

# SOBER STICK FIGURE

By  
Amber Tozer



## Preamble

“This is a dark and funny story about alcoholism. I hope it helps anyone who needs it.”

## Chapter One

The first time I ever tasted alcohol was at my grandma Babe’s house. I was seven years old. My uncle Woody let me take a swig of his beer, and I thought it tasted like sour pee. I knew what pee tasted like because I was a fucked-up kid. He also let me take a drag of his cigarette. Score! I felt like I was going to experience what men and loose women experienced in the movies, *extreme coolness*. As I took a big-ass toke off that cancer stick and my lungs filled with smoky chemicals it felt like my guts had just been set aflame. It felt horrible, like the most uncool thing I had ever done. I took another swig of beer then coughed so hard I almost threw up. Luckily, only long strings of saliva poured down my chin. My uncle smiled and said, “See. It’s bad. You shouldn’t drink and smoke,” then he took another puff.



My family said that Uncle Woody was an “alcoholic.” They also said my dad and Grandpa Mac were “alcoholics.” I could feel it in my bones that it was a very bad thing because when they said the word *alcoholic* their tone slipped into sadness. I intuitively knew that it was bad, but at the same time drinking alcohol was just something everyone did. I felt like I was hearing, “Alcohol is very bad, but everyone loves it and drinks it all of the time.”

I probably thought this way because my parents owned a bar-restaurant called the Do Drop Inn, a local hot spot in my hometown of Pueblo, a midsize lower-middle-class city in the foothills of Colorado. Do Drop Inn, or better known as “the Do Drop,” served pizza, burgers, and booze, and like all classic dive joints, had a dart board and a pool table. Me, my older brother, Adam, and younger sister, Autumn, were always around men who sat on stools with their elbows on the bar drinking one drink after another. They seemed fine. In fact, they made drinking alcohol look like a great idea. They were always laughing and smiling and when their favorite song came on the juke box they’d get up and dance. I loved walking in there with my family. Those boozy boys would pick me and Autumn up and say, “Hey, kiddos!” then toss us in the air. There is nothing more fun than being tossed in the air by a drunk when you’re a kid. In that moment you both feel so carefree and full of life.



I was happy my parents owned the bar, it was one of the coolest places in town. There’s not much to do in Pueblo except breed and drink, so that’s what everyone does. If you’re not making babies, you’re boozin’—sometimes people did these two things at the same time.



Mom's pizza recipe was a smash hit, and Do Drop became the number-one pizza place in town. Business was good, but I could tell something was wrong at home. My dad turned out to be a very sad and angry and depressed man. I had to take care of Autumn when my mom was at work because he wouldn't come out of his bedroom. I don't know if he was drinking in there or not because he kept the door closed. He slipped into a very dark depression that lasted years, and no one ever talked about it. I hated the silence.



Mom ended up divorcing him. She said the last straw was when he started hitting me and Adam with a cutting board. When my mom said we were moving out, I pretended to be sad because that's how kids acted in after-school specials when their parents got a divorce, but I was thrilled. I could not wait to get away. I hated him. Of course mom got custody of us, and the cool thing was, my dad didn't want the Do Drop. He said if mom gave him a lot of money she could have it.

So, she worked full-time at the gas station my aunt Sabrina owned until she made enough money to buy him out. Here she was, a newly single mom with full-time custody of three kids, going through a divorce, and working as a cashier at a gas station. I wondered what she was thinking, because you never knew, she was just always working toward a solution without emotion. I felt okay with everything because she seemed okay. I loved that she worked at a gas station because sometimes I'd go with her early in the morning before school and she would give me a day-old donut. Score.



My mom was a rock. She was a working warrior, doing whatever it took to maintain a stable life for us. I felt safe around her, but at the same time there was this hardness to her. Her style of lovin' was very tough, and she had no tolerance for feelings. I guess you can't be a softy when you have kids to feed and a fucked-up ex-husband. If she sat around and focused on her feelings she would have gone nuts. I believe my mom intuitively knew what to focus on to make things better, but what she didn't know is that we aren't all like that. I never, ever saw her feel sorry for herself, and that's how she wanted us to be.



My siblings and I handled the divorce pretty well. Adam was always focused on something like karate, bike riding, break dancing, or throwing Chinese stars at everyone. He did a good job keeping himself distracted. Autumn was real young, so I don't know if she knew what was happening, but she seemed okay. She was a mellow and sweet kid. I've always felt like an insane person no matter what was happening, so I guess I was feeling normal.

Okay, let me use these little stick-figure emoji bullet points to plow this this next portion of my life. After my parents got a divorce and my mom got the Do Drop, this stuff happened:



My mom met and fell in love with a fireman named Mark. He had a big beer belly, but considered himself an athlete because he was good at sports in high school. I thought he was great because he at least came out of the bedroom. I was like, "This guy is great! He comes out of the bedroom to drink beer!" They got married and had my half sister, Rochelle. She was so cute.



