

Chapter 01

Barbara: I always think that sharing your story is a great way to give back and be of service. I remember when I first got sober, hearing someone share their story is what actually gave me more hope than anything. And so my job today is to tell you what it was like, what happened, and what my life is like now.

I grew up in a very loving home. My parents were very nurturing and very loving. My parents were both married before, so I'm the only one from their marriage, but I have older siblings. The age gap to me that's the closest is 10 years. So my brother's 10 years older, sister 12 years older from my mom's previous marriage, and then from my dad's previous marriage, my sisters are 26 years older, all the way to 22 years older.

So I'm the baby by a long shot, was spoiled rotten. You know, my parents – my mom was a homemaker. She was an international debutante. She never left the house without her face on. She was the hostess with the mostest and, like, a little hummingbird energy. My dad was a cowboy through and through. He wore his cowboy boots with his suit. His heartbeat about once a month, you know, he was just as calm as they come.

And so he was 52 when I was born and my mom was 35. So I got a lot of wisdom from him. And I think being their second marriages, they kind of knew how to parent by the time I came along. So they loved to drink. That was normal in my upbringing, my childhood. I don't remember a night that they tucked me in bed, that I didn't smell alcohol in their breath. That was just my normal.

I remember riding horses on our family's ranch, and that's kind of where my love of horses came from. And I started off barrel racing, and we were at our family's ranch in Ocmulgee, and a snake spooked my horse, and he galloped and jumped over the fence. And I hung on and said, woohoo! And that was my first high.

So I was probably seven years old when that happened. And I told my parents I wanted to start taking English riding lessons and do Hunter/Jumper. So there began my love of show jumping.

And I went all the way to the highest levels, did Grand Prix show jumping. I started showing in Oklahoma, and my parents bought a horse farm, and it was our life. We were on the road every weekend to horse shows.

When I started, you know, wanting to expand my goals and started wanting to win outside of Oklahoma, there was a trainer in Flower Mountain, Texas. And he was the, if you wanted to win, that's who you rode with. I would go, and my horses were there with him, and I would go and ride, and I would meet him at horse shows, and they would trailer all over in the Midwest.

So we started winning championships in the Midwest and really accomplishing all my goals. And I was at Holland Hall at the time. And so we were in Palm Springs, California, staying at my grandmother's home there. And in the wintertime, you would always show in the warmer areas.

So we'd go to California for a month, and my Holland Hall would have a tutor that would be on the other end, and they'd fax my tests back and forth. And so that was my life, living at these horse shows. You show all week, and then Sunday's the big class. It's either a \$10,000 class, \$50,000 class, all the way up to now they have million dollar classes. But the highest I ever showed in when I was 17 was a \$75,000 class, and it was on ESPN. It was a big deal. It was big time.

At this point, I'm in Palm Springs. I'm 15 years old, and there's a \$10,000 class. And that night, my dad said, "Okay, kiddo, I'm going to meet you in the kitchen in the morning. We'll have some waffles, get your belly full, and then we'll go to the horse show real early."

You have to be on the horse at like 5.30 in the morning. I got up that morning, and I went in the kitchen, and I didn't see my dad, but I saw a light on in the bathroom. And I walked in, and I found my dad passed away.

He died of a massive heart attack, and my whole world turned upside down. My mom was a widow at 49. It just really was a very difficult situation. I think losing a parent is hard enough, but seeing him was very difficult.

So there was a lot of legal things that had to happen after he passed away. He owned several businesses, and so there were my sisters from his previous marriage sued us over his estate, and so my mom was going through a lot, so she started sending me to horse shows by myself. And I was 15.

I'd fly to Texas to his farm and to these horse shows. He was 47, and I was 15. And about a month after my dad died, we entered into a sexual relationship. I did not know until I went to rehab years later and did a sexual inventory that he had molested me. I thought that I was the horrible one for liking an older man, and I know now with all the work that I've done that I had a hole in my heart where my dad was, and I was just trying to fill that void.

