

Salvation Army Pathway of Hope Oral History Project

Interview with Nicole October 7, 2019

Interviewer: Shannon Baker

Narrator: Nicole

Date: October 7, 2019

Location: Salvation Army building, Roanoke, Virginia

Transcribed by: Shannon Baker, Paul Martin

Duration: 35:19

Timed Index:

0:00 = Childhood and adolescence in Rocky Mount and Roanoke (1990s – 2000s)

4:07 = Career and motherhood

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18:07 = Moving to Roanoke as a teenager

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0:02

SB: This is Shannon Baker interviewing Nicole for the Salvation Army Pathway of Hope Oral History Project on October 7, 2019 and we are in the Salvation Army building in Roanoke. So, are you ready to begin?

0:22

N: Yes.

0:23

SB: Ok. First off, did you grow up in the Roanoke area?

0:29

N: I grew up in the Rocky Mount, like Boones Mill area.

0:33:

SB: Ok, so was it different? Do you think it's different than Roanoke?

0:36

N: It is. It's more like country instead of city.

0:40

SB: Ok, so what was it like growing up in this area?

0:46

N: I moved to Roanoke when I was fifteen. I was homeschooled previously. I went into public school when I moved to Roanoke and that was a big change going from country life to city life.

1:02

SB: So, was it a big change going from homeschool to a public school?

1:08

N: Oh definitely. I mean, we did 4-H and stuff but the social aspect was a lot different.

1:16

SB: Do you want to talk a little bit about how it might have been different?

1:24

N: Personally, I gradually went towards the wrong crowds, so I got into a lot of trouble when I moved to Roanoke because there wasn't anything to do in the country but play in the woods. So, I was grounded a lot.

1:48

SB: Do you still have any siblings that you are close to?

1:51

N: I do. I have an older brother. We are fourteen months apart. We were really close growing up but not so much now.

2:01

SB: So when you started going to public school, did you enjoy how different it was from being homeschooled?

2:09

N: I did ... eh, maybe not. I kinda didn't like the authority part of it. That was just a rebellious thing that I went through.

2:27

SB: Did you have a favorite subject that you liked to learn about?

2:30

N: Probably English. Science.

2:39

SB: Do you think that your teachers were kind of influential in your life or, you said you didn't really like the authority?

2:48

N: I had a few teachers that, well my math teacher actually was one of my favorite teachers. Not like personally influential though.

3:00

SB: So the school you went to, do you think it was a good school? I don't know particularly how good the Roanoke County schools were.

3:11

N: I went to Roanoke City schools. They were good schools. I dropped out when I was a senior with three months to go until I graduated, but I did get my GED. But the schools were good.

3:36

SB: Could you tell us a bit about why you dropped out?

3:44

N: It was a long time ago. I really don't remember. I think I moved to Floyd County with a guy and that was... a relationship.

4:07

SB: So, what ... I'm trying to think of the next question. In your adult life what do you do career wise?

4:22

N: I work at a bowling alley. That's a lot of fun. Before that I was a lunch lady in the cafeteria at a high school. I've cleaned houses. I've done in-home healthcare. I did that for five years.

4:42

SB: Have you enjoyed what you've done?

4:44

N: Very much, yes.

4:50

SB: We saw your daughter when you came in. How old were you when you became a mother?

5:01

N: With my first child I was eighteen. Well I had him when I was nineteen. So my oldest is twelve and my youngest is three. I have five children.

5:14

SB: How has motherhood changed your life?

5:19

N: In every way possible. I mean, you don't get to be ... I was young when I got pregnant so the social aspect you know I had to grow up pretty quickly. And then my relationship ended so I was raising the baby by myself, so that was hard. Throughout the years I've had substance abuse issues so that kinda hindered my parenting. But I've been sober for four years.

6:00

SB: Congrats. So, you talked a little bit about the social aspect. Do you want to tell us a little bit more?

6:09

N: I mean you don't get to just go out. You have a kid and you have to stay home and be a mom. I didn't really have much help. I was doing it by myself. My family wasn't around so I was kinda place to place.

6:35

SB: What would you say the hardest thing about being a young mother was and is?

6:43

N: I mean still is just doing it by myself you know. I maintain my home. I maintain my vehicle. I have five children. They're in different places. I only have custody of the little one but you know it's hard financially, definitely.

7:08

SB: How did you come to find out about the Pathway of Hope program?

