

## Braxton's Lifeline Dessert Night Speech 2019



Growing up, I seemed to have always experienced situations that weren't in my control but found them completely controlling my life. My dad passed away when I was one year old so I grew up without a solid father figure in my life. My mom eventually had soon started dating someone who was locked up the majority of the time they were together.

When I was 3 years old, my sister who is five years older than me, was diagnosed with cancer. We spent the next three years in and out of hospitals while she was going through her treatments. School was irrelevant to me. I never cared. I never tried. I always knew the material and the answers but didn't care enough to show or express it.

When I was 12, my mom started dating a guy who was not a good influence on our family. He was gang banging, dealing and using drugs and bringing his lifestyle in to our home. My mom worked full time and wasn't always around to see everything he was doing and what type of people he was bringing in and out of our home. He was constantly taking her money and stuff from our house. He was very manipulative by asking me, my sister and my best friend to help him out with stuff like going and getting my mom's car keys when she had already told him he couldn't take her car. My best friend soon started following in the path of my mom's boyfriend living the same gang banging lifestyle and unfortunately, so did I. Stealing cars, robbing people, selling weed, in situations that I knew I shouldn't be in simply because these were the people I was surrounded with so I naturally fell into their lifestyle.

I was always extremely close with my mom, but the trust and bond between us quickly started to drift apart because I was following and doing whatever her boyfriend wanted me to do. I was scared to upset him by not doing what he told me to do even if I knew it was something my mom wouldn't be okay with. I would do my mom dirty quite a bit by going along with whatever her boyfriend wanted me to do including taking her money to give him. I always felt guilty by going behind her back and would usually tell her a few



days after what her boyfriend had asked me to do. Constant manipulation soon turned in to expectations. Expectations soon turned in to threats. And the threats soon turned in to fear for our lives. Although my mom tried many times to leave him by moving or getting the law involved, we couldn't seem to escape the living nightmare he was creating for us because he always found us. And every time he would show back up, things would get worse and worse. After a two-day long drug binge, my mom's boyfriend and my best friend showed up at our house demanding her to give them money and the keys to her car. After 5 horrendous years of being controlled by a lying, cheating, deceitful, mentally and verbally abusive man, my mom had had enough. With the very little courage she had left in her, she told them no. And with the very little respect my mom's boyfriend had, he and my best friend began beating on her. As my sister and I tried to pry them off of her, they turned and began beating on us. Once they stopped, they told us they were leaving to go get some people and some other stuff and they would be back. I had school that day and my mom told me I had to go because I would be safe there. When I got home, our house was destroyed from my mom's boyfriend and best friend trying to find my mom's keys and my mom was in a frantic scurry packing up as much as our belongings as she could and we left. We moved 3 hours away and lived there for about 2-3 months until we had to come back Elkhart so I could start my Freshman year of high school. My mom's boyfriend got locked up for 3 months but that didn't take away the fear of having his people come after us. I became incredibly withdrawn from any friends I had before we moved and didn't want anyone to know what had happened. This completely changed my perspective in life and realized that I wanted nothing to do with that lifestyle.

Second semester of my Freshman year I went to a local online school. I wasn't motivated at all and wasn't getting my work done and fell behind in my credits. My Junior year I switched schools to Life Academy and my grades have improved. On August 27th, 2019, my mom's new boyfriend burst in my room to tell me he couldn't wake my mom up. While on the phone with 911, we tried giving my mom CPR until the paramedics arrived and informed us that she was gone. We later learned she had passed away in her sleep from blockage in her arteries. I found myself at the age of 17 with no parents. A home to sell. Belongings to go through. Bank accounts to close and bills to pay off. I moved in with my Uncle and have been living with him ever since.

Shortly after my mom died, Lifeline came into my school to talk about their programming and what they have to offer. I was immediately on board and wanted to get involved. Even though I have only been coming to Lifeline for a few months, I have felt for the first time in a long time what it truly means when someone says they have my back because



I know that they really do. They believe in me, motivate me, support me and care about me above and beyond my experience here and getting caught up on my credits. They have become my family and my moral support system. I attend Life Academy in the morning until I come to work here at Lifeline on the Construction Team where we are completely remodeling a house across the street from Lifeline that will be used as a transitional home for students 18 and older who need somewhere to go due to not having parents or anywhere to go. Students just like me. Lifeline is an amazing opportunity and I'm so grateful for complete strangers opening their arms to me and accepting me for who I am and where I'm at. I have learned how to trust others again and have found a sense of belonging.

Even in all of these hard, undeserved, unexplainable situations where I could have so easily played the "why me" or the victim card, I always tried to look at the good that came out of each and every one of them. Because I lost my dad when I was one year old, I observed the lack of character, integrity and loyalty through the behaviors of my mom's boyfriends learning that I never wanted to be that type of man. Because I saw my sister fight through cancer for three years, I learned to be there for others in hard times. Because I chose to follow down the wrong lifestyle path, I learned that path isn't for me. In life, we can't always choose what happens to us but we can choose how to respond. With Lifeline by my side, I have chosen to get my life back on track and to be the man I know God created me to be; hard working, forgiving, trustworthy, loyal, independent and most of all, am in control of who I am and who I want to be.

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