

Todriyana's Lifeline Dessert Night Speech 2019



Good evening. My name is Todriyana and I'm 17 years old and a Senior at Elkhart Central High School. I have been attending Lifeline since I was in 7th grade and what an adventure it has been. Growing up, my mom and dad always told me that no matter what happens in life, they were always going to be there for me and my siblings. When I was in second grade, my dad walked out on us. I instantly felt like that promise was broken as I didn't have my dad to count on when I needed him most in my life. My mom played both the role of a mother and a father, as my father was constantly in and out of our lives. After he walked out, we didn't see or hear from him

until a year later at a local store and he acted like he didn't even know us. We saw him multiple times around town knowing that he saw us and didn't understand why he wouldn't acknowledge us. My younger sisters were constantly asking me why our dad didn't want us, and I knew right then that I had to protect them and look out for them. I was only 8 years old.

Despite the brokenness that was going on at home, I was still doing well in school because I had a decent support system there including my Aunt who worked at the school. Right before my 6th grade graduation, I saw my dad and asked my him to come. He promised he would be there. All my siblings and other family members were there, which I was so thankful for, but the one person I was longing to see in the crowd never showed up. I was devastated, yet again, from my dad's broken promise.

Heading into Middle School, my life slowly started to fall apart. We moved around more times than I can count so making friends was always temporary. My grades went

quickly downhill and I started hanging out with the wrong group of friends and getting in trouble at school. I didn't care about myself or the negative decisions I was making.

While in 6th grade, my mom started dating a guy who I, and my siblings, instantly got a bad vibe about. He moved in with us and became a heavy drinker. When my mom would be at work, he would get into physical fights with my older brother. My brother was too scared to tell my mom what was going on in fear that her boyfriend would beat him even worse. I knew this wasn't right and knew I had to stick up for my brother but when I told mom what had happened, she didn't believe us because her boyfriend would of course deny everything. His drinking escalated, as did our fear to be left alone with him. The next day, my mom went to work and her boyfriend was at home drinking, so I told my younger sisters to come upstairs with me to our room and we locked the door. He called me in to his room and even though I didn't want to go, I wanted to respect the fact that he was an adult and my mom's boyfriend. He began asking me all sorts of questions that quickly became inappropriate. He told me to come sit on his lap and me, being an innocent 12 year-old, I did what I was told. He started feeling up under my clothes and my instinct quickly told me to RUN! I ran upstairs to my sister's scared, broken and crying. They kept asking me what was wrong but I couldn't even piece together what just happened to tell them.

Later, my mom's boyfriend called my sister to his room and she came back crying and just as upset as I was and unable to speak. But I already knew why. We both couldn't even talk about it out of pure fear and shock of what just happened to us.

I wanted to tell my mom what happened but after she didn't believe us when I told her about my brother, I just felt like she really wasn't going to believe me now. We soon moved to Michigan, my mom's boyfriend included, and I couldn't keep this burden a secret anymore. When I told my mom what happened to me and my sister, her reply was what I feared she would say - "I don't believe you." Once again, a broken promise of her always telling us that she would be there for us no matter what.

I knew I needed to tell someone what was going on so I told my mom's best friend who lived across the street from us. My mom and her boyfriend moved back to Elkhart and left me and my siblings in Michigan to live with her best friend. I can't even begin to put into words how broken and betrayed I felt. I cried every day for months hoping to hear from my mom. I completely shut down and shut everyone out. Even though I had my siblings by my side, I felt so empty inside as I would wonder on a daily basis, "What did I do wrong to make both of my parents leave? Why did they leave? How could they just



turn their backs on us? Has my mom forgotten that she has kids and a responsibility to raise us?"

Life was pointless to me and the pain became so unbearable that I tried taking my own life. My sisters found me just in time and begged me to never try and do that again because they needed me. At that moment, I felt a small sense of purpose. My sisters DID need me and how dare I become another person who isn't in their life anymore. My depression and brokenness quickly turned to anger and I was expelled from school from getting in a fight. My siblings and I had to move back to Elkhart with my mom so I could continue going to school. I kept my distance from her boyfriend because I knew what he did to me and my sister and wanted nothing to do with him.

As the next few years went by, I spent my birthdays unacknowledged and uncelebrated. I couldn't trust anyone in fear that they would leave me or betray me. My mom would take me in to stores with my siblings and tell us to put things in our cart and to walk out of the store with it. Because she was my mom, I did what I was told, even though I knew it was wrong. One day, we eventually got caught, and my mom and her friend ran out of the store and drove off without me for me to catch all of the blame saying it was all of my stuff. I was arrested and put on probation. Once again, a broken promise that my parents would be there for me no matter what happened in my life.

