

Moving On

Stories from
the Women of the 4th Floor,
Richmond City Justice Center



RICHMOND
STORY
House 

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Amy's Story

The year was 1990 and I was 13 years old. I visited my best friend Rita's house every day after school because she lived in my neighborhood. I walked to her house not knowing that the man sitting on her sofa watching a Chicago Bulls game would be the father of my three beautiful daughters. He was 18 years old and his name was Mike. He had a bright car - a Maverick. I hated that car. The only thing I liked about the car was that he could take me places a teenage girl wanted to go - the mall, the movies. Plus, he could buy me cigarettes. That relationship was one my parents would not approve of so I kept a secret.

Before I knew it, we were in love. We had our first child when I was two months away from turning 16 years old.

Looking back, this man I fell in love with was terribly abusive.

I should have known something was wrong - how could this 18-year-old man be attracted to a 13-year-old girl? I know when I was 18 years old, I was never attracted to a 13-year-old child. During our days together, I wished I had a bodyguard.

Unfortunately, the abuse did not stop until I was 38 years old. I was devastated at the time. I didn't know what to do when our relationship ended. I just wanted him to come back home. I didn't know at the time but it was the best thing that ever could have happened. The abuse was over and he was moving on to another victim.

Thankfully, I survived the long-term abuse. Sure, I have scars inside and outside of me, but time heals all wounds.

Shatema's Story

It was my early childhood and also through my teenage years, and she teaches me even now. She opened up her heart and her home to me. I was a very problematic child. I was rebellious and hurt and angry. My parents abandoned me and I was mad at the world. But my teacher was so patient with me. She never gave up on me, even now. I can remember so many times my mother would promise to pick me up and spend the day with me. Or just stop by to say hey and see me. If only she would show up I could surely convince her to stay. Surely she would see me in my cute dress and shiny patent leather shoes and be so overcome with my love for her that she would choose me over those street people and those drugs. Well, the truth is, the few times she came, it was never to get me and she surely never stayed.

I can remember one time in particular. She promised to buy me a pair of sneakers I wanted really, really bad. I waited and waited all day. I laid across my bed after school and waited anxiously. I'm glad I wasn't holding my breath. When my teacher, my guardian (my grandma) came home from work and found me upset, she told me she would purchase the shoes and she did. I later overheard her speaking to her sister discussing the fact that my mother had written a bad check to buy my shoes.

When I look back I realize how all my life my grandma has been teaching me: when you love someone, you sacrifice and you love them when they don't know how to love themselves. Love is patient and kind. Love doesn't judge. Love forgives. I could go through life with a hard heart holding on to past hurts, or continually blame other people

for my bad decisions. Or I can continue to grow, and show people the same empathy, love, compassion and forgiveness given to me so freely by my mother's mother – my children's great-grandmother, my angel and teacher. My grandmother.



Heather's Story

The summer of 2015 was the worst and best year of my life. I fell in love with this boy I didn't believe it when he told me that loving him was like chasing a dragon – falling so deep in love with him little did I know that I sold my soul to the darkness. God, he tried to warn me but honestly I wasn't hearing it. The fact that I'm a christian and God ain't been around was turning my soul black. I felt demons trying to get me, waking me out my sleep, giving me cold sweats. My soul can't see the light. I'm wreaking of burning flesh. The darkest just set me up call me praying but damn, nothing! I feel like I lost my faith. Can't look back now. I use my blood to seal the deal. Satisfaction of my life is gone. All the stress, all this hurt, and pain. Now I'm in the

pits of hell. I can't believe I just sold my soul to the devil. He came in my dreams, told me to meet him at a crossroads where I tried to retrieve the items I left in the box. Instead, he just left me looking stupid with my fucking soul bleeding, he needed to see the future, wanted to be best. Was getting heavy took the weight up off my chest. I was calling for help but God, he ain't help me. This is that that is in my blood is killing my brain quick. Ain't no more inner peace in me. He got it all- owns every bit of me. But it was ally- There was a force greater than myself. I have to believe that God existed and could restore me to sanity. I got on my knees and wept. I asked him to save me, and bring me home to the light. I'm not brimming with love for God knows my heart. I'm beaten but I'm willing. God told me he forgave me but it will be a hard journey from here.



LaShaunda's Story

In a relationship that I knew from the beginning was a dead end. I still chose to drive down that road. During this relationship, I endured so many obstacles, trials, tribulations. But most of all, hurt and pain. This is boy I chose to let drive my car Took me so many places I didn't want to go. One day, this boy took me down a road called destruction. I noticed when I got on this road, everything and everybody I ever loved, I turned on.

Living in Mosby Court– a place of higher rated crime, and drugs, a 15-year-old girl smelling herself and wanting to be down struggles to find her way. In her home was a very uncomfortable feeling she's got every time she was left there alone, with her mother's boyfriend. Having an older sister who was 17 at this time, left to move with their aunt, because she got the same uncomfortable feeling when she was around this man.