7:14

N: I was in a domestic violence situation. So I was at the Turning Point for seven months. I was court ordered there because of my situation and that was in 2015.¹

7:37

SB: So you found out about it because you were court ordered?

7:41

N: No, I was in a domestic violence situation so I was at the Turning Point and this was like the aftercare part of it.

7:50

SB: So how did the program work for you?

7:55

N: It changed everything for me. It gave me a safe haven to get my life back and get my children back. I was court ordered there so I had to get clean and I had to get serious about what I wanted, you know getting clean and finding that job and just being a normal citizen I guess. They just gave me that second chance to start over.

8:34

SB: Do you consider it an important [source of] help in your life?

8:41

N: It is the most important thing, yeah, I mean I think without this program I wouldn't ... you know I might not even be here, honestly, because it gave me that safety.

9:05

SB: What exactly ... I'm trying to think of how to word this .. what exactly did it do to give you that safety? What did you do with the program?

¹ Turning Point is the Salvation Army of the Roanoke Valley's housing facility for survivors of domestic violence.

9:16

N: It's fenced in. Your abuser can't get to you. I was able to just stay safe. I was going through trauma therapy, I went through substance abuse counseling, parenting classes. It just helped me rebuild some of the stuff that I had lost over the years.

9:56

SB: Are you still in the program?

9:57

N: Yeah.

9:59

SB: So what are your next steps? Have they told you, do you know that?

10:04

N: I think right now we're working on anger management and parenting ... parenting skills. And then I have visitation with my five year old daughter. I am able to bring her here on Wednesdays and they have a youth program that my children are involved in. So just kinda maintaining my sobriety and hopefully getting me a new vehicle and getting me financially able to move to a bigger place so I can have my children back under the same roof.

10:53

SB: So it also helps your children, too, this program, the youth program. Is there any other way they can help your kids?

11:04

N: I mean they help me with rides to appointments, they go to and assist with court hearings, doctor's appointments, if I need a ride or something.

11:24

SB: You mentioned that you're working at a bowling alley now.

11:27

N: Yes.

11:28

SB: Do you think your work at the Pathway of Hope Program has helped you to get into your current career or do you think that way just ...

11:37

N: That was just kind of a fluke kinda thing. I know somebody who bowls there and the lady was needing help and they kinda just dropped my name. That was not really associated with the Pathways [Pathway of Hope].

11:56

SB: How long has this been? [*looking at recorder*] Okay. You also mentioned that they are helping you with your anger management. Would you like to talk a little bit about that?

12:17

N: I think I've always been ... I think that probably stems from my childhood. My parents divorced. A lot of things happened in my childhood and I just grew up. I always felt rejected and abandoned so I was just angry at a lot of things and then that probably introduced my addiction. And then with my children, raising kids is hard, especially by yourself. So you know just healthy ways to interact and discipline... but really just getting control of my emotions. How to take a step back and not react in a split second and make a choice that I would regret.

13:25

SB: Do you ... I'm bad at wording questions, I'm sorry.

13:30

N: That's ok.

13:35

SB: You talked a little bit about your childhood with your parents being divorced. Do you want to tell us a little bit about how things might've been characterized? A little bit more about just what it was like growing up.

13:55

N: I think I was probably maybe seven or eight [years old] ... around then my dad left and my mom didn't take it too well. She was really religious, so she was always at church and she would leave us by ourselves. We were home schooled so we would have school work and chores to do and she would just be gone so it was really just me and my brother by ourselves pretty much everyday. And then, me and my mother didn't get along so I eventually moved to Roanoke with my dad, and that wasn't a good situation either because my dad's an alcoholic so it was just kind of like the lesser of two evils I guess.

15:11

SB: You said your mother had been religious, would you consider yourself to be kind of religious?

15:18

N: I mean, I am. I am. I have my faith and I believe, you know, that God is why I'm here, you know? I've been through a lot, and... I mean, there's a lot of reasons I shouldn't be here, so... I mean, I believe God is the reason I'm here. And my mother has prayed over me and prayed over me, so... I do believe that.

15:59

SB: Well... I'm sorry, I'm bad at wording questions.

16:04

N: That's okay.

16:08

SB: So... Like, just kind of looking back over your life with your kind of experience with your faith do you think that God has been, like, present in your life, then?

