

Prepared Statement of Heather Malone, Person in Recovery, Media, PA

They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. This is true for me, as many would be shocked if they read the pages in my book.

My name is Heather Malone and almost six months ago, I finally made the decision to make a better life for myself. For so long, I lived a life of fear, darkness and chaos. I was using heroin on a daily basis. At the end, I was lost and alone. My family wanted nothing to do with me and my own children didn't know their mother.

I was living in North Philadelphia with a person who was physically, mentally, and emotionally abusive. I accepted this because I didn't believe I deserved anything better. Every day I asked myself, "how did I end up here?"

Looking back, it used to be easy to blame my past as for how I turned out. I never learned any kind of coping mechanisms to deal with pain and would keep my emotions deep inside me.

My mother was an addict who always had live-in babysitters look over my sister and me. She eventually moved my aunt and her boyfriend in with us for this purpose. I was four years old when he molested me for the first time. This continued for five years until he left my aunt. I vividly remember the day he left. My aunt ended up going into the bathroom and never coming out. It was hours before I had finally went to check on my aunt. When I did, I found her hanging from the ceiling. All I could do was make sure my little sister who, was five at the time, did not see her.

When my aunt took her life, my mother was not home. And she didn't come at any point during the following three days. I was left, watching my sister, while my aunt hung from the ceiling in our bathroom. Eventually, the neighbors called the authorities. At this point, my father stepped in and took custody of my sister and me. I thought this was my chance to finally be a happy and free kid, something I did not have a chance to experience to that point. Unfortunately it didn't turn out that way, as my father was very abusive. All I wanted was my father to love me, I guess he had his own ways of showing it.

I was fourteen when I tried to escape reality for the first time by taking my own life. I was so lost, alone, hurt, and scared. Obviously I was not successful, but self-harm, more attempts at suicide, and self-destruction continued to play a big part in my life.

My mother came back into my life at eighteen and this is where demise began. I always longed to be mommy's little girl. But when I moved in with her, she didn't want to be my mother. All she wanted was to have someone to get high with. Like I said, she was an addict and after I got into a minor car accident, she brought me to a doctor she was seeing who prescribed me medication. All I had to do was tell the doctor I had serious back pain and he wrote me a prescription. That first time taking a pill was a memory I will never forget. I thought I found the answers to all my pain and problems, it gave me a numbing effect that I fell in love with. As time progressed the strength of medications increased as did my addiction. Pills were so easily accessible and they were legal so I did not see the problem with it all at the time.

Time went on and eventually prescriptions ran out and pills became too expensive and I graduated to heroin and that became my new best friend. This took me down a very deep dark path, with more pain and suffering and all my never came true. I was a person that was hurting and hurt people. I was raped on numerous occasion; selling my body was an easy way to pay for my next fix. Jails, institutions, running, and using was my life. There were bouts of sobriety with the help of methadone and Suboxone maintenance. And yes, it helped periodically, but there was so much pain that I never dealt with which always led me back to relapse. I didn't know how to live life on life's terms without a substance.

I tried to be and do better. I even went back to school to work with people who were in a similar situation as me at Harcum University. In May of 2012, I was inducted into the honors society for receiving one of the highest GPA's in the tri-state area. As part of this recognition, I was scheduled to give a speech at a ceremony. This is where self-sabotage, which is re-occurring thing for me, took place. It should have been one of the best nights of my life. My father was so proud of me and my family was going to be attending the ceremony. I should have been proud and happy, but I wasn't.

I remember thinking back to how envious I was of my aunt who was able to escape reality when she took her own life. I never made it to that ceremony. The last thing I remember was walking upstairs to my room and getting two scarves, tying them together, and fastening either end to my ceiling fan and myself. Days later, I woke up in ICU at Crozer Hospital with tubes down my throat hooked up to machines that were breathing for me. I was so angry when I woke up – I couldn't even successfully kill myself.

