

My Story

By Chenelle Price

My Beautiful Tragedy began on August 1, 1979. My mother's name is Genevieve Roberts and she was pregnant with me at the age of 19. My father is William Price, Jr.; he was also 19 when they found out they were having a baby. My mother was very beautiful; she's always been a very sensual, graceful woman. Her parents are French, so she was kinda raised different than other people. She can speak the beautiful French language and she has a way of carrying herself that everyone around her noticed including me. I always looked up to her. I wanted to walk like her, talk like her, dance like her. I watched her closely.

My father was a little more rough around the edges. He was the neighborhood drug dealer. "Big Bad Billy," that's what his friends would say when they saw him walking down the street. My father was feared by people. He was mean; he liked to fight. He hated weakness. Everyone tells me that I was his pride and joy. I was his world. However, he still got into a lot of trouble, never thinking of me or the outcome—like so many people do. We don't think about the loved ones that suffer because of our bad choices.

My first memory of my father is a statement in itself. I was three years old and I can't even believe that I remember this, but I do. I even remember what I was wearing, Little Levi's "blue jeans" and a Red Sox baseball shirt. My dad liked dressing me like a little boy. In all the old pictures I've seen of me and my dad, I'm always dressed like a little boy.

This day was always so vivid in my mind. It was fall. I was on the couch with my father; he jumped up to look out the window because he had heard doors shutting. He screamed at my mother, "Get rid of it! Get rid of it all now!!" I was scared. I didn't know why exactly but I knew it was bad. They were running all over the house. My mother was crying. My father yelled my name. "Chenelle!" But I was so scared that I just stood there in the hallway. He came after me. I will never forget the look on his face when he found me and scooped me up in his arms.

He gave my mother instructions on what to say and ran to the bathroom with me in his arms. He got into the shower, closed the curtain still holding me. He looked at me and brushed the hair outta my face. He put his finger to his lips, "shhh," telling me to be very quiet. He put his hand on the back of my head and pulled me to his chest, cradling me. He kept kissing me on my forehead and cheeks, telling me, "Daddy loves you baby girl." At that point I started crying. I sensed fear; I saw it on his face. For the first time ever, my father was afraid. Not of the 30 or 40 cops and detectives running in our house, but afraid of being taken away from me and my mother.

Sure enough, the shower started shaking and there was pounding on the floors. They ripped the curtain down, guns pointed at us, at our heads. My father was

screaming, "Get them fucking guns off her!!" I was screaming. Once they saw that he didn't have a gun, just his baby, they lowered their guns and told him to put me down. He begged them to let him tell my mother and me goodbye. They wouldn't, but they did let her come into the bathroom and get me from him. As soon as I was out of the way, they jumped my father. I could hear him grunting; he was fighting them back.

I watched him being dragged out of the house and down the street into the back of a police car. I cried out for him and he kept yelling to me that everything would be okay and he would be home soon. And I watched him looking back at me from the rear windshield. I wouldn't see my father free again for five long years.

We went to visit him a lot in the beginning. I loved seeing my father, but he and my mother would fight through most of the visits. It turns out that my mother was pregnant when my dad went to prison. They just didn't know it yet.

It wasn't long after my brother was born that my mother had a man in her life. His name was Paul. He was a lot older than my mom. She was now 24 with two kids. I was 4 and my baby brother was almost 1. She needed help taking care of us and I don't think Paul minded at all. Why would he? My mother was young and beautiful inside and out. Paul was about 37 or 38 and I was never really sure what he did for a living, but whatever it was paid well. He bought my mom a nice little house near Sherman and Washington streets on the east side of Indy. At least to a four year old, it seemed nice. I'll never forget the huge red velvet curtains and shaggy black carpet. It was the 80's so it looked the part.

This was when I started taking care of my baby brother. We started having company all the time. It wasn't good company either. I could tell that even at four years old. We had a big oval dining room table that all the adults would sit at. I never wanted my baby brother to go anywhere near that table. It scared me. I hated when all those people would be in our house because I knew I wasn't going to be able to take my eyes off of "Little Billy," my brother.

Music would be blaring through the house. Smoke filled every room. Strange men and women would be sitting around the table with needles and bare arms and the sight of blood trickling down their arms would take my breath away. Nevertheless, someone had to take care of Billy and it sure wasn't gonna be mom.

