

Born to Mommy Dearest: A Single Mom's Triumph to Break the Cycle

Lindsay* sat beside me on our muted chocolate brown sofa clutching my husband's home brew in her hands. We don't jump to offer our guests coffee or tea; they get the good stuff – home brewed beer made in our very own kitchen. Knowing the details of much of Lindsay's childhood already, or what I had learned over the previous two to three weeks, I wanted her to be as comfortable as possible, and a good beer always incites conversation.

Lindsay, 28-years-old, looks like a model. She is a 6-foot-tall blonde of Danish decent with high apple cheeks and a brilliantly white smile. She dresses in style even though the bulk of her clothing comes from Forever 21 (a discount clothing store in Valley Fair). Beneath her beautiful exterior, she has not a clue how amazing she is; she is the epitome of humble. She is the type of girl you want to look at and hate simply because she is so gorgeous, but she has a heart of gold and her humility makes you fall in love rather than resort to catty thought processes.

On the exterior, she seems like any other mother. Her son is her world, her life revolves around him, and her focus in life is him and him alone. Being a single mother on its own is an amazing challenge and something I am in awe of – personally, I have no idea how I could do it. But what makes Lindsay so amazing is that despite her shocking background, she has been able to thrive as a single mother to raise a well-adjusted, beautiful and kind 5-year-old boy.

Immediately upon commencing our interview, I felt guilty for delving into the less than desirable aspects of her childhood. The first question was asked and she began delicately chewing on her nails and continued to do so throughout our entire conversation.

“I didn’t know any different,” Lindsay said quite frankly in response to my inquiring about how she dealt with having an unusual childhood. “Due to my mother’s drug habits, we usually travelled from campground to campground, or motel room to motel room. Since I had little access to television, I didn’t know life for most children was so different.”

“There were times my mother would leave us for months on end with strangers and we thought nothing of it,” she added. “We were that unaware.”

While their living situation was scattered, that wasn’t the only misfortune experienced during childhood. While under her mother’s care, Lindsay experienced unthinkable acts at the hands of her mother’s “friends” while her mother sat and did nothing. This wasn’t simply the life of gypsies, this was life at the hands of a very ill woman whose addiction was so grave, she was willing to subject her children to terrible acts, leave them without food, and generally do little but provide them with a ride to their next destination.

Lindsay was so involved maternally with her younger siblings, her sister, Julia, had to later endure therapy because she thought Lindsay was her mother.

“Lindsay *was* my mom. When I wasn’t with her, I would cry for her. We went everywhere together. I was very much attached to her because our mother wasn’t there, so Lindsay took care of us,” Julia explained through email.

Lindsay did not attend school formally or for any consistent amount of time until she was 14 years old. Child Protective Services (CPS) stepped in on two occasions and forced her to attend

school. But then her mother would move Lindsay and her two younger siblings and she would no longer continue.

While in foster care and while attending high school, Lindsay had more access to television. She began to realize that life for children her age was very different than her own. While watching shows such as “Boy Meets World” and “Saved by the Bell” she realized that the kids on these shows were going to school *every day*. It wasn’t until she was 14 and placed in various foster homes that school was demanded on a regular basis and she graduated high school, receiving a diploma.

I would imagine that this realization of a childhood lost would be quite a shock and drum up anger toward one’s mother in most individuals, but for Lindsay, her concern lay within her family.

“I was more concerned about being separated from my siblings. My main concern and objective was always trying to ensure my brother, sister and I would stay together. My three older siblings are so much older than I; they had escaped from my mother - long before her addiction had become so severe - and had families of their own.”

Like her older siblings, Lindsay envisioned herself moving on, going to college, getting married and having children – children being her main priority. She imagined herself adopting siblings whose ages were all over the map and bringing them into one home, something that does not happen often in the foster care system.

“I wanted to attend college because I realized once in school how much I had missed... basic knowledge. But family was my absolute main priority,” she stated with conviction.

After graduating high school and attending college for a short period of time, Lindsay seemed to find her knight in shining armor. He was a man she had known only nine days before becoming

engaged and who painted that wonderful picture with the house, a dog, children, and the white picket fence.

“While I was with him, my sister in Arizona, who now had custody of my younger brother, asked if I could come to Arizona and take custody of him. He was 16, I was 21. I spoke to Chris (her fiancé) and said I could not marry him unless my brother could come live with us. He agreed to all of this.”

Things went downhill pretty quickly and Chris no longer seemed the knight in shining armor she had dreamed of. Just six months after becoming engaged, Lindsay became pregnant. While Chris was ecstatic in the beginning, even stating, as recounted by Lindsay, “I want to have a baby with you so I can know you forever,” Lindsay knew things were going in a horrible direction from the moment morning sickness set in.

“I was so ill with morning sickness. I ran to the bathroom but didn’t quite make it. Chris brought me a bucket, a sponge and white hand towels demanding I clean up my mess and go to Bed, Bath, and Beyond to replace the towels I had ruined.”

Chris began other controlling behaviors such as holding the bedroom door closed so she could not escape, or, after the baby was born, not allowing her to leave her own room until he had exited the house for work. She knew she wanted more for her son – and for herself.

“Being a single mother was the last thing I wanted to be,” Lindsay stated. Regardless, she knew she had to leave.

Upon learning she was going to leave, according to Lindsay, Chris stated, “If you leave me I will make your life a living hell.” She was personally willing to endure hell to ensure that her child did not.

She promptly booked herself a motel room and did not look back. Chris defiantly kept all the necessities for the baby, including clothes, the child's birth certificate, Lindsay's passport, and her car.

From that point on, she bounced from house to house. One house belonged to a member of her church and the family graciously watching her son so that she could work. Another home was with a good friend who wanted to help her out. She finally went to stay in Arizona with her friend, Carrie, whom she purchased a home with. Unfortunately, on a visit back in California, she was served papers stating that she could not leave California and that her son's father would be fighting for custody.

For the last five years, Lindsay has been in and out of court with a man who has very limited visits with his son and still manages to flake on many. He has been convicted of nine counts of contempt (with many more pending) for refusing to pay child support a good deal of the time.

While almost the entirety of her son's life has been committed to court battles with her son's father, Lindsay has proceeded each day with a smile on her face. "He is my saving grace – no doubt about it," she says in reference to her son, John.

Lindsay has found time to work strictly on Fridays and weekends as an event waitress so she can be available during the week for her son who attends kindergarten. She has never owned a credit card, so rent and associated bills for their humble two-bedroom apartment in Campbell, Calif. are paid for with a carefully and strategically balanced checking and savings account. Needless to say, one's head must be tightly wound, love and passion abundant, to accomplish such a feat.

Despite the difficulties she faced as a child and on her way to becoming a mother, she is surviving and thriving with a smile on her face. Her reward? A happy and healthy 5-year-old boy

named John who makes *everything* worth it. *He* is a true testament to Lindsay's astounding ability to overcome... and triumph.

*All names have been changed to protect the interests of the child and due to ongoing litigation.