I was going through puberty and was full of suppressed rage and was mean to Autumn and Adam. I was also very horny. We all moved into a big house together "out in the country," and I loved my new school. I found an outlet for my pent-up rage and horniness—sports.



Autumn, Adam, and I rarely saw my dad because he was still a mental mess.



My mom was a workaholic and worked seven days a week at the Do Drop. Mark drank a lot of beer when he wasn't being a fireman.



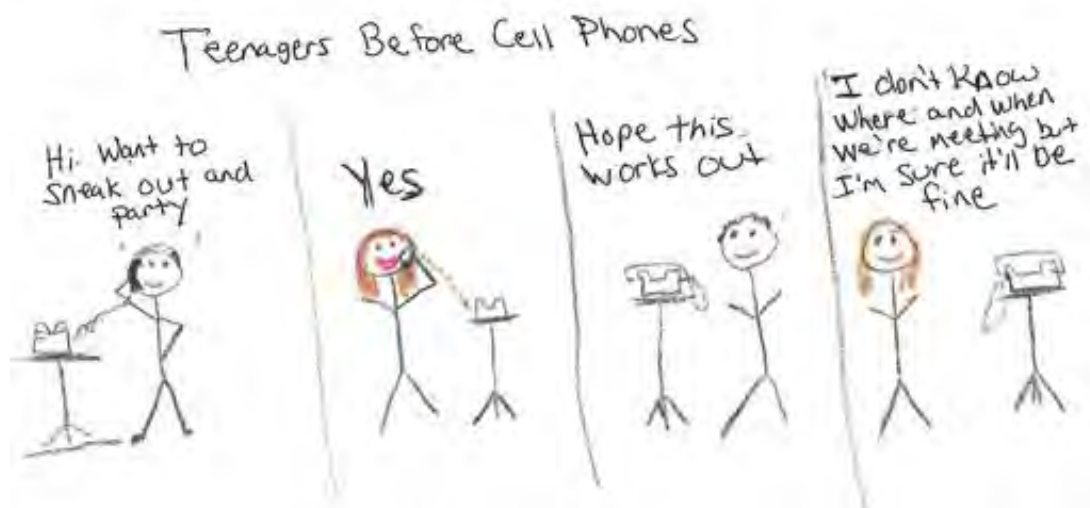
I was content. I liked our new house, I was excelling in sports and school, and I loved my friends—but I had this other side of me, this nagging sense that I needed something else. Something was missing, it was like a lonely feeling, a pit in my stomach. I thought being a good kid would make me happy, but since it didn't, the dark side seemed very tempting.



This is why I wanted to try alcohol again. I wasn't a kid anymore taking baby sips of my uncle's beer; I was thirteen years old and ready to party my training-bra tits off. It was the summer of '89, and I was with my friend Tammy-Lou. She grew up in the country, so that's why her name is like that. She was a real tall girl with rich and cool parents. I loved her family. Tammy-Lou and I lived in the same neighborhood, went to school together, played sports together, and my stepdad was friends with her dad. I liked her because she was so much fun and laughed a lot. And if you did something stupid, she'd get a kick out of it and even encourage it. A perfect friend to have—tall, fun, funny, rich, sporty—and she enabled stupidity.



One night, Tammy-Lou was staying the night at my house, and we made a plan to sneak out and meet some boys we went to school with, Jason and Peter. These were the days before cell phones, so our plans consisted of one phone call to a landline and a lot of faith.



My house was super easy to sneak out of, especially on the night Tammy-Lou stayed over because my parents weren't even home. Mark was working an overnight fireman shift, my mom was working late at the Do Drop, and I don't remember where my siblings were. Hopefully, I didn't leave my little sisters home alone. Anyways, we could have just walked out the door, but I made Tammy-Lou crawl out a small window.

