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Defying the Odds

Do you consider yourself successful? An even better question, were your parents addicted to drugs? Does one value success more when they are faced with a difficult past? Growing up in a broken home, facing physical abuse, not knowing any love from her parents, and seeing how drugs and selfishness can destroy relationships and lives, Rachel has defied the odds of becoming just another story of someone becoming a product of the environment and made a life for herself that she can be proud of. At nineteen years old, Rachel Tinsman is now married, a full-time student, and well on her way to becoming a successful sports horse trainer.

Originally from Greenfield, Alabama, Rachel’s earliest memories include what she considered to be a large house containing a mom, a dad, a brother, a sister, and her cat Sylvester — one big happy family all living under one roof. “My sister and I grew up together for the most part. Her name was Tiffany Ann Tinsman and she was everything I wanted to be. She was my idol growing up. I thought she was so cool with her boyfriends and tight jeans.” Like most siblings, Rachel states that she and Tiffany often fought. “Me and my sister actually fought over mini clipboards one time. They were exactly the same, except the color. One was teal, the other purple. Mine was teal, but Tiff swore it was hers. She got her way.” They fought over the usual things like toys, but they also had to fight for something much more than that: attention from their parents. Rachel emphasized that the little bit of attention they were given just never seemed to be enough. Rachel’s little brother Jacob was later adopted by a young couple that could show him love. Rachel believes that the parents that adopted him may have changed his name, but she’s not really sure. The adoptive parents tried to keep in touch with Rachel’s mother, but Rachel says her mother just didn’t seem to care about Jacob or how he was doing.

When asked about her mother, Rachel said “I thought she was beautiful, especially when I was younger. She had a cowlick she would hairspray up, kinda seventiesish, with very long, soft, black hair. She was a goofy lady who liked to have fun.” Rachel’s mother never had a career, nor did she care for one, stated Rachel. She would occasionally do odd jobs like painting or cleaning houses, but nothing permanent. Rachel says that her mother’s main focus was supporting her habit, even if it meant sleeping with the drug dealers themselves. Rachel’s father had the same problem. He worked as a plumber and electrician, but barely made enough to make ends meet. Rachel says that she and Tiffany were not a priority of their parents. Their addiction to drugs like cocaine, heroin, and meth was what all their time was spent focused on. Rachel says that she was too young to understand her parents’ habit, but she had a sister that she could play with, and that was enough.

“I was about four years old when my parents split. They fought and fought and fought and my mom ended up leaving the big house with Tiffany in hand and me stunned at the doorway. I was young, but I remember it like it was yesterday, for it was the worst day of my life.” Rachel says that the day that her mom and dad split was the day her world fell apart. “The main thing I remember is the sound of the glass clock making contact with our VCR. Mom threw the clock, Dad ducked, and it hit the VCR. Dad hated being yelled at, especially when mom would shake her finger in his face. He bit it, actually bit her finger. After that, she walked out.” Rachel knew that her parents loved each other, but their love for drugs took over their lives. “Since the divorce and the wonderful big house, it was all downhill from there.”

After Rachel’s mom and Tiffany left, she didn’t see much of them again. “I knew nothing except hungry, dirty drug dealers, and lack of love from either parent.” Rachel was physically abused by her father and was dangerously thin. Rachel moved around a lot while living in Alabama, staying with her father and several of his friends. She lived a very unstable life and attended at least five different elementary schools.

By Rachel’s junior high school years, Rachel finally had a change of pace. Rachel’s fraternal grandparents knew that their son was having a difficult time raising a daughter and invited Rachel to their home in Lake City, Florida, and although she did not know much of them, she moved and hoped that she would be able to find the stability she was looking for. “I was greeted with lots of awkward hugs. I was scared when I first moved in. I wasn't really sure what to think of everyone, especially Dharma, the big rottweiler who instantly befriended me and who I will always hold close to my heart. Without her, I may not have stayed.” Rachel says that her new room consisted of a blow-up air mattress, a nightstand, and an angel nightlight. Rachel says that she found the angel nightlight to be very comforting.

Until Rachel was able to escape the only life she had known, she never really realized how bad her life truly was. Her new life in Florida was so different. “In many ways, they helped me. But in many, they hurt me.” The hurt that Rachel received from her grandparents was not like the hurt she was used to. Instead of physical pain, Rachel says that they left her with a broken heart and a head full of lies. She didn’t feel like they had welcomed her into their home out of love, but instead out of guilt. Rachel’s grandparents called her crazy and forced her to see a therapist because they thought that she was going to turn out like her parents.

