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Faithful Mercies

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A disease of the body consumes the insides. A disease of the mind consumes the insides and more. Addiction is a disease that takes hold of the victim, seeping into every aspect of their lives, including their family and their friends. Whether this disease changes lives for the better or worse ultimately depends on the foundation on which the life has been built. To see a loved one, specifically my mother, become overwhelmingly suffocated by addiction is an indescribable experience. The nights are hard and the afternoons are bearable, but the mornings hold promise and potential. Praise God that His mercies are new every morning, just as Lamentations 3:22-23 says.

The night Mom left was impossible to comprehend. It was August 7, 2010, and I was ten years old. My two sisters were ages six and four. Our family of five was living with my grandparents as we were in the process of moving, meaning my siblings and I shared a bedroom that was meant for no more than two.

“Don’t complain,” scolded our parents. “Your grandparents are doing an incredibly generous thing letting us stay here.”

And they were. It was a very stressful time to be a Hintz. We weren’t just moving — we were renovating the new house from top to bottom. My grandparents had to feed us every meal, while also helping with construction and painting and decorating. They did so with love, and I’m not sure I’ll ever fully comprehend the difference it made.

Then that night came, and the house became the least of our worries.

“Abby,” came a voice in the darkness of the middle of the night.

“I have to go away for a while,” said my mom. “I’m going to get better. For you, my girl, I’m going to go get better.” We laid in my bed and we cried quietly, trying not to wake the girls, for there was no reason to. The goodbye wasn’t for me at all. It was for my mom. She needed to see all that she had to live for, and why this was right. I cried because I was confused; she cried because she had come to the inevitable.

She kissed me and tip toed out the door towards the hardest journey she would ever endure. That any of us would ever endure. I laid in bed for 10 minutes, before running outside to get another hug, but I was met instead with a defeated dad and a truck pulling out of the driveway towards a rehab three hours away. I cried and he held me and carried me back to my bed, where I finally fell asleep.

The following day was simply an extension of the night. My dad told my sisters that Mom had to go away so she could feel better. What they wouldn’t understand is that it was her mind that was sick, and because her mind was sick it caused her to turn to substances that were bad for her, drugs and alcohol, because she felt as though it was the only way to help. In that moment there was no oldest or youngest or middle, for none of us knew any better than the others. It was a Sunday, but we stayed home and watched TV and cried and prayed and cried because sometimes *just being* is the only solution to the chaos that’s happening around you. Every night after that was impossible. My dad was exhausted from a full day’s work, as were his parents. We often went to my mom’s parents house instead as her mom was a teacher and off work for the summer. That meant saying goodbye to my dad every night. He always stayed until we were asleep for the simple purpose of giving us peace of mind. Then he’d go back to an empty bed and start the process all over again. Sometimes I’d hear him leave and my heart broke every time. My grandparents would try to console him, but there wasn’t much to say. He was a hero in those moments. The strength I saw in him had to be Christ, for humans alone are not capable of handling such indescribable sadness.

The afternoons when Mom was at rehab were wrong. We tried to go about normal life, but there was no denying that there was nothing

normal about it. I quit my soccer team because the stress was too much. I tried to be a good older sister, but at ten I didn't really know how. I believe God gave me strength to be there for my siblings, for I couldn't have done it on my own. I constantly dreaded the thought of starting middle school. A new bus, an earlier start time, a new schedule, a new everything. Such a transition is hard enough, such a transition without a mom was a nightmare. It wasn't just that she wasn't home. We couldn't call her. I only talked to her on the phone three or four times in the six weeks she was gone. To think that some people go through every part of life without a mom by their side is impossible to imagine.

My church family was incredible during this time. They brought us meals when my dad wasn't home in time to cook, they prayed and prayed for us, they were sensitive and loving through it all. Most of all, they didn't judge us or my mom. When society hears the words drugs, alcohol or addiction, our minds automatically take a negative turn. The words have developed a harsh stigma, and to be in a church that didn't condemn my mom was such an act of the Holy Spirit, as all of this was. His faithfulness simply couldn't hide.

The morning Mom came home was like standing in front of the bus on *Extreme Makeover* before they showed you the new home for your new life. She'd always say when we spoke on the phone, "You're not going to recognize me, girl. I'm going to be the mom you need me to be." To a ten-year-old, this made no sense. I've never needed any more of a mom than what I'd always had. How could there possibly be a better version?

The black truck with tinted windows pulled into the driveway and I flew out of our new front door. She stepped out of the car and her smile was free. Her eyes held hope behind the tears that spilled down her cheeks. She was home. She was better. There was a better version. And at the same time there was nothing wrong with the one before, other than the struggles that so viciously plagued her mind.

There were weekends after she was home that she would have to go back as part of the program, and we spent a lot of our time at meetings with her. But what a valuable experience that was. Those

meetings opened my eyes to a whole other world, and though its full of so much hurt and brokenness, there is so much beauty in it. God works so evidently in people with addictions that even a ten-year-old can see it. This is what I wrote in my journal three months after Mom had been home: “My sisters and I didn’t really know [about the addiction]. But it is amazing now comparing the old mommy to the new mommy! I JUST CAN’T TELL YOU HOW HAPPY I AM!”

While the physical presence of addiction no longer plagues my mom’s body, the chaos of mental illness will never leave her mind. Though she would never dream of letting me or my sisters see it, every day is a battle for her. And despite the fact that the battle wages from morning until night, the morning brings promise of a new day, a fresh start, and new mercies. His mercies got us through the nights and the afternoons. His mercies carried us all the way to the mornings. My mom still struggles with nights. They’re hard, because it is impossible to ignore how close and unknown tomorrow is. The afternoons are when life is full of goodness or sorrow. Yet every morning, we realize that tomorrow holds mercies and faithfulness and a God who never leaves us nor forsakes us.