I idolized him and worshiped him, and I won every blue ribbon for him, and that went on for five years. It was a very sick time in my life. Nobody knew about it. It was very secretive. He had me kind of in this trance, so that went on for a while.

At that point, I'd graduated from Holland Hall, and I was no drugs, no alcohol at this point. I was the golden child. I made good grades. I was this champion horse rider. I hadn't messed up yet at this point in my life, and so I graduated from Holland Hall, and where did I want to go to school? SMU in Dallas, because that was where the trainer was, and it was the closest college to where my horses were, and then I could finally see him more, and I could ride my horses and show and compete. So I started my freshman year at SMU, and I was still seeing the trainer, and I was at a horse show in Kentucky at the Kentucky National Horse Park, and I was in the jump

off, and I was galloping my horse to – I mean, the jumps are five foot tall.

I mean, we're talking they're six foot spreads, five feet tall at the big Grand Prix level, and I was up out of the saddle, and my horse added a stride, and when he jumped, it catapulted me out of the saddle, and it ripped my arm back, and I broke my right shoulder. Like the ball came out of the socket, and I had three pins in my shoulder, and so that was very difficult.

I had to take the semester off college, move home to Tulsa. My mom had to hire an in-home nurse to come and bathe me a couple times a week. It was intense because you can't do anything when you're in a – I had a contraption that kept my arm out to the side, and so then my mother decided to sell my horses, and she said, "I buried your dad a few years ago. You have broken your

back at the, you know, junior nationals last year. You broke your shoulder. I can't do this anymore. I'm selling your horses" and I was devastated.

That was my whole life, my identity, my everything, and of course I wanted to be next to the trainer. So when she sold my horses out from under me, I went into like a deep depression, and I remember I was at SMU, and I tried Jack Daniels for the first time, and I thought, "Well, where the hell has this been my whole life?" You know, it was the solution for me.

I felt 10 feet tall and bulletproof. It didn't matter that my horses were sold. That was my new—everything was going to be okay as long as I had Jack Daniels. So that's when my drinking began.

I moved back to Tulsa, and my plan was, okay, I'm going to go to TU for a semester, and then I'm going to move somewhere else. But my best friend that I met at Holland Hall, fifth grade –we were best friends all through Holland Hall – and then she was at TU, and she said, come to TU.

It's like Holland Hall. It's so wonderful. She was in a sorority, and so I went to TU, and I fell in love with it, and I didn't move, and that's where I graduated from. But being in a sorority, we went to the fraternity parties. We drank. You know, everybody binge drank on the weekends, and then they'd sober up. Well, I didn't sober up.

But still, people in my family drank alcoholically, so it was not an issue. I didn't think it was an issue. My life was not powerless. I graduated cum laude from TU. It was not affecting my ability to accomplish what I wanted to accomplish.

My senior year at TU, I was out at a bar, and I met a guy. He was a bad boy. I think the trainer set up for me how men should treat me, and the trainer would call me fat. He'd call me the C word. He would – very verbally abusive. So then when I found this guy, it was like, well, he's nothing like the trainer. I just – it fell into a pattern of finding bad relationships. So my senior year, he came home.

He had a job at the Hard Rock Casino, and he came home. And I had experimented with drugs, but nothing ever, you know, too bad. And he had a glass pipe with a melted down substance, and he said, smoke this. And I said, well, what is it? He said it's speed. And so I smoked it, and little did I know it was methamphetamine. So from the first time I tried it, I was hooked.

I lost 50 pounds in four months, and my biggest insecurity my whole life had always been my weight. I remember my grandmother, I was at her place in Houston at her house, and I just won a big horse show in Katy, Texas. And it was a \$10,000 Grand Prix. She bought a sponsor table, brought all her River Oaks hoity-toity friends. I won the class, made her look really good, and we were at her house afterwards.

And we were all toasting a glass of champagne, and I said, "Grandmommy, are you proud of me?" And she said, "Yes, but you need to lose this." And she lifted up my shirt in front of everybody and grabbed my stomach. And I just shriveled into the corner and kind of disappeared.

