

## UNFIT ADOLESCENT

MY NAME IS TASHA AND I AM AN ADOLESCENT OFFENDER. LET US EXAMINE THE WORD ADOLESCENT SHALL WE? AN ADOLESCENT IS ONE UNDERGOING ADOLESCENCE; A PERIOD OF IMMATURITY, A PERSON WHO HAS UNDERGONE PUBERTY BUT NOT REACHED MATURITY: A TEENAGER. AN ADOLESCENT CANNOT: PURCHASE ALCOHOL, CONSENT TO SEX, RENT A HOTEL ROOM, PURCHASE CIGARETTES, SIGN A LEGALLY BINDING CONTRACT, VOTE, OR GAMBLE; AT 15 I COULDN'T EVEN OBTAIN A CALIFORNIA ID OR DRIVERS LICENSE, HOWEVER, I COULD BE TRIED AND SENTENCED AS AN ADULT. THESE FACTS DO NOT ABSOLVE ME OF GUILT FOR MY CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR, HOWEVER, MY CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR DID NOT PERSIST INTO ADULTHOOD, BUT MY LIFE SENTENCE HAS.

TRAVEL BACK WITH ME TO WHEN YOU WERE 15, (NOW I REALIZE THIS MAY BE A LONGER JOURNEY FOR SOME OF US) NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW, (AND IF YOU WERE LIKE ME, YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW IT ALL) AS WE MATURE WE REALIZE WE HARDLY KNEW ANYTHING AT ALL. I WOULD NOW LIKE TO INTRODUCE TO YOU WHAT ARE CALLED MITIGATING FACTORS. A MITIGATING FACTOR IS SOMETHING THAT CONTRIBUTES TO A RESULT TO MAKE LESS HARSH.

MITIGATING FACTORS INCLUDE: EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IN THE HOME, SUFFERING ANY FORM OF ABUSE, MENTAL ILLNESS, INADEQUATE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, ABJECT POVERTY; JUST TO NAME A FEW. A SINGLE EXPOSURE TO FIREARM VIOLENCE DOUBLES A CHILDS CHANCES OF LATER ENGAGING IN CRIME, FURTHER, CHILDREN



THAT ARE ABUSED ARE 59% MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT CRIME.

I WILL USE MYSELF AS AN EXAMPLE TO GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE. I GREW UP IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL HOME IN A LOW INCOME COMMUNITY. MY FATHER WAS ADDICTED TO ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCES. AS A RESULT, MY FATHER WOULD HAVE VIOLENT OUTBURST OF PHYSICAL ABUSE AGAINST MY MOTHER. IN FACT, WHILE I WAS STILL IN HER WOMB I WAS EXPOSED TO THIS VIOLENCE. WHEN MY MOTHER WAS APPROXIMATELY FIVE MONTHS PREGNANT WITH ME, IN A DRUNKEN RAGE, MY FATHER THREW HER DOWN, SLICED HER FACE AND TOLD HER HE SHOULD KILL HER. NOW OF COURSE I DO NOT CONSCIOUSLY REMEMBER THIS, YET SOMEHOW SUBCONSCIOUSLY IT WAS RECORDED IN MY MEMORY, BECAUSE I'VE NEVER FELT SAFE IN MY HOME. MY MOTHER, HAVING SUFFERED SUCH ABUSE DEVELOPED PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS. HAVING LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT WE RARELY CALLED POLICE DURING MY FATHER'S OUTBURSTS.

WHEN I WAS JUST EIGHT YEARS OLD I WAS RAPED BY A RELATIVE. I'D BEEN MOLESTED FOR YEARS PRIOR TO, YET I WASN'T PENETRATED UNTIL I WAS EIGHT. MY DYSFUNCTIONAL PERSONAL IDENTITY WAS THUS DEVELOPED AND CONTRIBUTED TO MY CONDUCT PROBLEMS. IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR ME TO TRUST ANYONE OR EXPRESS MY FEELINGS. I BECAME "CRUSTED OVER." I ALSO SUFFERED IN ACADEMICS. IT WAS DURING THIS PERIOD THAT I WAS ALSO EXPOSED TO SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE.



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MY FIRST SUICIDE ATTEMPT OCCURRED WHEN I WAS 10 YEARS OLD. I TRIED TO OVERDOSE ON MY GRANDFATHER'S CANCER MEDICATION. MOREOVER, JUST PRIOR TO MY CRIME, ANOTHER ACT OF NON-CONSENSUAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE HAD TAKEN PLACE. SUBSEQUENTLY I DISCOVERED I WAS PREGNANT AND SUFFERED THE LOSS OF PREGNANCY; I WAS JUST 15.

THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE MITIGATING FACTORS IN MY PARTICULAR SITUATION. MY PAST ISN'T BY FAR THE WORSE, NOR IS IT UNCOMMON. THE PICTURE I AM TRYING TO PAINT FOR YOU IS A CLEAR VISION OF THE INJUSTICE IN OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. WE ARE A SOCIETY THAT PLACES MORE IMPORTANCE ON USHERING CHILDREN FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE COURTROOM, INSTEAD OF HABILITATING THEM. NO CHILD WAKES UP FROM A SLUMBER AND SAYS, "TODAY IS A GOOD DAY TO BECOME A PRISONER. I THINK I'LL COMMIT A CRIME."

ADOLESCENTS DO COMMIT CRIME; THIS IS TRUE, HOWEVER, AS PEOPLE MATURE, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL TRAITS UNDERGO CHANGE. YOUTH NEED EDUCATIONAL, RECREATIONAL, SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND FAMILY SERVICES — NOT LIFE SENTENCES. I AM SURE YOU TOO HAVE DONE SOMETHING AT 15 THAT YOU WOULD NEVER DO NOW. WHAT IF YOU DID, AND WERE NEVER GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE? WELCOME TO MY WORLD AS AN ADOLESCENT OFFENDER.

By: TASHA BROWN  
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