So she meets a boy at school who lived in Creighton Court– Another high rated crime area where drugs were common. Going to school, which was Armstrong high school, she would leave early without permission to be with her new boyfriend. Having trouble at home, she then moved in with her boyfriend at the age of 16, with both her parents and his parents permission. In this new neighborhood she begins to see and do new things. Now that she lives with him, she notices a different side of him that she was always curious about. During this time being filled with lust, intercourse always to place and was very intense. And she often wondered what given this extra

boost of sexual desires, while wanting and yearning to feel the same intense sexual desires as he.

Once summer Friday night after her and her boyfriend came from going to see a movie, she noticed a different mood and behavior and him. So she wanted to know why he was acting this way. She then followed him to the bedroom and they the edge of the bed. He then got up and to use the bathroom. So she then crept behind him and she after the bathroom, she witnessed him with a tannish, brownish substance and a folded up \$10 bill with the cut off straw in his hand. Immediately, she knew that this was the drugs that she used to hear about the neighborhood.

At this time, he tries to justify and rationalize what the substance was where it came from. So she puts everything together and realized this was the disturbance and difference in his mood and behaviors, and the reason intercourse was so intense. Curiosity sets in and she wants to try the substance that made everything better. Being introduced to this new boy known as heroin, she began to like it. It wasn't so pleasant after the first use, nausea set an. After that it was a feeling of euphoria. Now that the intense sex, the mood-altering and behaviors made sense. Eventually this new boy became her best friend and took her life down a road of destruction.

OLIVIA'S Story

May 17, 2017. Awakened by the loud sound, BOOM! BOOM! Rushing to the front of my three-bedroom house I share with two dogs. Disorganized, just moving in, half-asleep with nothing on but a birthday suit. I manage to make it to the living room.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The sound arose again. "Police!" they scream.

This has to be a nightmare, I thought. Already awakened, assault rifles, nine millimeters, drawn on me, causing me to buckle at the thought of being killed. Naked, standing there yelling, "Don't shoot. Don't shoot my babies!" I cried.

"Well, get the fucking dogs," they fired back.

I grab them as they were trying to protect me from the police.

As they escort me to my bedroom, I grab the first thing I saw to put on. I was thrown outside. What a beautiful day, I thought. Back-to-back cigarette smoke, sitting there scared, with no understanding my life was changing

right before my eyes, in the midst of my so-called success. Not for good, but for the worst. Three guns, \$10,000, 180 grams found.

Bye, bye freedom. Talk about moving on. Moving on to confinement!

So I'm here, Richmond City Jail, living with the unknown. In booking with the smell of fear and body fluids lingering in the air. The booking process was like balancing chemical equations. Long, hard and uncomfortable. Sitting there wishing and wondering what my life was going to endure being here.

Booked and given no bond by the magistrate. Sick! Sick to my stomach after being totally stripped from everything I had, everyone I loved. Worried, not knowing what to do. Feeling like I've been kidnapped. Someone, call the police. That's funny. They already did!

I'm thinking to myself, how did this happen? Who told on me? In my mind trying to put two and two together but not getting four. I'm scared. Crying in a holding cell, tasting the salt from my tears.

Hours later, being called out, given a jail starter kit, which consisted of blanket, toilet paper, sheet, night shirt, towel and state soap. Off I go to start my new life! Moving on. I'm calling it moving in moving in my new home. I thought for the rest of my life, until I realize, I didn't kill anyone.

Lord, please get me out of this. That's when my spiritual journey began. Praying, going to church, Bible study, you name it, I did it, as long as it was bringing me close to God. But really I wanted freedom! I wanted out! I was in jail, trying to please the eyes of the Lord with promises of doing the right thing. They call that "jail house religion."

Well, to make a very long story short, I gave my life to Christ again after I don't know how many times. I still was smacked with an eight-year sentence. Well, readers, I'm moving on. To prison! Oh, I was so mad at God!

One day, I was reading a Daily Bread for Women and ran across the title, "My Motive Revealed." Right then, my Father convicted me on the spot. he

showed me the true condition of my heart. I wasn't given what I wanted. I was given what I needed. Time. Time to grow, to learn to know and love the Lord. Not making the new walk a routine, but a relationship.

The writer said in the passage, "As far as I was concerned I did everything right, but my heart was still void of the promised joy, love and peace. I held out hope that if I kept this lifestyle up, one day God would reward me . . . until one day I received a big disappointment!" As for me, instead of freedom, I was given eight years. She also said, "The disappointment I experienced revealed my true motive for seeing the Lord. I wanted my own glory not His. I wanted my life to be great, and wanted God to make it that way. Instead, God showed me that, although I deserve nothing, He graciously gives me His very best in giving me a relationship with Him."

I know if his will was for me to be free, that want would be met, but my needs were more important. So I've moved on. Moved on to a new man and his name is Jesus!

LORETTA'S Story

It was 1984 in Portsmouth, Virginia. I attended Churchland High School. My grades were fairly good. My family and I attended church on a regular basis. I was raised very strict. All I could wear was dresses and skirts. I wore my hair in bows and ties. I was very outspoken. I was athletic.

Sometimes I was negatively influenced by others.