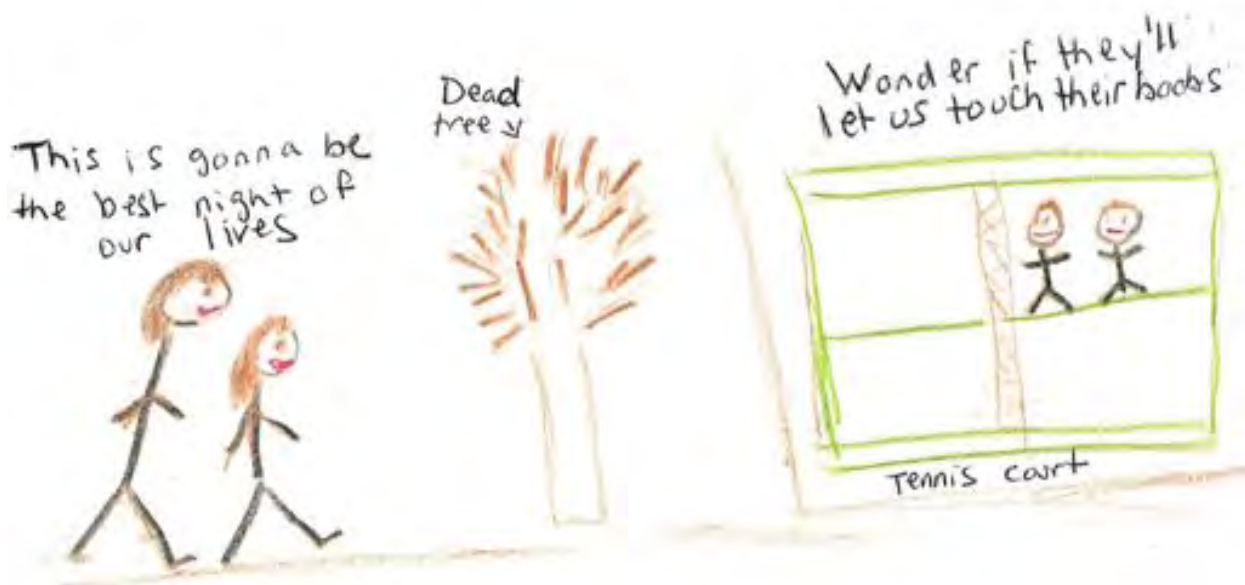


I loved the feeling of doing something my parents would not want me to do; it was an adrenaline rush. The nagging dark side of me that wanted to be bad was finally being fed and the wrongness felt right. Even though sneaking out would be a mild thing to "bad kids," it was a huge deal to me. When you're an overachieving three-sport athlete who spends a lot of time making your hair perfect, sneaking out feels like you're committing a felony.



As Tammy-Lou and I walked in the dark, down the dirt road that led to the tennis courts, we could see Peter and Jason standing by the net. They were both tall, thin, and blond. Jason was a trouble-maker; he was always doing crazy shit and getting in trouble. I liked him because he didn't give a fuck and wasn't intimidated by authority figures, or at least that's what it seemed like. Peter, on the other hand, was a good kid. Sort of like me, but not as needy and way more kind. Jason and Peter were best friends, probably drawn to each other because they were opposites.

As Tammy-Lou and I got closer to the courts, I got another burst of adrenaline. The thoughts in my mind were very staccato. We. Are. Sneaking. Out. To. Meet. Boys. And. Drink. Alcohol. SO. BAD.





We reached the tennis court entrance and greeted the boys with our awkward pubescent ways of communicating, which I'm sure involved a few insults. Maybe Tammy-Lou and I said something like, "Hey, dummies." And the boys said something like, "Hey, fatties." But I don't remember what we said. All I remember is Jason pulling out a huge bottle of Jim Beam from the inside pocket of his jean jacket and drinking it straight from the bottle. I could not believe how much he did not give a fuck about shit.

Peter was next. Jason passed him the bottle, and we all just stared at him waiting for him to take a drink. It was the rawest form of peer pressure. Eyes on you, Peter. Whatchya gonna do? He put the bottle to his lips and took a big swig, no big deal. I was pretty sure these two boys had done this before.

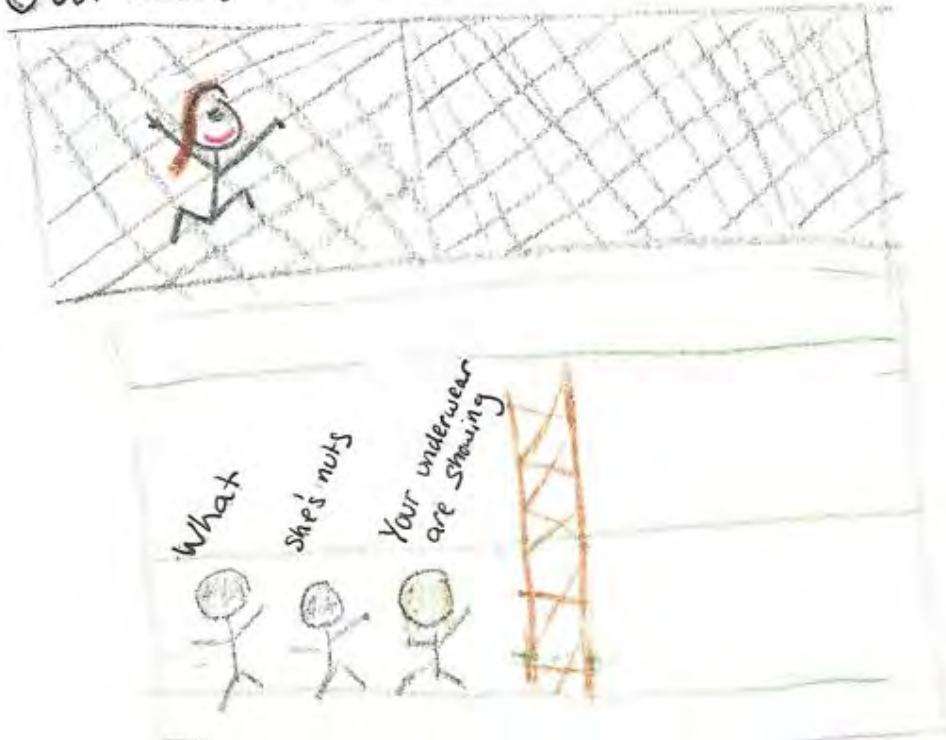
Then it was Tammy-Lou's turn. I knew she would be able to handle it because she was so tall and athletic. She took a swig, scrunched up her face, yelled "UGH," and passed the bottle to me. I could not wait to taste this disgusting beverage. I took a big drink real fast, wanting to get it over with. It tasted like something the devil made, but I enjoyed the warm sting as it traveled down my throat into my belly.