16:23

N: Definitely. I mean, I grew up in church... Well, my dad was Jehovah's Witness, and my mother was Christian, so they would, like, fight over who was taking me to what place, you know? So that was crazy to grow up in. So I would be at church half the time and then at the Kingdom Hall the other half of the time, so. And then they would argue over their, you know, "I'm right!" "No..." They would, you know, argue their aspect of things. So...

16:57

SB: Growing up with a Jehovah's Witness for a father must have been interesting.

17:01

N: Very. I mean, I don't know about interesting, but... I don't agree with any of that, so.

17:12

SB: Would you want to talk a little bit more about, like, what it was like, I guess?

17:23

N: I mean, I guess that they always argued about their different religion, you know, their aspects... I don't really remember much about the Jehovah's Witness part of it, because my dad left, eventually, when I was young, so I just continued to go to church. So now I have been going to church until the last few months because I'm having vehicle issues, but growing up I don't really remember.

18:07

SB: So... When you moved to Roanoke as a teenager what were... some of the biggest changes that you saw in your life?

18:23

N: I lost a lot of weight, I mean, because I was walking back and forth to school. And I was in the home with my brother and my dad and his wife, so that was a change because before it was just me and my mom and my brother. So that was hard to get used to. Well I think I also resented my dad for leaving, so when he would try to be authoritative towards me, you know, and give me rules, I was like, "No." So... I think that's probably where the rebellious part came in, you know? I resented my dad, and I just didn't respect him, so.

19:10

SB: So, would you want to tell us a little bit more about, like... your problems with authority, I guess, when you were younger?

19:28

N: I think a lot of it, like I said, comes from my resentment towards my parents. I resented both of my parents, you know, because my dad left, and then mom was... not present, so I just felt abandoned, I guess... I'm sorry, what was the question?

19:50

SB: I guess, just like a better way to word it would be... How do you think your issues with authority figures kind of impacted your life?

20:01

N: Oh, authority, that's right. Sorry. Okay... Well, it started with my parents, and then as I got, you know, into drugs and situations it became, you know, the police and that kind of thing, so... And now I'm still like struggling with authority, because I'm having—you know I have court situations for my custody of my children and I'm having to do what the judge says and I don't feel... I feel discredited, because of the progress that I have made, I don't feel like is highlighted, or recognized, so, you know, I guess I'm still a little jaded by that.

20:53

SB: Do you want to talk a little more about how you feel about your progress?

21:05

N: I mean, I've lost... I have five children and I have custody of one. I've lost all my children due to substance abuse. Now I have a job. I maintain my home and my vehicle and I am a present parent. I have my son on the weekends. I have visitation with my daughter and I have the baby full time. My sobriety is a big thing. I get off probation in January. I've been on probation

for three years for a possession charge. To look back from where I was to where I am now is... I don't feel like the same person. I don't. I just can't even understand why I made the choices I made back then because I wouldn't do it now. I mean I'm really proud of myself.

22:20

SB: Would you want to tell us a little bit about how you kind of managed to get to this, like how you got ... words aren't coming to me right now...

22:38

N: To where I'm at now? My progress?

22:40

SB: Yeah, how you managed to get there.

22:43

N: I think it all started with... well I was in that domestic violence situation with my daughter's father and I just had enough I guess. And I left and I went to the shelter. He's incarcerated. He got twenty-seven years. I had eleven years over my head and they gave me three years probation. That was a blessing. I guess it started from Turning Point. That was my second chance. Also, being on probation has also held me accountable. This program, you know J [the program manager], she is really interactive with me. She knows more about me than my parents honestly.

23:46

SB: So J has really just been a force for good in your life?

23:50

N: Yeah. She's been a guiding light.

24:02

SB: Would you want to tell us about your history with addiction?

24:11

N: I don't even know how old I was. I guess it started... when I was twelve or thirteen and I just was smoking weed because I thought it was cool, I guess. I started drinking a lot because my dad was an alcoholic so I saw it a lot so I guess I kinda fell into drinking a lot. I think I've tried everything. I was addicted for a long time to the hard drugs and... I've been clean for four years. There was about ten years, I would get clean and then fall back into it. I think losing my children was like... kinda propelled it because that's a loss. I guess I was covering up my feelings in an unhealthy way. Now J has helped me kinda ... talk things out or write it down or do it in a healthier way.

25:39

SB: So you like to talk things out and write things down to work through things?

