

What the *bottle* holds

Student finds strength within her struggles

She holds a bottle in her hand. The voices of other people at the party turn into white noise, all Nora* can focus on is the smell of alcohol coming off their breath.

They hold the bottle of alcohol like it's a trophy, like it is something to be proud of.

To them, it's a typical Friday night with some blurry memories. To her, it's the dirty hotel rooms, the abuse and the hurt.

She takes a sip.

The time her mother did not come home for three days. She takes another.

The bruises on her mother from her father's fist.

She takes a few more, trying to erase the memories of her childhood with the same poison that made it toxic.

"I wanted to forget everything," Nora said.

There is one thing she cannot forget--her little sister.

She puts the bottle down.

The bottle is just an object. Nothing more than glass. But it held so much power in her life. It was something her father would choose over her. She would drink not to get drunk, but to see what was so special about it that would make her parents choose it over her.

Every single time.

"Being myself, being a high schooler, sometimes I go to parties and stuff," Nora said. "But I know to set an example for my sister."

Setting that example hasn't always proved easy. But Nora has learned from the mistakes of her parents, and the mistakes of her past.

"Seeing alcohol now...I've learned from it," Nora said. "I've learned to see it as ... something that can destroy other

people's lives."

The destruction that Nora faced seemed never-ending. Spanning the entire country, her struggle followed her from Hawaii to New York, from Florida to Colorado.

It started with the first eviction, after her father failed to pay the mortgage in the house in Alabama. They moved to Florida, and brought all the baggage from their past home, including the bottles of alcohol and the abusive tendencies.

"It was pretty traumatic, seeing the father that you thought was, like, a superhero and all of a sudden he ends up hurting your mother," Nora said. "being in a small house you could see everything that was going on...I didn't know what to do."

Her father's rage would span from calling her names to even throwing her baby sister, because he did not want her.

"You're stuck in this position that you don't know what's gonna happen next, and you feel like you don't have a family anymore," Nora said.

Her sister was her refuge; she was her sister's keeper.

"I didn't know where to go. I was just six years old, and seeing all of that...you don't know what to do...I was just holding my sister and crying cause I didn't know what was happening things are just like flying" Nora said.

Eventually he walked out.

Her mother was left alone with two children. All of them carried the scars from Nora's father's abuse. Her mother turned to drugs and alcohol and found her refuge in other men, while Nora stepped into a new role as caretaker of her sister.

She would sleep at different men's houses every night, sneaking in Nora and her sister.

Nora witnessed her mother doing many drugs, from smoking weed to shooting up heroin.

"At the time, I really didn't see any bad in my mom because she would make herself seem like the victim and I thought it was the normal thing to do" Nora said.

While her mom was off with other men, Nora

knew she had to make sure her sister was okay. She wanted to give her sister the love that her mother could not provide.

"I saw her with my sister and she didn't give a crap about her," Nora said. "She would leave me with her, and just not care... I felt more like a mother than her."

Eventually the drugs, random men and moving around from house to house became too much for Nora.

She ran away.

She ran away to a local Walmart, and hid in the towering aisles. She wanted to run away from all the hurt and pain and memories. No matter how hard she tried to run away, she was constantly reminded of the one thing that kept her strong: her sister.

When she got back home, her mother was relieved that she was safe. Nora was happy that her sister was okay.

She knew that her mother loved her.

"She showed us she loved us by getting money from guys. Once in a while, she would take us to Waffle House or something," Nora said.

She did not know that it would take her running away for her mother to realize just how much hurt she put on her daughter.

"Eventually she ended up seeing how much she was hurting me and went to rehab," Nora said.

This was the first time in many years Nora saw her mother sober. This would be the first time her mother told her that she loved Nora, and Nora believed it.

This was it. This was strength.

But the trust was something that her mother had to earn back.

"We went there and saw what she was doing and saw she was doing better so I started to trust her more," Nora said.

When she came home from rehab her breath didn't smell like booze, and her eyes didn't look tired.

Her mother needed one more break from her children, but this would be the final one.

"She took a break from us for two days because when she got sober she realized how much she was hurting us, and was super emotional and when she came back she was better." Nora said.

Her mother came back from rehab as a new person. She was smiling, and finding happiness in her own children rather than a bottle or the kiss of a stranger. She showed up to help Nora enroll in school and find her passion.

"When she was sober she was realizing things that she didn't before, like my passion for school and how I am actually smart and I wasn't actually stupid and how much I was taking care of my sister," Nora said. "Life is not always going to be easy. It's going to knock you down really hard sometimes but you have to realize your own strength."

Her mother's sobriety allowed her to form a new relationship with Nora--one that wasn't there before she went to rehab.

"When I went back to school, she actually bought me my uniforms for the first time. It was like a bonding moment for us, and she really showed appreciation for my love for writing and school and education," Nora said. "She got dressed up and did her makeup when she went to enroll me in school and that made me super happy because she was sober."

Ever since then, Nora has found a refuge outside of a bottle, outside of a dark hotel room, outside of the pain that she knew all too well as a child. Nora has found her home through journalism.

"After seeing all that, all I can see is the worst in people," Nora said. "But being in broadcasting actually helps with that, so I can actually find stories of other people and relate to them."



Drinking at a young age can cause long term problems.



*Name has been changed due to omission