



BEING A TRAUMA QUEEN: CHANNELING TRAUMA INTO CHANGE

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Before we begin....

- Goals

1. Begin looking at our system as a child would view it
2. Learn why we never judge a book by its cover
3. Seek out ways to be more trauma informed

- Caveats

- This is my personal experience, as I remember it
- I went through the system in Jackson County, I work in Jackson County
- A lot has changed since I was a child
- Bio vs. adoptive parent

- Trigger Warning

- Please feel free to take breaks, as needed
- I will need some grace today

I was born!



My childhood-from 1992-2000

- I grew up in the KC Metro area
- 2 siblings
- We were poor, but we were okay-we lived paycheck to paycheck
- My parents met while my dad was in prison
- My parents worked-sometimes, my mom worked 2 jobs at times
- My dad smoked marijuana, my mom didn't
- From a young age, I helped my dad grow his marijuana
- Some domestic violence, though not a ton



My House



November 2002

- Law Enforcement executed a search warrant on our home
- Found chemicals to make meth
- Home was unsanitary
- We were placed on a safety plan with relatives
- On December 13th, 2002-JO filed a Petition

Petition Filed in Juvenile Court

Original Petition-Dec. 2002

In Interest of: JENNIFER WILSON
Life Number: 150768
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COUNT 1

The minor children, Heather Wilson, a female child age six (6) years, Richard Wilson, a male child age nine (9) years, and Jennifer Wilson, a female child age ten (10) years, are without proper care, custody and support in that on or about December 3, 2002, law enforcement officials located an operational methamphetamine laboratory and components thereof, including chemicals which are dangerous and hazardous to the health of the children, and said laboratory was located in the home where the parents and children reside. The children are at risk of harm or injury if left in the care and custody of the mother or father or in the family home.

COUNT 2

The minor children are without proper care, custody and support as alleged in Count I of the instant petition which is hereby incorporated herein and, further, in that on or about December 3, 2002, the home in which the parents and children were residing was found to be unsafe and unsanitary including but not limited to the fact that the home was unclean and littered with debris and cat feces and, further, that toxic chemicals were found in the refrigerator and freezer of the home where the family's food supply was being stored, thereby posing risk to the children's health and safety.

WHEREFORE, petitioner prays that the Court make and enter such judgment as the Court shall find to be necessary in the best interests and welfare of the juvenile and the best interests of the State.

First Amended Petition-Jan. 2004

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4. The Juvenile resides in Jackson County, Missouri and has been found within Jackson County, Missouri and is in need of care and treatment for the following reasons:

COUNT 1

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COUNT 2

The minor children are without proper care, custody and support as alleged in Count I of the instant petition which is hereby incorporated herein and, further, in that on or about December 3, 2002, the home in which the parents and children were residing was found to be unsafe and unsanitary ~~including but not limited to the fact that the home was unclean and littered with debris and cat feces and, further,~~ that toxic chemicals were found in the ~~refrigerator and freezer~~ of the home ~~where the family's food supply was being stored~~, thereby posing risk to the children's health and safety.

COUNT 3

The children are further without proper care, custody and support in that in and around December, 2002, the children's parents fled the state of Missouri with the children which resulted in a capias being issued. On or about November 3, 2003 the children were found in Las Vegas, Nevada by police who responded to a call involving abuse and/or neglect of the children. Mr. Wilson was arrested for failing to register as a sex offender and the children were placed in protective custody, ultimately being returned to Missouri in response to the capias.

*Added to Court Report
w/ the sentence
6/11/04*

December 2002-January 2003

- Parents had my maternal grandparents take us to Tennessee for a few weeks
 - Capias was entered for us
 - Much abuse and neglect
- On January 1st, 2003-we returned to KC, stayed with paternal grandmother
- Around mid-January 2003-we moved in with a family friend
 - Much abuse by family friend
- Around late January 2003-we moved in with another family friend

Capias Issued on 12/18/2002

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI
FAMILY COURT DIVISION

IN THE INTEREST OF:		PETITION NUMBER:	JV02-01439
JENNIFER WILSON			
SEX: FEMALE BORN: 06-26-92		LIFE NUMBER:	150768

WHO MAY BE FOUND AT: Tennessee or California
W/F; 4'11" 60 lbs; Bl eyes; Bd hr

ORDER TO TAKE JUVENILE INTO JUDICIAL CUSTODY


THE STATE OF MISSOURI TO: Any Peace Officer or Juvenile Officer in the State of Missouri:

IT BEING ALLEGED THAT: The juvenile did not show up for a court appearance on 12/18/02 in court room D at the Jackson County Family Court. Current whereabouts are unknown.

YOU ARE HEREBY ORDERED TO TAKE INTO JUDICIAL CUSTODY, Jennifer Wilson, a person subject to the jurisdiction of the Family Court Division of the Circuit Court of Jackson County, Missouri, who is alleged to be within the jurisdiction of the Family Court Division of said Court, and bring the juvenile forthwith before the Honorable Judge/Commissioner of said Family Court Division to be dealt with in accordance with law.