We continued to pass the bottle and drink. After a few more swigs, I was officially drunk and experiencing the psychic transformation that alcohol provides. It was like I had just poured a solution to all my problems over my mind.



I felt like a superhero, like a very hyper, athletic, sexy, smart, courageous, teenage superhero. I ran around hurdling the net and climbing the fence. I didn't know if I was showing off or trying to get my friends to worry about me. I liked the idea of being so crazy people worried about me. Then, I thought maybe I should kiss one of the boys, but I had no idea how to flirt, how to communicate, and my way of connecting with people was impressing them. But on this night, I realized all that shit didn't matter.

God made fences so we could climb them



Tammy-Lou, Peter, and Jason stood in a huddle talking or whatever they were doing. I didn't know and I didn't really care because I could not contain my energy. Jason was usually the one to act like a nut job, but on this night, it was my turn. I finally saw him as my equal. Jason was nothing but another kid on the planet. I was just as crazy as he was, and I would no longer hold him on a pedestal for being a bad kid who didn't give a fuck. I was the bad kid who didn't give a fuck. It was an incredible transformation. The nerves I had just an hour before were briefly drowned out by the voice of Jim Beam. A voice that I felt like I had been waiting for all my life.



I was feeling incredible, I thought I should probably drink as much as possible so I could get MORE of those incredible feelings. I guess feeling drunk wasn't enough, the darkness that lurked inside of me kept telling me I needed MORE. I went from experiencing my first drunkenness, to experiencing my first blackout in less than a couple of hours.

All I know is that I was at the tennis courts trying to be crazier than Jason, and the next thing I know I'm in my basement with Tammy-Lou and my mom having somewhat of a normal conversation. Apparently we had rushed back to my house, making it just in time before she got home from work. She brought us some pizza and asked us why we had our coats on. We couldn't say, "Oh, because we just got back from binge drinking whiskey with some bad boys at the tennis court, and we didn't have time to take our coats off before you got here," so I said, "We're cold." Tammy-Lou chimed in, "Yeah, it's cold in here." And that was it. Mom was sort of like "Huh, okay" and walked away to get ready for bed. She didn't know we were drunk AND she gave us Do Drop pizza. DRUNKEN SUCCESS STORY!



Okay, it wasn't a total success. I woke up a few hours later and threw up Jim Beam, pizza, and all the happy feelings that I thought would last forever. I lay on the bathroom floor like they do in the movies, curled up in a very dramatic fetal position wondering what had happened the night before, knowing that a chunk of time was missing. Flashbacks of running around the tennis courts and talking to my mom flooded my mind and filled me with dread. I promised myself I would never, ever drink again.





## Chapter Two

My first real addiction was attention and validation, so from the age of 15 to 18 I was focused on being the fucking best! These years are a blur of academic and athletic accolades and I rarely drank. When I was writing about all of this stuff I got bored. Here's what I looked liked when I originally wrote this chapter.

no one is going to  
want to read this crap



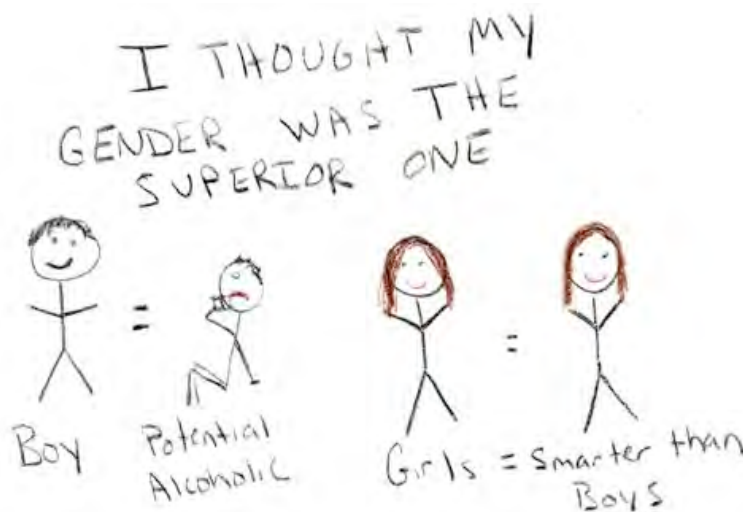
Honor Roll! Most Valuable Player! All-State! My bedroom wall was covered with awards. I'd look at them and daydream about the day I'd be someone really important.



Although I wasn't drinking during this phase of my life, it doesn't mean that I was free from alcoholism. I was surrounded by it and could not get away. I was like a pile of shit, and it was a fly. Let me see if I can draw that.