Because of Rachel’s rough early years, she was forced to grow up quite quickly. After moving to Florida, she let her past be her past. She never struggled with any temptations to be like her parents. She was smart and she knew it. Rachel began taking honors classes and found her passion and reason to live.

If there’s one positive thing that Rachel’s grandparents did for her, it was introducing her to the world of horseback riding. While living in Alabama, Rachel didn’t have time for hobbies. Her only hobby was survival. Rachel’s grandparents lived on several acres of land and had several horses. Although Rachel was expected to take care of the horses as part of her chores, she didn’t mind. She fell in love. This hobby eventually led to her passion and reason for waking up in the morning. This is what Rachel wants to do for the rest of her life. Rachel’s one request for this article was that Ringo Starr be included. Ringo was Rachel’s first horse and became her best friend. “The day I got him was the best day ever. I felt normal again. He was so big and fluffy. He had kind eyes and never yelled at me or called me names. He just listened.” Rachel says that she owes it to Ringo for saving her social life and that talking to him was like talking to a human.

At age nineteen, Rachel is a full-time student at Florida Gateway College studying Equine Science and is employed at The Oaks Equestrian Center in Lake City, Florida. Rachel teaches riding lessons and trains sport horses. Rachel describes the group that she works with at the Equestrian Center as the family she never had. They accept her for who she is and make her feel loved.

Shortly after graduating high school, Rachel met a gentleman named David Rader. She had no idea when they met that she was meeting the love of her life. “Lost, confused, and in need of attention and love. He made me laugh, and let me have fun. He loved me and gave me attention I never had before. He understands me and doesn't care that I came from a terrible family.” After less than a year together, Rachel and David decided to get married. Rachel says that she now has faith that she has someone that she can be with forever and that she can trust not to leave her, a faith she never knew until now. “David has made a very positive impact on my life. He helps fill the hole.”



Although Rachel’s story can be described as one of success, the same cannot be said for her sister Tiffany. Unlike Rachel, Tiffany was never able to escape the life of their mother. “Last September, my sister died of a dry overdose. Even though we were separated by a state and hadn't seen each other in years, I felt so alone. She was the only person in the world who knew what I went through as a child; she died with our secrets.” Rachel still thinks about her sister every day. “If I could tell her something right now, it would be that I love her with all my heart and that I wish I could've saved her.” Rachel stated that she often wishes that it could have been her sister that got saved and had the opportunity to live a life free from drugs. “Some people do die of a broken heart. She was just plain broken.”

On January 13th, 2012, Rachel’s mother, Debra Tinsman, passed away just four months after Tiffany’s passing. “My mother died shortly after my sister, choked to death by her own saliva because she was too drugged to remember to swallow.” Rachel feels mostly sadness for her mother. “Honestly, I really don't have much to say to her except that I'm sorry. I’m sorry her life was terrible. I'm sorry she had to drug herself because she was so unhappy. I'm sorry she never got to experience true happiness. I’m sorry she never made it to heaven.” Rachel made it clear that she loved her mom, but knows that she made the choices that affected and ruined her life. Rachel says that she has decided not to hold a grudge with her mother for all the pain and hurt that her mother caused her, but will never forget about the hole she left in her heart. “Without a mother, life was tough for me. I envied other girls and still do. I wish more than anything that I had a mother. I miss her and the way she was when we were younger. She was beautiful and strong and funny. I wish it had lasted.”

Rachel’s father is still alive, but she doesn’t believe it will be for much longer. You can only live a broken and drug-obsessed life for so long before it catches up to you. Tiffany Tinsman had a three-year-old daughter that she conceived with one of her drug dealers, but was later adopted. Rachel would like to meet her brother Jacob and niece someday and hopes that they are able to escape the life of their parents just like she was fortunate enough to be able to.

After being asked what the best day of her life would have to be, Rachel’s response was, “I feel each day has the potential to be the best.” Rachel’s story is certainly one of success. It’s one thing to make something of your life, but it’s another to come from absolutely nothing, having the odds against you, and defying them. Rachel says that she looks forward to her life with David and wants to someday be the mother that she never had.

