. When I was one, our parents got a divorce.

They weren't meant to be together; me and Estasia could feel that at a young age. But there was a lot of drama that came with the divorce. I think that's when the drug use started again.

After the divorce, we lived in a house with our biological mom part time. Then our dad met our stepmom pretty close after. We basically grew up with two moms and a dad. People say that kids aren't aware of things, but you definitely are. You might not know exactly what's going on, but you can tell. I have memories of dumping [mom's] cigarettes down the toilet because I associated them so heavily with the pills that I knew she was doing. As a kid, I couldn't separate the substances, but I knew everything she was doing was bad. Teresa and I would take stuff out of her purse and throw them down the toilet.

In the essay [our mom] would say how she was waiting for her mom to come pick her up every weekend, and that's how I felt going to her house every weekend. I wanted to come back to dad's. I knew there was a lot of love and stuff, but I was doing most of the caretaking. I was cooking as the older sibling from ages 5-10. There was too much responsibility for a young child. Our parents were very open about her addiction as we got a little older because we started to ask questions. I remember seeing her passed out. We couldn't wake her up. Later on, it got worse.

I wanted her to stop. There was one memory with me, Teresa, my grandma, and we're all sitting in our living room yelling at my mom to stop. She was saying she couldn't and was getting mad at us. I wanted her to stop and felt some sort of responsibility for her.

'I could feel a downward spiral.'

I remember Estasia was very young at the time, age six or seven when it started to get worse. The police came one night and that's when I was like, *okay, this is a real thing*. Our house got raided. I remember I could feel a downward spiral in her life happening.

We moved to another apartment and were super excited because our dad and other mom helped us, and they were really close to that area. We could walk to my dad's house. It turns out we moved – well, she may have planned it – but we moved right across the hall from this drug dealer, the bald guy.

The bald guy would come over to the apartment. [Mom] would lock the door; they would go in their bedroom. I remember her coming out with bruises. We learned how to pick locks really young because we would see this man come over and she would lock the bedroom. He was the one guy that made me feel uncomfortable. He picked us up from school one day when he wasn't supposed to. Our dad and stepmom were very diligent about no one being able to pick us up because they knew that my mom was associating with not the best people. Somehow, he was able to pick us up and I remember sitting in the car like, *we're not supposed to be with you*. He would make creepy comments too. I told my mom, "You need to get rid of this guy!" But then we ended up getting evicted and she went to jail.

'I was always scared.'

We saw her going to jail a few times. One time she was driving high and hit her head. I remember seeing her and she was drinking tea with a giant gash on her head. I looked at the windshield and it had been completely cracked.

She was inadvertently neglectful. She wasn't necessarily in a position to be a mom. We'd go over to our biological dad and our other mom's house smelling like pee. I remember vivid images of the house being total chaos – mom trying to feed me cereal but it's all rotten, stuff like that. Plus, she was an animal hoarder – turtles, rats, cats, frogs. She was a very loving person and did love animals. She thought she could care for more than she could, so I'd see them die. She would lie to us about how they died.

I was always scared. I was always scared that she wouldn't exist anymore. Growing up I knew what death was. I could see all these animals that she was hoarding die and I knew that what she was doing was hurting her. We would see her passed out and I was always scared that she would die, or I would get worried about her bruises and the guy coming over.

I responded to it with anger. Over the course of my life that's turned into a positive anger because it's justice driven and wanting the best for people, for themselves. But I think I always knew you can't change someone if they don't want to be changed.

[Mom] would say that she was going to the grocery store, as if I don't look at the clock and see that it's midnight. It was things like that. Kids can pick up on way more than you would think. Obviously, when she would tell us stuff like that, we knew where she was and what she was doing. We would worry. We would blow up her phone. We wouldn't sleep until she got home. We would be left home alone a lot, so that was kind of scary. I'm still scared of the dark. We got left a lot. One time she left me in the car. I was locked in the car in the middle of the summer.

You're a really heavy sleeper. She accidentally locked the keys in the car while you were sleeping. Everyone in the whole neighborhood is shaking the car, trying to wake you up and Estasia wouldn't wake up. Everyone's literally doing everything to wake you. Everyone was trying to get into a window with a door hanger. It was an accident. But she would do stuff like that. Sometimes I'd wake up and not know where she was.

I was always angry at her.'