Pending the juvenile's appearance in said Division the juvenile shall be detained at Division of Family Services or in the most appropriate placement as the apprehension warrants, and as the officer serving this order, you shall forthwith make return hereof to this Court.

WITNESS the undersigned Judge/Commissioner of the Family Court Division of the Circuit Court of Jackson County, Missouri, and the seal thereof issued in the County and State aforesaid on 12/18/02.


Judge/Commissioner

RULE 111.01, 111.07

February 2003–November 2003

- We moved to Vegas
- Things were great at first
 - We had a home
 - My sister and I were in school
- Then, the meth addiction hit hard
- Severe domestic violence
- I started exhibiting delinquent behaviors
- Homeless and hungry



November 2003-December 2003

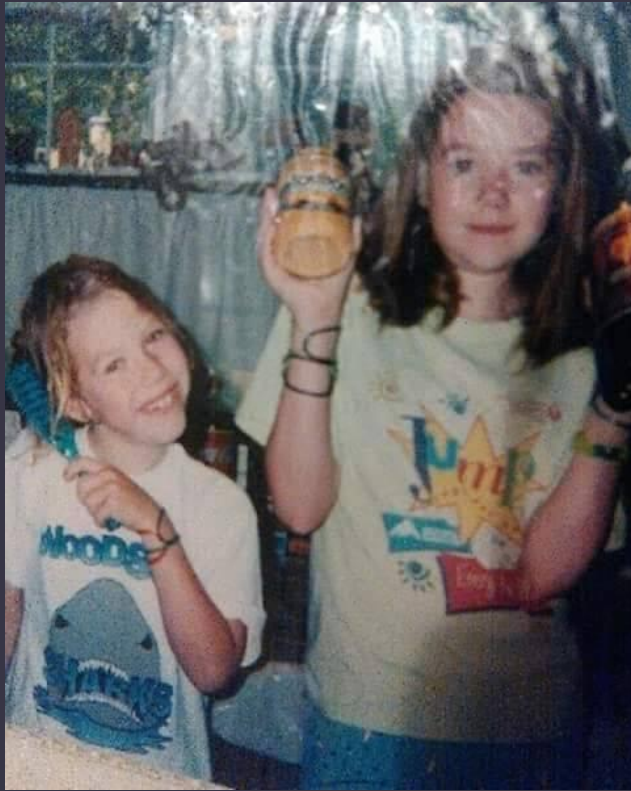
- November 3rd, 2003-placed into police protective custody
- Stayed in a children's shelter in Vegas
- Siblings and I flew back to KC for our case
- Parents stayed in Vegas-had occasional supervised phone calls
- Placed in a children's shelter for a few weeks
- Placed in our first foster homes



First Foster Home-Dec. 2003

- Not a warm welcome
- Had supervised phone calls with our parents and paternal grandma
- Physical Abuse and a Subpar investigation-No one believed us.
- We were moved at the placement provider's request, not our request

Second Foster Home-March 2004



- Much better environment
- We were treated well
- We were this couple's first foster placement.



Adjudication

- June 18th, 2004
- Mom appeared, dad did not. Paternal grandma was there too-first time seeing her in a long time.
- First time since November 2003 that we had seen our mother in person
- Contested trial
- We sat outside of the courtroom

Findings from Adjudication/Disposition

- Richard Wilson led the officers throughout the residence where other components of an operational methamphetamine laboratory were discovered.
 - Dining room-actual methamphetamine
 - Basement
 - Living room
 - Brother's bedroom-actual methamphetamine
 - Kitchen-actual methamphetamine
 - Bathroom
 - Computer room-actual methamphetamine
- Richard Wilson subsequently acknowledged his awareness that there was a methamphetamine laboratory located in the residence.
- On November 3rd, 2003, Las Vegas police were dispatched to the Klondike Motel, a facility known by law enforcement to be frequented by prostitutes, in response to a child in distress.

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Testimony having been heard and other evidence received by the Court, the Court finds the evidence adduced sustains the allegations. Therefore the Petition is sustained. The Court having found it had jurisdiction over said juvenile and the Court having received evidence concerning the need of said juvenile for care and treatment, and it being found that said juvenile is in need of care and treatment;

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED: that the juvenile is committed to the custody of Children's Division for placement in an appropriate foster care setting, until the further order of the Court.

Pending placement of the child together with siblings, the Children's Division shall insure regular and consistent sibling contact.

The Court finds the child was removed as a result of an emergency whereby the child could not be safely maintained in the home in that the same was contrary to the health and welfare of the child further, the parents have voluntarily absented themselves from the State of Missouri thereby preventing reasonable efforts at this time.

The Court finds that the parents are in need of substance abuse evaluations and appropriate treatment and psychological evaluation and parenting assessments in order for the Court to determine the appropriate level of services, which such services and assessments the Children's Division shall fund and provide in this State.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED:

1. The Children's Division shall continue to fund and provide all services currently in place for the child.
2. The parents shall have THERAPEUTICALLY SUPERVISED contact only.
3. The Children's Division shall commence concurrent planning forthwith.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED: On this 10th day of August, 2004, leave is granted for Garrett Hodes to withdraw as attorney for Richard Wilson, the father, in the above-captioned cause.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED: that the above-captioned cause be set on the 7th day of March, 2005, at 10:30 A.M. in Division 41 for Review.