So fast forward years later to the first time I tried meth, I thought, well, giddy up. I finally found the solution to how I can be skinny. And when I lost the 50 pounds, I didn't see an addict. I finally could look in the mirror and like what I saw. I thought that I was pretty for the first time ever in my life, because skinny equaled pretty in my grandmother's eyes.

So my family was very concerned when I was losing that much weight. I had bald spots where I'd been picking my hair out of my head. I mean, it was not good. So they had an intervention for me, and I went to Cirque Lodge in Utah. It's a wonderful rehab. And my family did a great job because they use horses in the therapy. And it really got through to me.

I relapsed two weeks later. I got back together with the ex. I was more addicted to him than I was the drugs at that point. And I just didn't want to lose him because losing him brought up grief and brought up the loss of my dad. So it was a hard separation. So my mom's plan, my aunt been sober, she's sober 33 years currently. So back then she was sober, you know, a couple of decades and she lived in Santa Fe.

And so my mom didn't know what to do. She just got me out of this rehab and I relapsed. So I lived with my aunt and my uncle Kenny. It was a – I'm so grateful to the time that I had in Santa Fe. She introduced me to a wonderful community there of sober people.

I was four months sober. I had a sponsor. I started working the steps. My life was coming together. And I got a phone call from David Almas jail and my ex had been arrested and I drove nine hours and one night I bailed him out and I relapsed.

And I went from smoking meth to the needle and that is not something that I'm proud of. But I think it's important to share just how far down the scales I went because there's no lower rung on the ladder than using that way.

A lot of people think that addicts of that kind are sleeping under a bridge. I'm a privately school educated young woman that came, you know, with a silver spoon born in my mouth and here I was. So addiction supersedes race, class, any of that.

And I think it's important to share that part of my story because the fact that I'm sitting here years later is an absolute miracle. In my relapse, we had rented a hotel across from the Hard Rock Casino because we loved to gamble when we were high and I had overdosed and my ex took my car and my purse and they found him at the casino.

I was passed out and my mom had hired a private detective and they busted down the door and came and helped me and got me the medical attention that I needed. My mom lived in a gated community and she would not give up. She saved my life and I honestly believe that. She was my biggest enabler but at the same time if she had thrown me out on the street I wouldn't be here today and I'm so grateful for the love that she shared with me.

So slowly but surely I started to get my life back together. If I needed to go anywhere, she had somebody drive me. If I needed to go to a meeting, somebody would drive me. I had no freedom because the ex was showing up at the guard gate, he was wanting to get in. It was a nightmare and she was so determined that she was going to help me.

And so I got a job at the Sloppy Dog Wash and I was a manager there for five years but I'll tell you that job healed me from the inside out and dog people are good people. And those dogs didn't judge me, they didn't look at me like I was a bad person. It melted the shame away. It gave me a sense of purpose. The owners trusted me with keys to the store, to the cash register and I slowly started to get my life together.

I was still drinking but the drugs were out of my system. And my mentality at that point was well the drinking will never do the damage in my life that the drugs did. So I'll just drink, that'll be fine. And I was not out of control at that point. I was working, getting my life together and I had an apartment at that time. It was really – things were coming together. My family was starting to

trust me again. My mom and I had completely bonded and things were looking good.

And then I got a phone call from my mom's housekeeper one morning, January 17, 2008 and she said, "You need to come quick, Miss D's dead." And so my mom had died of a diabetic coma and she was only 60 years old. So I was 26 years old and both my parents had passed away. It was just, it was a really difficult time. I felt all alone in the world. My mom was the only one that really had my back and here I was just kind of getting my head above water and just trying to get my life together and then she passed away.

But I promised her I would never use drugs again. And I'm so – that promise is what really kept me going in those early days of losing her. I was working at the Sloppy Dog and I was really sad and my sorority sisters from college were like, "We've got to get you out of the house. There's this new place called El Guapo's downtown. It's a Mexican restaurant. Let's take you out there. We'll go on the rooftop."