One day, during lunchtime, we all decided to hang out in the bathroom. Then they started passing around the bottle and marijuana. One of the girls said, "Don't be so stuck up. It's going to make you feel good." I decided to participate.

When I went to class, I fell asleep. I felt someone tap

me on my heard. Unaware of who it was, I just swung. I did not realize it was the teacher. I was sent to the principal's office. The principal said, "Ms. Harris, what happened? You are a good student."

I was suspended for my actions. I knew what I wanted to further my education, although I did not want to go back to high school.

In 1987, I enrolled in Job Corps. I received a certificate for Retail Sales. I also received two trophies and other certificates. At the time, I thought I fit in, not knowing my life was in turmoil.

Thinking back, I should have used my own judgement. Today, I have realized that everybody does not have my best interest at heart.

Shavone's Story

Just because I decided to become a person in recovery doesn't mean the world has stopped moving or forgot the person I used to be and the things I used to do. As the newcomer in recovery, the first fresh breezes of sober air are all rainbows, dreams and new beginnings. We sometimes get so caught up in the new-found way of life, that the very mention of our faulty past is met with gasping shock and feelings of audacity.

"How dare you speak of me that way?!" is the usual response to those who have the nerve to remember our old behaviors. Followed by, "I'm not that person any more! When will you all just move on already?"

Two weeks ago, my younger brother and I had a huge falling out because he decided to casually reference my charges and convictions to an old friend of his asking his blessing to date me. But he ended up with an ear full of "beware" and "approach with caution" signs.

The truth that I've come to realize is that recovery is a two-way street. I spent over a decade building a sturdy report of how vicious, dishonest and selfish I could be. Now that I've been clean one year, I expect the world to greet me with open arms and second chances. Sorry, Sweetie. It doesn't work that way. In the midst of my reproachful thinking, I was led to a powerful scripture written by Paul in Philippians 3 about pushing hard forward towards the prize. Although the words expressed there were extremely poignant and convicting, I can't say I've taken hold of the prize of life as of yet. However, I can say my eyes were brightened to new hopes and optimisms that one day my past will bridge the gap that could shape the way towards my future.

Jernae's Story

It was the summer of 1995 and the sun was shining, flowers blossoming and there was a light breeze in the air. My middle sister, Shae, decided to take me to the corner store to get a soda and ten-cent candy. That's when I laid eyes on my very first crush. He was at the store with his big sister also, Ashley, whom my sister seemed to know.

His dark skin, white smile, light brown eyes made my heart flutter. My arm got goosebumps and my stomach had butterflies. he was so handsome with his Tommy Hilfiger outfit on. We both exchanged smiles and I was so nervous when he said "hello" to me first. My mind went blank and I almost choked, but somehow the word "hello" seemed to float off my tongue.

It was amazing to me how I reacted when I met him, because little did I know he was one block over from me the whole time. With my hands sweaty, he asked me my name and I said, "Jernae." I returned the gesture and he said, "Tony."

From that day forward, Tony and I would always meet up at the playground for our playdates, thanks to our big sisters. Our big sisters made sure we got to play with each other as much as we asked. I was only seven-years-old and I didn't know what it meant to have a boyfriend, but what I did realize was I got butterflies every time we would play together.

On one particular hot summer day, our sisters asked our mothers could they take us somewhere special. When we finally reached our destination, we ended up at the local skating rink. We were both so excited to be at Skating Land on a nice summer Sunday instead of being at the playground. It was Penny a Pound Day, so our sisters didn't have to pay full price and had extra money to spend on junk food.

Tony and I ate pizza and skated for hours holding hands, talking about school, while going round and round the rink. It was

our last lap and Tony said, "I'm moving to the county to go to a better school in September." I remember my heart skipping a beat at the thought of him telling me that we only had a couple of weeks the rest of the summer to spend together. From that day forward, we spent every day together going to the pool, riding bikes and talking on the phone every day.

Thinking back now, things were so simple at the age of seven. But it was also the time that I realized that nothing will last forever and at some point I would have to move on.



A Word from the Facilitators

We'd like to thank the RCJC staff for letting us teach this class. As we move into year two of this partnership, we are increasingly thankful for the connection we have to the residents at RCJC, who we consider our neighbors and community members.

To the women on the fourth floor who made this zine possible: thank you for sharing your lives with us, but in person and through your writing. We learned so much from your strength, vulnerability, and resilience. Keep telling your stories.

-Rachel

A huge thanks to the RCJC staff for your help and support and for believing in the importance of our program.

To the women of fourth floor who shared their lives and their stories with us: we will never forget you! You amazed and inspired us. Keep writing!

-Liz

About the Richmond Story House

The Richmond Story House is all about people sharing stories.

We run workshops that help participants frame their personal narrative and experiences in new ways.

We prioritize underserved parts of our community in our mobile workshops, and our in-house workshops are open to all. We also have a monthly reading group, meeting space, and other ongoing and upcoming events!



**Unearthing and Amplifying Untold
Stories in Our Community**

www.richmondstoryhouse.org