My dad was drinking, my stepdad Mark was drinking, my uncle Woody was drinking, and Grandpa Mac ended up dying of cirrhosis of the liver. Alcoholism was everywhere. It was the root of the dysfunction, but I never felt “too close” to it. It wasn’t an obvious problem in my life. I rarely saw my dad, I didn’t know my grandpa that well, and Mark and my uncle Woody were fun drunks. They came to life when they drank. They made jokes; they laughed and smiled more. It never occurred to me that it was genetic, and I was clueless that I was at risk of being an alcoholic. And I thought maybe drinking too much was a “guy” thing because all the women in my family were solid.



I never really registered how bad drinking was until the summer before my senior year. My cute little, five-year-old sister Rochelle was riding with her best friend Chelsea and her family when they were hit head-on by a drunk driver who was going the wrong way on a major highway. Rochelle’s best friend Chelsea died on the side of the road. She was six years old. Chelsea’s loving and kind dad was crushed by the steering wheel and died instantly. Jennifer, Chelsea’s older sister, made it out okay, and her mom, Linda, was stuck between the front and back seat and they had to use the jaws of life to remove her from the car—she survived. Lucky for the drunk driver, he died instantly. He escaped never knowing the horror he caused—the deaths, the pain, the broken bodies, and the broken hearts.



Rochelle was hanging on for dear life and was flown on a flight-for-life helicopter to the hospital. She was in a coma with a concussion, a broken neck, and a lacerated spleen. The entire family rushed to the hospital to be with her. My mom was in tough-love mode, she was like, "Don't cry in front of her! She needs us to be strong!" We weren't allowed to be sad in front of Rochelle. We were all either in shock, weeping in the waiting room, or trying to stay busy by taking care of each other. The entire town sent flowers and food and prayers.

I couldn't process any emotion. I think we were all going insane, pacing and waiting and wondering if she was going to make it. Thank God she woke up and recovered like a champion-warrior, superhero baby girl.



This accident shook our entire family to the core, and I vowed to never drink and drive. My senior year I was nominated for homecoming queen and my speech was about drinking and driving. I urged everyone to not do it, and I promised I wouldn't. I didn't win; a girl who joked about her dad's farts won.



Even though I wasn't homecoming queen and my sister almost died and the men in my family were drunks, I thought high school was a great experience. I was too wrapped up in my greatness to notice anything was wrong. I was on the honor roll all four years, racked up eleven varsity letters, a shit load of athletic awards, and a basketball scholarship. I worked my ass off and took all these accomplishments very seriously, and when it was time to finally graduate, I made the decision to drink as much alcohol as my body and mind would allow. I needed some relief. The pressure of being all I could be in high school really made me a high-strung asshole, and I needed a drink.



The night before graduation, my friend Bobby had a big party in the garage behind his house and it was so fun. There was a keg, random bottles of hard liquor, and weed everywhere. A bunch of football players, cowboys, cheerleaders, pot heads, and intellectuals were there. The best part about our senior class was the cliques clicked with each other, diversifying our parties. Cowboys would pour shots for the stoners; intellectuals told jokes to the jocks. It was such a fun loving group of kids, and the alcohol helped us love each other even more.

We are all one





I decided to drink beer that night because I thought maybe it wouldn't make me throw up like Jim Beam did. I kept track of how many beers I drank. I wrote tally marks on my hand and ran around showing everyone, "Look, I've had seven cups of beer!" I think I got up to around eleven or twelve cups before I passed out in Bobby's pickup truck. It was a comfortable place to sleep until Bobby started banging on the driver's side window the next morning yelling at me because I got mud all over his seat and he said I peed in his mom's greenhouse.



During the graduation ceremony, I was so hungover and panicky. I didn't like seeing the friends I was with the night before because we were sober and awkward. I didn't remember everything that had happened and that made me nervous. I thought peeing in the greenhouse was funny, but I wondered what else I did and was thankful I did not take a shit in the greenhouse. As nice and open-minded as my friends were, they would have no problem nicknaming me "Tozer the Fertilizer."

It's the weirdest feeling to know just hours ago you were drunk and laughing and dancing and now you are nervous and shaky. It sucked because this is the day we had all been waiting for, and I was dry heaving and hiding behind sunglasses. I couldn't believe how unexcited I was about the entire ceremony. I think I did a good job pretending to be happy, but I just wanted it to be over.



After breakfast and getting a bunch of hugs and congratulations from friends and family, I felt better. My spirits were lifted, and my 17 year-old body recovered from the hangover. When my friends said what I thought were encouraging words, “Oh my God, you were so fucked-up last night. It was hilarious!”, it made me happy. I forgot about those few hours of hell during the graduation ceremony and got excited about life again. High School was over! Holy shit! I was getting old!

I kept waiting to feel like an adult and wondered if I should I do my hair differently, read more books, or buy a purse. I didn’t change much, I just partied a little bit more. I didn’t drink often, but when I did, I drank A LOT. I remember one morning I woke up on the floor of my bedroom in a puddle of my pee.