She would forget to feed us; forget to give a bath and change his diapers. Sometimes I think she forgot we were even there. I would walk right past her and she would look at me like she didn't even know who I was. I gave up on asking for help from her. I started taking care of everything myself. I learned how to change his diapers. I gave us a bath every night. I would get up with him at night and fill his bottles and in the morning I would make two bottles: one with chocolate milk and one with juice. I knew what foods he could eat and I knew which ones would choke him. I don't know how I knew these things, but I did. My only fear was that we wouldn't have any food

in the house. This went on for what seemed like forever. I missed my father so much. I haven't felt safe since he went away to prison. I wanted him to come save us so bad.

My mother started getting sick more than usual. Sometimes I would clean her up and tried to get her off the floor. Before I knew, I had a baby sister. Jessica was beautiful. My mother told me that she was mine. She had had her just for me. This made me happy, but deep down I already knew she would need me to take care of her and I was preparing for her (?). I was older and smarter now at the age of five.

My mother took good care of us for about two months and then she started acting like she used to again, but not as bad. Maybe because Jessie was so little. Once Jessie was about eight months old, my mother had completely changed back into that other woman. I was always nervous and worried. My brother wasn't too bad, but he ran off a lot and got into things more. Jessica was harder to take care of than Billy. She cried all the time. I kept her clean and fed her the best I could, but sometimes we wouldn't have milk and all I could give her was sugar water. She would spit water out, so I learned to put sugar in it and she liked it. I was more stressed out now because my mother had started doing something new; she started leaving for two and three days at a time sometimes. She was getting worse. Something had to give and it did.

One morning mom woke me up and told me we were going to the store. Her best friend stayed at the house with the two little ones. I remember getting into a big white van with my mother, Paul and another man who was driving. They were talking, all three of them. I know now that what they were doing was planning. Planning something really bad.

We pulled up to a Hooks drugstore. I remember them saying, "You take her in with you. It will look better." Then the other man said, "When you guys come out, we'll go in." My mother and I walked in and she walked us straight to the pharmacy and gave the man behind the counter the papers she was writing on in the van, "prescriptions." The man walked away and came back a few minutes later with bottles of pills. He put them into a bag and mom paid for them and we walked out. We got back into the van and they jumped out.

About five minutes later, I heard two gunshots and they came storming into the van. There was a bunch of yelling and before I knew it, we were on the highway. The way I understood what they were saying was that Paul was upset because the other guy fired the gun. He did not shoot the guy, but it probably shocked Paul, not to mention the attention it could draw.

In the midst of all this drama, I begin to worry about the babies. All I can think about is getting home to them. I didn't like anyone around them. I didn't trust anyone. I knew people changed. No matter how nice people may seem or how well you know them. They do things to themselves that take away the ones you know and replace

them with these empty eyes and lazy bodies, and they can't even talk, let alone take care of a baby; they can't stay awake long enough.

Next thing I knew was that we were being chased by the police. They are freaking out and throwing things out the window. My mother was frantically opening the pill bottles and putting pills in her mouth. Looking back, I would say that she knew it was over and she was going away for a long time and she wanted one last high; one for the road I guess.

Once we were pulled over, police were shocked to find a little five-year-old girl in the back of the van. They were angry. Angry because I could have been killed. I looked to my mother for something, anything. But I didn't find anything. No concern, no fear, nothing like what my father showed. She went numb, blank. Maybe because she knew what this meant. Maybe she was trying to swallow her reality after swallowing the pills that made this her reality. I don't know. I was so young. I can only say things how I saw them and how I see them looking back.

An officer picked me up and held me in a very caring way. I remember feeling very safe in his arms. He took me to his car and talked to me. I told him about my brother and sister and the bad people that were in the house. He assured me that he would get them and keep them safe. I cried to him. I told him they needed to be with me because they are scared of people. Really, I don't know if they were scared of people, but I was for them. "Will we be together?" I kept asking him because he told me he was taking us to a safe place with other kids. A Guardian's Home is where he took me. There were a lot up kids there. I was so scared. I wanted my mother. I wanted her to be herself so bad. I knew that if she was herself she would never leave us here. I knew she would do something. God, why can't I just reach her. It's like she doesn't even hear me or see me. I know her. I know she loves me. It wasn't always like this. She was loving and caring