25:45

N: Yeah, instead of reacting.

25:49

SB: Are there any other ways you like to try to work through things?

25:53

N: I've learned to crochet... I don't know, I just like to stay busy. I love my job, I mean, I take extra shifts. I just work, and it's really a boost of confidence, you know? Because before I didn't care about a job, you know?

26:22

SB: So would you want to tell us a little bit about losing custody of your kids?

26:37

N: I had my oldest when I was nineteen and then I guess he was three when I lost custody of him to his grandmother. His grandmother has had him since he was three and he's twelve now... Then I had another daughter, she was born with drugs in her system and she was in the NICU for a week. And I had a spinal fluid leak, so I had a spinal migraine, so I wasn't able to see her while she was in the NICU... I guess I started... I was doing cocaine a lot, so I got her taken for that, and then I went to thirty-day residential treatment, and a family had her that I went to school with their daughter, and they had her, and they ended up adopting her... What's next? Then I had a son, and then another daughter. I had them until four years ago with this recent situation. My recent charges... And I lost both of them in 2015, so... And I've since had the baby. I had the baby while I was at Turning Point.

28:20

SB: So... how did you feel when you lost custody of your children?

28:34

N: I was ashamed, and I think I just used more to cover it up... I kind of just kept it going, and then I would have another baby and get clean and start using again. And I mean it all has to do with your surroundings, so I wasn't around the best people, so, you know... I guess I struggled with, you know, I felt abandoned since I was young, so I just always wanted to be included and accepted, so I just... just drugs were my go-to.

29:26

SB: Do... Do you think—I'm just checking the time [*looking at recorder*]—Do you think that since you've made all this progress you've found a place where you might feel a little more included and accepted?

29:45

N: I mean, my job. I love the people I work with, you know. I actually have family members who work there, so... that I didn't know worked there, because I've always been... I didn't attend family functions, because I was always off doing my own thing, so when I got this job I didn't know my uncle and his wife work there. You know, it's just a nice fit. I love my job and I love everyone here at the Salvation Army, so... And my family, you know, me and my mom have gotten really close.

30:28

SB: So you've managed to reconnect with some of your family members?

30:31

N: Yeah, and my dad as well. You know, me and my dad went, I think, four or five years without speaking, and then, you know, he's recently gone through... treatment, as well, so he's trying to stay clean. I think we're... I mean, we go to meetings together, AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings together and stuff. And then I go to church with my mom in Rocky Mount, so... I'm kind of slowly rebuilding.

31:09

SB: So with that like... with that like, reconnection with your family, are you happy to have that back in your life?

31:25

N: Yeah, I didn't think I would ever, you know, have that. And at one point I didn't want it back, you know? Because I had so much resentment and anger, so, but you know... I am imperfect, just like they are. Now that I have children of my own, I see how, you know, life hits you and you do things and you just do what you can in the moment, you know? I mean, I'm trying my best to keep... to not let my kids see me struggle, and you know, I don't blame my parents, you know, because they did the best they could. Once I forgave them, and I guess they forgave me, too.

32:20

SB: So you've been kind of... learning how to forgive, I guess?

32:30

N: Yeah. Forgiving myself is the hardest thing, because I just... My kids don't deserve the situations that they're in. Their home lives are... you know, and they're in these situations that they're in because of choices that I made, and I was selfish and didn't put them first, you know? But I was young, so you know, I didn't know. If I knew then what I know now, you know?

33:02

SB: Well, if you did know then what you know now, what would you go back and tell yourself?

33:08

N: Don't do drugs. Family is really important, you know. Hold on to your family... Just believe in myself more, because I discredit myself, more than anybody I criticize myself. Just really kind of embrace who I am.

33:45

SB: So... Looking back on all the stuff we've talked about, do you think that there's anything we didn't really talk about that you'd like to talk about?

34:10

N: I don't think so.

34:17

S: Well, I guess my last question for you would be, so, with the Pathway of Hope program, what would you tell anyone who was thinking about trying to get into this program?

34:38

N: I mean, don't hesitate. I mean, it's a great opportunity, and it really, honestly, has saved my life. I mean they genuinely care about people, and I mean, it has just changed everything about my life. And I would just really encourage them to just get the information.

35:07

SB: Anything else you want to add?

35:10

N: No.

35:12

SB: I think we're good. Alright. I'm going to end the recording now.

[END]