I think our dad did everything he could. When they were first getting divorced, my mom was on drugs and she was making our dad out to be a villain. She was manipulating the situation for custody, but they believed her as the mom. Her whole side of the family was super against our dad because of these lies, so that's why we came to California after their divorce. People helped her choose California because she turned to Judaism as a source of her healing and there was a Jewish rehab. Her stepfather, the one she mentions in the essay, was Jewish.

When she went off to rehab, it was weird. I loved her so much and communicating with her through letters and trying to play games from afar felt weird. This rehab was supposed to be like a yearlong program or until she got better, but she passed away. I think she was there for three months. We came out and saw her while she was in rehab once. I remember being confused because I was always used to her looking a certain way. I remember she gained a lot of weight, and she had her hair cut, one side was shorter than the other side. She looked so different.

I was really happy to see my mom. We went to the thrift store, and we got this little candle that we put seashells around. We planned to light it together when we talked on the phone. I think I wrote her a little note. I remember Teresa was so angry the whole time.

I think I was kind of over it at that point. I think I was hopeful that [rehab] would work, but I wasn't confident in it. Also, I really wanted a phone at the time, and she said no, so I was super pissed about that. I was always angry at her. But we still loved each other a lot.

We just were kids.'

I remember we got home from school and our dad and stepmom told us that they needed to talk about something. I think I already knew as soon as he said that. I knew that something was wrong, but I didn't want to have that conversation. I remember stalling and I was like, "No, I want to go on a walk." I tried to put it off as long as I could. They were like, "Your mom's in a coma." I said, "Can we see her?" I remember them saying like, "No. Your auntie is there, and she doesn't think it's a good idea for you to see her right now." And she was dead.

I was mad. I wanted to see her. I can't remember if they told me then or if they told me later that it would be too scary. The fact that she was in a state that was too scary for me to see when I had seen her so low was terrifying. Knowing that you don't have the chance to say goodbye is hard. What happened was she was in rehab and she was having stomach problems. She went to the hospital and was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. I was 8 and Teresa was 10 so they told us the details about it later. I guess the rehab place and the hospital didn't communicate with each other, so they gave her a bottle of the pills that she's addicted to. Her tolerance – it used to be high – got low and she self-administered them and overdosed in the hospital.

I think [Mom] always felt an immense amount of guilt because she didn't feel she had control over her addiction. I think the hardest thing for me was knowing that she maybe died feeling guilty and that there was nothing I could do to resolve that feeling for her. I never got to tell her it's okay. I think I've internally come to peace over time with that, knowing that she would know. We were just kids. Being a kid, things are so confusing. I feel fortunate because that was only one of my households. I had this other household with two very loving and supportive parents that put us through therapy. Some kids go through this and don't have that. I feel like that helps with my healing.

I learned to let go of it a lot. It taught me a lot more of wisdom, which I'm thankful for. It made me the person I am today. I think our family became a lot closer during that time. I think it brought us closer together. I think there's a lot of judgment that came at certain points from having a drug addict mother. Growing up in our family, people were waiting to see if we would become addicts or if we would be okay. I was rebellious in high school. I had anger management problems. I got in fights. I had a chip on my shoulder for sure. It took a lot of time to unlearn.

'It doesn't define her.'

The essay at the beginning sums it up pretty well and sums up all that she's been through. Something that always hurt hearing her essay is that she ended on such a positive note of saying that she's healed now, she's ready for the light. I think that shows how easy it is to relapse and that the healing journey is a lifelong process.

With our family, there's a lot of medical trauma. Our whole family's scared of taking pills. I get scared. Growing up, if I couldn't decipher something in a pill bottle, I didn't want it. Even if it was Advil, I would rather suffer than take a pill. [We need to] shed light on the manipulation of pharmaceutical companies.

[Our mom's] one person in the larger story of people profiting off of her pain and addiction. People being prescribed these things then they're addicted and giving into the system of Big Pharma.

Keep the understanding that it's definitely a disease. It's not something you can control, and it really does take over your body. Patience is the key. From the perspective of being a kid, I always loved my mom. I think that, as a parent who may be going through this, the love is never ending. If you're a parent and you can ask your kid for help in any way, they want to help as quick as possible.

Recorded at:
Glendale,
Los Angeles County, CA
06/06/2024
3:00 pm