So I reluctantly went and so it was my sorority sisters that I'd known for a while and then a massage therapist was one of their friends and she came, I'd never met her before. So we're finishing up our dinner and the massage therapist sees this guy across the way and she says, "Oh my gosh, that guy is so good looking. I have to go talk to him." And I said, "No, look, he looks so cocky. You don't want to go talk to that guy. He looks like an asshole to me."

Well, he ended up being my husband. So we get up from the table and we're walking out and she pulls her business card out, her massage therapist business card out. And she says, "If you ever want to massage sometime, give me a call."

And I'm like, "Oh, why did I come out tonight?" I wanted to shrivel under the table. It was, you know, so embarrassing. So he was there with a friend and they invited us to sit down. So here there were four girls, these two guys, and I heard her ask him where he grew up. And he said, "A horse farm in Claremore." And I went, "What horse farm?"

And he said, "Woodridge farm in Claremore." I'd met his mother at horse shows. I'd been out to the family's farm. My sister had had her horses boarded out there for 16 years. And so the massage therapist went to the bathroom and she came back and we were already holding hands. So she got so mad she took the trolley home.

But if I ever run into her again, I need to thank her for introducing her to my husband. So we started dating and I realized he was a really great guy. And I thought, I just need to go ahead and scare him off because he's a really great guy. I'm a mess. I'm trying to get my life together.

So I think it was our third date. I just said, listen, I'm, you know, I'm a drug addict. I'm trying to get my life together. I don't think you really want any part of this. And he said, "You know what? My biological mother was a heroin addict and I was adopted when I was eight years old by my family. And I really commend you for trying to get your life together."

So not only did I not scare him away, but we bonded and we fell in love. So we were married on his family's horse farm in Claremore in 2009 and we took over running the farm. So it was a really great experience for me to be on the other end because growing up, my parents always paid somebody else to take care of the horses. And now I was the one taking care of the horses.

So I was mucking stalls. I was getting the hay. I was riding the horses. It was a breeding farm. So we got to see the horses, you know, the mares have babies. It was – it was a beautiful time in my life. And to have horses in my life without the trainer and be able to have the passion and love for what I fell in love with horses in the first place.

So we knew that we wanted to start a family. We – our first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage and that was really difficult, but I just remember white knuckling it and not wanting to drink. And the minute that we found out there was no heartbeat, I couldn't wait to go drink. And what a sad thought that is that I – the first solution for me was I'm going to turn to what I – what I always numb out with.

So after the miscarriage, we got pregnant with our son and our son was born in 2012 and he has been the greatest blessing in my life – in our lives. I remember maybe having a couple of glasses of wine when I was pregnant with him, but by the grace of God, I was not – I was not drinking alcoholically. By the time he was a month old, I had my first glass of wine and it was like a bear inside of me was sleeping and the bear woke up and it just engulfed me and swallowed me whole.

And when it talks about the phenomenon of craving, that first sip is all I needed. And then I was off to the races. My husband started to see that I was drinking too much. He would help me. He would lock up the liquor cabinet. He

would measure out one glass of wine all along. I had gin hiding behind the spoons as I was, you know, uh, cooking dinner or he'd have a zip tie on the liquor cabinet and I'd cut it off, take my chug or whatever, put the zip tie back on.

You can't fool an addict alcoholic. We're going to find a way. So I was lying. I was deceiving. I was doing all of these things. And by the time my son was four months old, I was drinking a bottle of wine and probably a cup of gin a night, just chugging it. So my husband came home from work and he saw me carrying around her son and I was drunk about to drop him.

So he knew at that point that I was out of control and he called my aunt who was sober and he called my brother and he said, "She's out of control. I've been trying to help her. I don't know what to do. Please help. What do we do?" And my aunt said, "Get your ass to a meeting tomorrow." And the very next day is when I got sober and I've been sober ever since 10 years.

And it wasn't the fancy rehab that I went to. It wasn't living with my aunt who had decades of sobriety. It was looking into my son's eyes when he was four months old and having a spiritual experience and realizing if you stop right now, you have an opportunity for this little soul straight from heaven to never know what decades of alcoholic torture are like.