When it came to drinking, I didn’t know how to do it “right.” I couldn’t just have a couple, but I thought that was normal. And since I was only drinking once in a while, I was fine. I wasn’t anything like my grandpa, my uncle, my dad, my stepdad, or that drunk driver who killed my sister’s friend. I was just a kid doing what kids do. And I wasn’t just any kid. I was special. I was a girl who did really well in high school and was going to college.



### Chapter Three

The basketball scholarship I got was to a Division II school in Durango, Colorado, so that's where I went. I did not have a good time. Within the first month, I was overeating, and since I hated puking, I'd take laxatives and shit a lot. Then I was like, "This is disgusting" and got my pseudo eating disorder under control. I just felt trapped and needed some form of mutilation or stimulation. I couldn't party and socialize because there was no time. All I had time for was basketball practice, class, homework, and sleep, and the rest of the time I was crying.

September 1995

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	B-ball CRY
CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	B-ball CRY
CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	B-ball CRY
CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	School B-ball CRY	B-ball CRY

We had a very intense conservative coach from the South who would yell, "MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RANCH," which meant, "You're slow and lazy and need to catch up." We were always in the gym lifting weights, so the freshman fifteen I gained was all muscle. I felt like I had lost control of my body because I didn't know what to do with my powerful muscles.



I couldn't quit basketball; I needed the scholarship money. I was like a basketball whore.



I lived in a dorm with the sweetest girl on the planet. I couldn't stand her, and I felt guilty about not liking her because she was so nice.



Thankfully, in the spring of my freshman year, an opportunity to move back home fell in my lap. The college in my hometown offered me a basketball scholarship! I could play basketball and go to school for free back home! I moved as soon as I was finished with the spring semester.





Adios, beautiful mountain town Durango. Hello, Pueblo, you sweet, little, lower-middle-class town in the foothills of Colorado. I was so happy. I loved Pueblo, and as much as my family drove me nuts, I missed them. I felt much more grounded being in that familiar environment, despite the fact that my mom had just divorced Mark because he drank too much and my biological father was on a downward mental illness and drinking spiral. It was okay. It felt normal, and I wanted to be there.



I didn't blame my mom for divorcing Mark. His boozin' was getting out of control, and he started drinking and driving. She couldn't believe that he would do that after his daughter had been seconds away from death at the hands of a drunk driver. My mom's life was riddled with alcoholism, and she didn't even drink! Her dad was an alcoholic, my dad was an alcoholic, and now Mark. She'd had it! She'd always say, "No more alcoholics!" She was very matter of fact about this divorce, no signs of sadness, no complaining about her situation—just a lot of action to move on.



My dad during this time—oh God, he just kept getting worse. I wasn't sure if he was drinking or if he had just lost his mind, but I couldn't be around him for more than an hour. He was full of negativity, and my stomach would fill up with acid when he was around. I blocked out all of this family crap. I had to focus on myself. I was moving back home. I had to switch schools and prepare for another year of college basketball. STRESSED!



That summer I found some relief working at the Do Drop as a waitress. It was such a fun place to work. My mom had moved the business to a bigger location, so it felt more like a restaurant than a bar, but people were always drinking there. Our customers were a good mix of families, young people, and your hard-core drunks. We'd occasionally have to ask people to leave or cut them off; that's how it was at every bar in town. People in Pueblo love to party, man.

I became good friends with another waitress there, Lisa. She was from Chicago. I loved that she was from out of town, and I loved the way she talked. She was super quick, had a funny Chicago accent, and told the best stories. Her timing with jokes was incredible, and no one had ever made me laugh so hard in my life.



One day she was like, "I want to go on a road trip to Crater Lake, Oregon." I said, "I'll go with you." A few weeks later we were on a cross-country road trip on our way to Crater Lake, Oregon, in my 1990 extended cab Nissan pickup truck. It was 1997, and we used a real map to find our way.

Me: How do we get to crater lake  
Lisa: we follow the blue line on the map  
Me: K



I was only nineteen but had a fake ID. Well, it was a real ID that I stole from a bitchy girl who forgot it at the Do Drop. I was her waitress, and she was so mean to me. After she paid her bill, I noticed she left her driver's license on the table. I could have easily ran and given it to her as she walked out to the parking lot, but I picked it up and looked at it. "Hmmm, brown hair, brown eyes, twenty-three years old. I could use this!" I put it in my pocket. Since she was such an asshole, I didn't feel guilty about stealing it. I tried it out at a bar, and I was sort of offended when it worked because I thought she was ugly.



But thank God for that ugly girl ID, because I needed it to party on our road trip. We drove through Salt Lake City up to Oregon, doing bong hits and laughing our asses off the entire way.

Crater Lake was incredible; it's a volcano that collapsed and filled up with rain. It had the bluest water I had ever seen, and it was only 30 degrees. Some boys were cliff jumping into it, and Lisa and I decided that we should do that too. When I hit the water, I went under a few feet, then popped back up with my mouth open and screaming so loud. It was one of the moments I knew I'd always remember. It was terrifying and exhilarating, and I was just so damn happy to be alive. Euphoria took over, and I made a mental note to take more risks in the future. Jumping in Crater Lake sparked my first moment of clarity, and I wanted to hold on to that feeling. I assumed that, in order to feel euphoric, I was going to have to keep doing crazy things that scared me.



