

My Story

Renea M. Walker



I didn't have a bad childhood, just a lonely childhood. My mother and father were not an integral part of my life. My mother was an alcoholic. She worked for Water Reclamation for 35 years and was drunk every day. They had a plant where you test the water in big tanks and I'd tell her "They're gonna find you floating in one of them tanks one day."



Renea & her grandmother

I had a grandmother that raised me. She wasn't a kissy-kissy, touchy-touchy person, she taught you how to survive. **My grandmother said the only thing that no one can take away from you is knowledge, so learn everything you can.** School was never a problem for me, in fact I went to Metro, a top accredited high school downtown, and I graduated a year early. School was fun for me, I always wanted to learn.

When you start using drugs it's fun and you do it every day. There is always someone who tells you "Oh you can handle this, you are going to feel wonderful." All I knew was I didn't want to hurt anymore. I had an addiction for thirty-four years of my life, can you imagine that? I got high longer than some people are old. That was my escape because if I got high nobody was going to ask me a serious question because nobody thought I knew anything. "She's gonna be just like her no-good momma." In my mind, alcohol was never my thing because I would never be like my mother, but experimenting with drugs would make me feel good. Sounded like a winner to me.

I have two daughters, one is 44 and my youngest is 39. I used to think that they didn't love me but that was not the case, they didn't like my lifestyle. I no longer liked me.

I lived in a building that had built-in mirrors everywhere; I took newspaper and covered all the mirrors because I couldn't stand to look at me anymore.

Then I met John. He was my everything, my friend. We would sit up at night on the back porch to see the stars and we talked about the books we read together. He kissed all my boobos when they hurt, made them all better. **He taught me how to love** because I didn't come from a loving home or close-knit family. I just wanted someone to love me, I wanted to belong to someone somewhere.

John died in 2016 after we had been together for 25 years. When John died I thought I was going to lose my mind. He had cancer and hepatitis and I took care of him for 18 months before he died. The killer part is that he came from a big family with 12 siblings, and none of them came to see him. He was the black sheep of the family because he got high, but what people need to know is that using drugs doesn't mean someone is a bad person, it just means they made some bad decisions.



John, next to his ashes

His mother sent his oldest brother to tell me she could get market value rent for the home we had been living in and if I couldn't pay then I would be put out. I was



Renea at the door of her TRC apartment

homeless for 2 years, sleeping on people's couches. **The day I came to TRC and I put my key in that door, it opened a whole new world for me.** It was mine. Nobody asks me what I'm doing in the kitchen. Nobody tells me I have to be in by a certain time. This is mine, I earned it. I went from my grandmother's house to my husband's house. I was always accountable to someone or for someone. No one could make me feel less-than anymore.

So, at this point in my life it's about Renea. I don't mean to sound selfish but it really is about me. Being here has done a great deal for me and I feel like I'm still growing. **God**

gave me a do-over to start life how it was meant to be: happy, joyful, and peaceful. I enjoy life now. I really, really do. I'm not saying I'm not human, I'm not saying everything is perfect, but the good outweighs the bad. It surely does.



I had spent so long looking outside from people's basements that when I came to TRC, I said "You can put me on the highest floor you have and make sure I have a window." I call that my window to the world. In the morning, it is the most beautiful view for a sunrise that you have ever seen. At night when the city is asleep and the sky changes, you can see the stars. I think it's simply beautiful.

In the future, I would like a one bedroom apartment with a little more room. If I live long enough, I'd like to see Europe. I want to experience the museums, the castles, the rolling green hills. From this day forward, I want to be involved in something where I can help someone, like what TRC does, where I can mentor and open up the eyes of the young. Even some of the old, because I was one whose eyes were opened. I want to mentor, to be an advocate, a facilitator. That sounds wonderful.

I'm truly grateful that this place exists, I appreciate it with everything in me. **I know that I can't be the only one out here in society that wants a better life.**

Sometimes you have to go through a whole bunch of things in life before you can receive it. We can be a little critical sometimes. Just open your eyes, put cotton in your mouth and open your ears, learn how to receive some things, learn how to be receptive to things that will enhance your growth.



Renia M. Walker