And it just clicked. It just – something in me clicked and I was ready to be done. And I never looked back. I started going to New Haven as my home group and my meeting with my aunt and I started to just get my life together. And my husband has been the most supportive rock.

He was an angel sent from above. He watched our son so I could go to my – my meetings in the evening and here he worked all day long and then he would come home and watch our son. So I could get to my meetings. I made it for a long time on two meetings a week. That's just what I had to do, but you do whatever it takes.

Some people do 90 meetings in 90 days. I had to do what I had to do and I'm sitting here 10 years. So something worked. My life is so beautiful today. I got a sponsor. I worked the steps. My relationship with my husband started to improve because I stopped lying and all of the things that I was doing.

When you work the steps, I equate it to taking a thorn out of your soul and all of this ugly stuff comes up. And you have to take an honest look at it, but then

you look at it, tell it to your sponsor and guess what? You're free. You can, you can start to heal.

And then all of that ugly stuff that happened, all of the things that you did, the shame, all of the things that keep you in that cycle of addiction. You're free and you don't have to drink and use anymore to drown out the memories, the shame, the horrible things. And everybody has a past.

Nobody's exempt from trials and tribulations. And this is just – my solution was drugs and alcohol and it's not today, which is a beautiful thing. Life today looks like: on Tuesday mornings. I love Tuesdays. I go to a Bible study in the morning and then I pick my aunt up and I go to our new women's meeting.

I chuckle every time I go to my Bible study because the church is at 28th and Yale, and it's right on the same corner behind that strip club, lipstick cabaret. And that's where I used to go and score drugs. You know, I mean, and that's a God wink. That's a God wink every single time that I have to drive by that parking lot and I park my car and I'm walking in with my Bible and my going, wow, if that's not a transformation, you know? I mean, it's just the – the woman that I am today. I have peace and serenity in my life.

I have relationships with people. They can trust me. I'm – I have connections with people that I didn't have before. I've mended relationships. My sisters that sued us over my dad's estate, they're at every football game of my son's. They're at every – I'm having dinner with them tonight. You know, my dad would be so proud that I have a relationship with them today.

It –this program and being sober helps you mend families. It brings families back together. Recovery is the most amazing life. My aunt, her son, we are all sober together. So family get togethers used to be a lot of drunkenness, a lot of yelling, a lot of, you know, chaos. And now we get together and there's several sober people and it's beautiful and we can have gatherings and we don't judge the people that do drink, but the people that do drink respect our sobriety.

And it's, it's just, it trickles down, and alcoholism and addiction runs in families, but so does recovery. Recovery does too. And it can trickle down in families too. And one person having the courage to stop drinking and to stop using can have an effect on the rest of the family that you will never know.

And the fact that my 10 year old has never seen me drink is the greatest, the greatest gift I could ever give him. And he has never known anything other than a healthy mom. I am just so grateful for my sobriety. I'm grateful for my life. I feel like I was given a second chance of life. I wake up every morning. I read my devotionals. I sit out, we have chickens and I love our chickens. And I just have a peace and a connection with God and a trust that everything is going to be okay.

And I used to have so much fear and I don't – I don't have that today. And it took some time for me to – to have that because going to therapy and doing all the work that I did, I was diagnosed with PTSD from finding my dad when I did, when he passed away.

And the therapist also educated me that I was, you know, self-medicating for years as well. You know, so the fact that I, I'm not triggered anymore and I'm not wanting to, to numb out or anything is such a gift. I'm actually grateful for my addiction today because it's given me a purpose and being able to help women in recovery. I have a sponsee that I've helped and she's probably eight years sober now. And to say that I had a little piece of that and to watch her get her life together is one of the greatest gifts that I've ever received.

And that's what the 12th step is all about is sharing, you know, what this program has done. You know, being of service, sharing my story today, you know, that is something that you can do to help the still suffering alcoholic. It's just, I could go on and on, but I'm just so grateful for this beautiful life and for each day. And that's my story.

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