People would tell me that everything would be okay and God would work things out for me but all I could think was, if God is there for me then why is He letting all of this stuff happen to me? Mom's boyfriend soon started beating on her, me and my siblings in front of each other and she still acted like it didn't happen. One day, my anger got the best of me that resulted in me getting arrested and being put on probation for an altercation I got into with someone.

I didn't know who to turn to, who to trust or who to look up to. I soon learned about Lifeline from some teachers at school. I thought it seemed fun and a positive place to be instead of having to be at home, so I decided to check it out. At first, I liked coming but wasn't really open to hearing about God because of everything I had been through.

Our home flooded so me and my siblings moved in with my Aunt and Uncle. After eventually telling my Aunt what my mom's boyfriend had been doing to us, she told my mom that her boyfriend wasn't allowed at her house and my mom chose to go live with her boyfriend. My Aunt would go to church every Sunday and was always telling me to just be open to God and to come to church with her. I thought she was crazy, but I



eventually gave in and went to church with her because I figured I didn't have much more to lose in my life so why not give it a shot. I actually started listening to what the Pastor was preaching about and was always blown away at how everything he was talking about applied directly to my life and what I was going through. I started coming to Lifeline on a regular basis as it was a way for me to offload my struggles, ask questions about God and what I had been learning in Church and surround myself with positive people who actually cared about me and what I was going through.

My bond with my mom actually started getting better which I was so grateful for. I also started an amazing bond with my Girls Group Leader at Lifeline, Emily. She would sit and listen and talk with me, take our girls group to Starbucks, and eventually asked me to go to Church with her. Emily started picking me up for church every Sunday. My Aunt had always told me that when God calls upon you it's up to you to answer that call. One day after church, that call from God came as I was sitting on my front porch and I gave my life over to Him.

My Aunt and Emily continued to walk alongside me and life seemed to be falling into place, until October 31st of last year when my mom showed up at my Aunt's house to tell me and my siblings that she was leaving to go to Missouri with her boyfriend and we weren't coming with her but she would be back. The daily phone calls from my mom turned into bi-weekly phone calls. The bi-weekly phone calls turned into not hearing from my mom at all for six months. I of course felt betrayed by my mom once again but this time, I knew I had someone to turn to who I finally trusted for the first time in life to help me get through this situation - Emily. And she did. We sat in a local coffee shop while I poured my heart out to her telling her everything I had been through and what I was currently going through. Emily gave me a devotional book and started talking to me about getting baptized. On May 5th, 2019, I was baptized at church by Emily and another Lifeline Staff Member, Micah. Both my mom and dad promised to be there. As I was standing in the pool about to be baptized, I looked out into the crowd to realize the absence of my parents. But this time, it didn't matter to me. It didn't matter because not only were my Aunt, and sisters there, my entire Lifeline family was there taking up the first two full rows standing and cheering for me.

This past summer, my mom came back and wanted me and my siblings to move back with her to Missouri. But Emily wasn't going to let that happen. On August 2nd, my mom signed over legal guardianship to Emily, who I have been living with ever since.



I have had opportunities and “firsts” since being with Emily and Lifeline that I never thought would happen. I rode my first roller coaster, went to my first apple festival and carved my first pumpkin. Lifeline gave me my first job working for them for the past year as a Leader of Elementary and Middle School kids. I will also get to experience my first Christmas in three years and for the first time get to actually buy presents for others and wrap them myself because Emily taught me how. I never felt like I belonged somewhere so perfectly until I lived with Emily. I belong with Emily and her family. And for the first time, I don’t have to worry about my family not showing up to my events because not only is Emily and her fiancé, David always there, but Darrell and Leslie and other family members are usually there too. With prom and graduation coming up, I already know they will all be there for me.

I never saw myself graduating from High School, let alone going to college. I’m humbled to say that not only am I graduating High School, but I’m graduating early and already have plans to go to college at Word of Life in New York for Youth Ministry after my Internship at Lifeline next Summer.

If it weren’t for Lifeline and Emily, I would probably be pregnant, locked up, a dropout and going nowhere in life. Lifeline helped me see my full, God-given potential. Words cannot explain the love and appreciation I have for Emily and the opportunities she has given me and it all happened because of Lifeline. Their inspiration is my motivation. They saved me from being another teenage statistic in this community and for that, I will be forever grateful.

Todriyana
Lifeline Student and Mentor