

## **CREATIVE NON-FICTION, 2<sup>ND</sup> Place: Charlee Simpson**

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### **The Day I Chose Peace**

It was early December back in 2023. I was out with my mom; we were going for one of our daylong drives. Those were the kind of drives where you do whatever you see along the way. It was one of the only times my mom and I got along; she's always been like a garden of secrets that I'm trying to find my way through. We never got along; she was a heavy drinker and took her anger out on me. Her trauma as a child bled into me through mine. I'd like to say she couldn't help it and I should've just given her more time; that's what younger me wanted. The little girl in me wanted her mom to be her best friend like all her other friends were with their moms. My mom turned to alcohol a lot of the time; there weren't many days that she was sober. During those times my mom's silence spoke volumes; she wouldn't speak to me, and I would worry about what I did to upset her this time. The truth is I did nothing wrong; her narcissism made her believe I did something wrong, and that's what she went with every time.

After one of our day drives, we went back home, and she turned to drinking. That December night was the worst I had ever seen her. She began her usual routine of putting me down and down. Her words were sharp like a blade, cutting as deep as it could. Saying every hurtful thing under the sun, I knew not to believe it, but it was hard to hear it from someone who's supposed to be your light in a storm. I took it; every word she preached, I took, and I never let a tear fall. I owed myself that much. After hours of this, she finally lay down to sleep. I told myself that night would be the last time I'd ever let her treat me like that ever again. I packed my bags, called my dad, and walked out that door, never walking back through it again. My dad picked me up that night; it was incredibly late, but he knew when I called something was wrong. He assumed what had happened by the way I was when he got me, but he never asked a single question about that night. We pulled out of the driveway, and I watched as the house got further and further away; my emotions were still like the ocean on a peaceful day. I couldn't believe what I had just done, but I knew in time it would have been the right thing to do.

That night I went back home with my dad, wondering if I'd ever speak to the woman who birthed me again. On one hand, I felt a sense of relief; on the other hand, I wished I would have never left. My mind wouldn't stop thinking about how I would make it in this world without my mom. She clearly wasn't going to get the help she truly needed in order to be a stable parent. So I had no choice but to cut all contact with her. The next morning I prepared myself for multiple phone calls and text messages from my mother. I mean, I left that house at 2 o'clock in the morning without a trace; all my things were packed and gone from her house, and I never told her I was leaving. Of course, she was going to wonder where I was, but she never would have thought twice about what she had done in order for me to get up and leave. She never remembers the things she did; she would wake up the next morning and ask me what was wrong and why I was acting distant towards her. That one December morning she didn't wake up to me still there; I was nowhere to be found. Just as I thought, she began to call me over and over and over again. I never answered one; I didn't want to talk to her, maybe because I didn't know what to say. I knew if I did answer her, she would apologize and say, "Baby, it will never happen again; I'll get better... I promise." Those were the beginning days of me never trusting a promise. Phone call

after phone call all throughout the day. After she realized I wasn't going to answer her calls, the texts started coming in. "Charlee, please call me."

Weeks and months passed by, and I still never did contact my mother. From time to time then, and even still now, I'll get the occasional, "Charlee, I'm sorry. I miss you." "I love you, baby." "You can't hate me forever." I just give them a glance and turn my phone off. Many told me to block her, but I couldn't bring myself to do that much. Even after going no contact, she still found a way to put me down and continue her abuse. Sending me hurtful texts, even going as far as contacting my grandmother and telling her how much of a terrible person I am and how I'll never be anything in life. Seeing all these messages, I knew my mother was lying about being sober because she would have never said hurtful things like that if she hadn't been drinking. Once again, lies, lies, lies—everything that ever came out of her mouth was a lie. I do believe my mother loves me; I just think she has a lot of demons to fight, and as much as I want to be with her through that process, I have to take care of myself as well, and her pulling me down with her isn't good for me. Even though my mother couldn't do right, my father was with me through everything, and he supported every choice I made about my mother, the main one being going no contact. He was there when I needed to talk about her. My dad had to step up and be both parents. I know it's hard having to do all the daughter things, but he did it every time and better than my mother could ever. Every basketball game and every volleyball game, I never saw my mom in the stands, but I saw my dad every time.

Throughout this process I learned that God has a plan for everyone, and everything that happens is a part of a choice made by him. If I had continued taking the abuse from my mother, I would have never been who I am today. After years of abuse from my mother, I've learned so many lessons, good and bad. I've learned to bury my feelings. I've learned that I'm only lovable if I'm a digestible version of myself that she approves of, that all love, even a parent's love, is conditional. Luckily, after decades of these lessons learned by my mother, I'm continuing to heal and unlearn everything she has taught me. I'm now learning that I am lovable, and I don't have to mold myself into anyone else's expectations but my own. I am who I am in spite of her, not because of her. Overall, I've learned that I am not a reflection of my mother. My mother went through it, just as her mother did before. I went through it for most years of my life, but I will spend the rest of my life breaking the cycle and not putting my future daughter or son through the same thing. Everything a mother is supposed to teach her daughter, I have had to learn on my own; as hard as it's been, I've done it and continue to do so. This significant event in my life has been the center of my existence; every day I have to live life and face the battles of not having a stable mother in my life. The part of cutting contact with my mother that rests my mind and puts me at ease each night when I lie down is that I am breaking the continuous toxic cycle. That random December day is the day I chose peace.