We drove down the Pacific Coast to San Francisco and stayed with one of Lisa's friends who was a scientist with a real fancy job. The scientist friend had an eccentric neighbor who invited us over. She told us about an S&M club and said we should go. She even gave us sexy, black leather outfits to borrow. Lisa wore a skimpy shirt that landed around her upper thighs so it was good enough to double as a short skirt, and I had on thigh-high, black leather boots and a black leather top that was too big for me.



The S&M club was insane. There were people dry humping everywhere and hanging off contraptions from the ceiling, and there was a soft-core-porn sex show happening on a big stage. One guy onstage poured water down his back. Then a lady touched his lower back with an electrical stun-gun thing, and blue shock waves traveled up the streams of water on his body. Lisa and I were like "Holy shit," and then we started pounding alcohol.





We tried to fit in, but it was pretty obvious we were white trash. These people were full of culture and sophistication and lots of experiences with hot sex. Lisa and I danced around, tried to meet people, and got real fuckin' sloshed. We drank Long Island Iced Teas because those have a lot of booze in it. There's not even any tea in them at all!



I loved the manufactured feeling alcohol gave me. It gave me bad ideas that I thought were 100 percent great, and the confidence to take action on them. It turned me into the same superhero I was at the tennis courts that night with Tammy-Lou. I loved myself and I didn't give a shit about what anyone thought. The feeling of not caring is what I loved the most. Alcohol shut down the negative voices in my head and replaced them with a twisted, positive voice that said, "You're amazing. Do something crazy, everyone will love it."

So, in this mindset, after the sex show I hopped up on that stage. There was a bar that ran across part of the stage that was about 8 feet above the ground. I jumped up and grabbed it and started

doing pull-ups. I wanted to show off my ripped arms. As I was doing pull-ups, a guy walked by and I wrapped my legs around his head and would not let go. I thought I was being sexually aggressive, but he hated it and tried to break free from my tight thigh grip. His face was in my crotch, and I just kept squeezing his head so hard. Lisa was on the ground laughing, and I felt like I did at Crater Lake, so happy to be alive even though it was at the expense of some stranger's neck.



That trip changed my life. It made me want to explore the world. It inspired me to be more artsy and less jockey, and I also began to think that partying was a very, very good thing. I wanted to do it more. It was SO FUN. But I still had three years left of college basketball. UGH. I was hoping basketball at this new school would be better than it was in Durango. I pulled it together just in time for my sophomore year. I decided to major in business because I love thinking about different ways to make money.



Basketball was not better at this school. Of course the coaches turned out to be overbearing whack-attacks with Charlie Manson eyes. I came to the conclusion that college coaches never really reached their true athletic potential, and, therefore, project the success they wish they had on others, forcing them to be great at any cost.



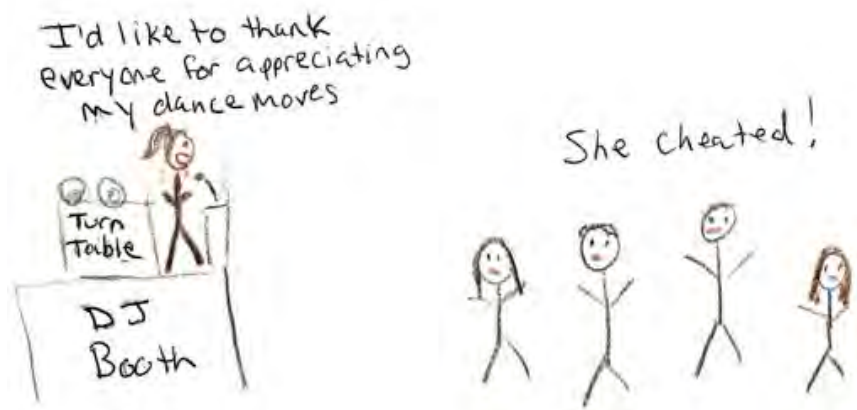
The upside was I loved my teammates. We would party during school breaks and over the summer. I was pretty good about not drinking too much during the season, but when I did drink I drank like an obese pig. It was weird, even when I tried to have just a couple, I couldn't. If I had one, I had to have many—just like Mark and Uncle Woody and the guys at the Do Drop. I thought maybe when you drank you're supposed to drink a lot. I developed a mindset that told me the main purpose of drinking was to get FUCKED-UP. The only reason alcohol was invented was to lose your mind, make bad choices, and then have an easy way to justify your behavior.

I invented this so people  
can lose their Goddamned minds



One time, the entire team went dancing at the only club in town called Peppers. Thursday night was college night, and if you were eighteen you could get in. We drank Mad Dog in the parking lot, and once we were in the club, our main goal was to find older boys to buy us alcohol. I got so fucking wasted that night, and it felt incredible.