Note Well: Each party is responsible for notifying their respective witnesses of the above date and time.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT PURSUANT TO SUPREME COURT RULE 129.08 UPON THE ENTRY OF THESE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE COMMISSIONER ALL PAPERS

Third Foster Home-Julyish 2004



Third Foster Home-Continued

- We were able to have regular sibling visitation with our brother.
- Occasionally, our parents would have phone calls with us but not consistently.
- We started discussing where we wanted to be placed, if we couldn't reunify with our parents.



TPR and Disagreement on Adoptive Resource

- Permanency Goal was changed to TPR/Adoption on 3/7/2005
- There was a lot of disagreement regarding the adoptive resource for my sister and me
 - There was a hotline made against the foster father regarding sexual abuse towards one of my foster brothers (his adopted child)
 - We were safety planned out of the home for approximately 1 month
 - This was unsubstantiated.
 - Some on the FST wanted us kids to be adopted together, others wanted a sibling split.
 - Ultimately, we kids decided we wanted to do a sibling split.

Adoption

- We were adopted on 7/27/2006
- I changed the spelling of my first name, changed my middle and last name
- My sister changed her middle and last name.
- My brother was adopted the month prior, he changed his name entirely

Life Post Adoption

Middle School

- I went to 4 different middle schools in 6th grade
- Once I moved into my eventual adoptive placement, my education was much more stable
- Throughout 7th and 8th grade, my adoptive mother argued with a lot of teachers about assumptions they made about me.
- I participated in extracurricular activities, but I also had my pending CAN case- frequently had to leave school early for therapy or for court appearances

High School



- Extremely focused on school, eager to go to college.
- The stigmas from foster care followed me, even while applying to colleges.
- Graduated from high school in 2010- knew I wanted to be an attorney.

Issues in High School

- When I turned 16, one of my adoptive brothers started grooming me
 - Sexually assaulted when I was 16
 - Perpetrator's behaviors were very much like a criminal minds episode
- I moved out/ran away from my adoptive home shortly after graduation
- Stayed with perpetrator for a bit, then a friend until college started up in August 2010
 - I'd gotten injured during tumbling practice, I struggle to drive or walk, I had nowhere to go
- My family did not believe me about the sexual assault-they believed it was consensual

Undergrad

- Attended Avila University, starting in August 2010
- Went a little crazy my first year-engaged in risky behaviors
- Tried forgetting about the sexual assaults and dysfunctional adoptive family
- I was no-contact with my adoptive family for a bit
- There was some stalking behaviors by the perpetrator, but the sexual assaults stopped
- Started to level out my second year of college

Reconnecting with my Biological Family

- In 2014, I went to my paternal grandpa's house randomly-he gave me contact information for my uncle
- A few days later, I got a call from my uncle, giving me my dad's number and telling me he is waiting on a call but doesn't know who is going to call
- I talked to my daddy for the first time since I was 13 years old.
- I talked to my mom that same night

Graduating from Undergrad



- Graduated in 2013 with 2 majors and a minor, summa cum laude-my dad watched me accept my degrees
- Had 2 very great professors who mentored me while in college-they really believed in me and my ability to be successful

Visiting the Fam in Las Vegas



Law School



- Went straight into law school at UMKC, graduated in 2016
- I met my future husband-broke up with a long time boyfriend
- My dad passed away in 2014. I really struggled with his passing.
- I was interested in either going to a big firm... or going into criminal law. I had ZERO desire to do juvenile work.

Practicing Law

- I got sworn in in September 2016
- I started out working in a small firm-juvenile, domestic, and criminal
- In August 2018, I moved to the JO in Jackson County





What Went Right

- My biological parents had excellent attorneys
- My voice was finally heard when I was 13
- The Commissioner always read my letters
- The Commissioner always allowed me to attend court
- I was reminded routinely to be a kid
- I had regular sibling visitation
- DFS/CD took proper steps leading up to removal

What Can We Do Better

- Be trained on how to talk to kids
- Engage kids in their cases (as age appropriate)
- Keep milestones in mind
- Remember that kids hear and see a lot, even when you don't think they are paying attention
- Believe a child when he discloses abuse
- Never assume anything about a child in care
- Respect why a child may not be ready to make disclosures
- Be understanding of a parentified child
- Try to make your courtroom child friendly

What I've Learned

- We can alleviate generational trauma.
- A small act of kindness can change a child's life forever.
- It's not about where you've been, it's about where you're going.
- We will never fully understand or comprehend what a child is experiencing in our system, but we can be supportive.
- The trauma never leaves, but it can be used to make things better.
- Addiction is truly a disease.

Where am I now?



Questions?
Comments?
Concerns?
Jokes?