As years went on, things got worse. Addiction became my full-time job. I was consumed with the numbing effect. I didn't want to live. But if I had to, I didn't want to feel anything. I felt like a soulless, empty shell of a person. I used to live and lived to use.

I eventually got back into a relationship with a person who was also in active addiction. I really thought we loved each other. To me, pain equaled love because all the people that were supposed to love me hurt me, so that is all that I thought I deserved. Physical abuse was something I allowed because if someone hurt me physically on the outside I didn't have to feel my internal pain.

Last year, on Friday, December 8th, the abuse went to a whole new level. I remember being woken up by my girlfriend choking me. I begged her to please just end my life. She proceeded to cut my throat, hit me with a bat, and had me hanging over the balcony. I wanted her to drop me. My father showed up and stopped her, he carried me to his car and took me far away from there. I should've went right to the hospital. I was bloody and couldn't walk. I later found out that I had a fractured hip, eyes blackened and finger print bruises on my neck.

But all I could do was beg him to take me to Kensington to get my next fix to feel numb once again. After a lot of persuading, he took me but he made me promise if he did I would then go into treatment. I agreed. I was at my all-time low. I showed up to rehab badly physically beaten. Worse though, I was emotionally and spiritually bankrupt and broken.

Detox was not easy and insanity set in. I started missing my girlfriend because, again, pain equals love to me. After the third day, I finally found enough courage to look at myself in the mirror and I almost fainted. Before bruises get better they get worse. This made me take a long look at myself and the life I was living.

I didn't want to live this way anymore, I needed to figure out how to escape the nightmare I had been living for so long. At that moment, I truly surrendered and prayed for a new way of life and guidance.

At Keystone, they had me in a dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) group for people who have experienced trauma and I am so grateful for that opportunity. In past treatments, I would act as if I used drugs only for the effect and that there was no underlying issues. I never shared that I had a very traumatic past which made me feel like my only answer was addiction. With the help of DBT, I was able to scratch the surface of all my pain. I spoke about my past and secrets that had kept me sick for so long.

As my projected discharge date was approached, my counselors suggested I move to a recovery house. At first I was resistant due to previous stays at recovery houses that were not conducive to my recovery. My counselors explained their suggested recovery house was not your average facility. And the more positive things I heard the more intrigued I became. I thought maybe this is my chance to actually get my act together and live a real life and not just exist.

I made the decision to go, and it has not been easy by any means. I live in a therapeutic community of women that help build me up to be the person I can and want so much to be.

I came through the doors of MVP with so many defects of character. I was so used to living a chaotic lifestyle. This program is helping me recognize when my defects come out and how to work through them so that I can change them and become a better person. Perfecting this process is unrealistic and I fall short all the time. However, because of MVP, I am able to work on being a productive member of society. Today, I am accountable for my actions. I am able to be a daughter, a friend, and most of all, a mother. Trust was always a hard thing for me, but today, I can trust in others, others can trust in me, and most of all I trust in myself.

I am still in a lot of pain on a daily basis due to my fractured hip. I need surgery to get a partial hip replacement and I fear the aftermath because to recover, a doctor will just write me a prescription for pain medication to help ease the physical pain. If I do not notify them ahead of time that I am a person in recovery, it's almost automatic for them to prescribe opiates.

Like I said, that does help with the pain temporarily but this is how my demise of addiction all began with a simple script written from a doctor. I do not want that to be the way my life has to end, but it will because I truly believe I may have another run in me but I do not have another recovery. I want to recover. I don't want to be defined as a statistic and hopefully things can change to help implement changes to avoid over prescribing or prescribing people who are at risk.

In treatment, they asked us what our five year goal was in life. People wanted houses, families, and cars. When it was my turn to share, all I wished for was genuine happiness. I honestly thought pure happiness was unattainable for a person like me, and I definitely didn't think I would be able to achieve it within five years. But today, I can truly say that I am so grateful to be exactly where I need to be.