There was a dance contest, and I said, "Aw shit. It's on." It was one of those contests where you dance and show off your moves. A judge walks around and if he or she taps you on the shoulder, it means you're out. Well, some guy came around and tapped me on the shoulder and told me I was out. I thought, "Yeah, right." I ran off the dance floor and put on my friend's sweater and put my hair in a ponytail so I looked like a different person and went back out there and ended up winning! I went up to the DJ booth and gave a speech, even though that wasn't what you were supposed to do.



It was amazing, and I thought I was very special. Then we all went back to this girl Tina's apartment to crash. She was a shooting guard, and had the cutest nose ever. I was sleeping in her bed and had a dream about urinating in the Colorado Rockies. I woke up and walked to the corner of her bedroom, pulled down my pants, and peed in the corner. I thought I was in the mountains peeing like a pioneer. Tina was in the room on the phone with her boyfriend giving him a play by play of what was happening. I went back to bed like nothing happened.

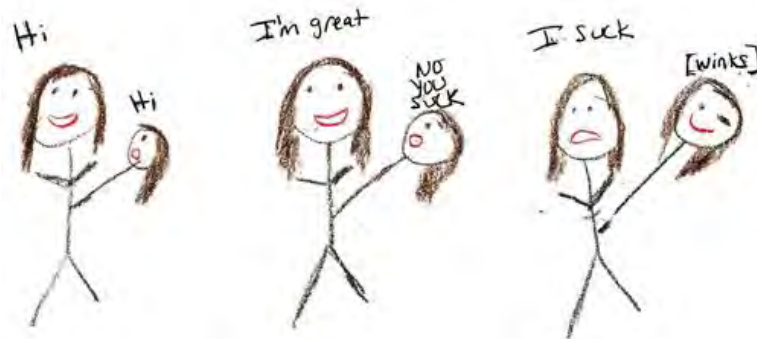


Since Tina's boyfriend was a player on the boys' basketball team and had a big mouth; my nickname quickly became "squat." Everyone in the basketball community knew what I had done, and it was actually sort of funny because everyone got a kick out of my pee story. I wasn't that embarrassed, I sort of liked the attention. It was funny! I was such a funny girl! Partying so hard and peeing everywhere was endearing!





I just realized this is the third pee story I've told. Don't worry, there are more. Anyways, I had these short benders of pure drunken fun, but managed to keep my drinking under control. I spent the majority of my college years working hard at school and working even harder trying to keep my shit together. I felt like I was burning up on the inside, like I was going to explode. It was like there was another person living inside of me, that didn't want what I had. Something that made me feel like I wasn't enough.



During my junior year, I ended up quitting basketball. I had to. I was done. The money was not worth it anymore. I just wanted to go to school, do some traveling, and figure out what I was going to do after college. It felt so weird walking away from something I used to care so much about, but it was a huge relief. I had no idea how good quitting could feel.



My senior year, I moved in with my grandma Babe and made school a priority, but I also started partying more than I ever had before. My drinking went from every few months to every weekend. Then, I started showing up drunk to night classes and one time a professor busted me. He pulled me outside into the hallway and told me that he knew I was drunk. He said he could smell it. I said, "Oh, I worked at my mom's restaurant today, and a customer spilled a beer on me." He looked at me sideways and let me go back to class. The thing about lying when you're drunk is, you believe the lie. Your denial is incredible. The second I came up with that lie I felt like he was an idiot for even questioning me. And you know how I got to class? I drove drunk. Yep, little miss "don't drink and drive because my sister almost died" was driving drunk to school.





Deep down I knew I was fucked-up for drinking and driving, but the excuses I came up with were so good I'd talk myself out of feeling bad about it. I became a master at this. Anytime I did something crazy when I was drunk, I was able to convince myself that it was okay. And no matter how obvious my occasional insanity was, I truly felt like I was fine. Sure, I liked to party, but when I was at home with my grandma, my life was really quiet, calm, and peaceful.

I was working and going to school and ended up graduating with a BSBA in Business Administration. I didn't even know what that meant. I was like, "Um. Okay. Guess I'm a businesswoman now. Location. Location. Location"—that's the only thing I remembered about marketing class.

I had been listening to Tony Robbins's *Personal Power* CDs and convinced myself that I should move to New York City. I was going to do it. I told Lisa, my family, and all of my coworkers at the Do Drop. I'm not sure if they believed me or not. I didn't care. I was moving there by myself because I was in a blackout of positive thinking.



## Chapter Four

I had been to NYC once, for a few days with my friend Danielle, a hilarious girl who worked at the Do Drop. She was always like, “Oh my God! What the fuck?” over everything, even if ice melted or something obvious and normal happened. She’d be so animated about it. She was the perfect friend to go to New York with, because both of us were always screaming DID YOU SEE THAT and THAT GUY WAS SUCH A WEIRDO and ARE WE GONNA DIE? Just like San Francisco, there was something about this city that made me feel like I didn’t know anything about life. I wanted to know more about everything—art, food, culture, sex—and I wanted to know how to get a big-city attitude.

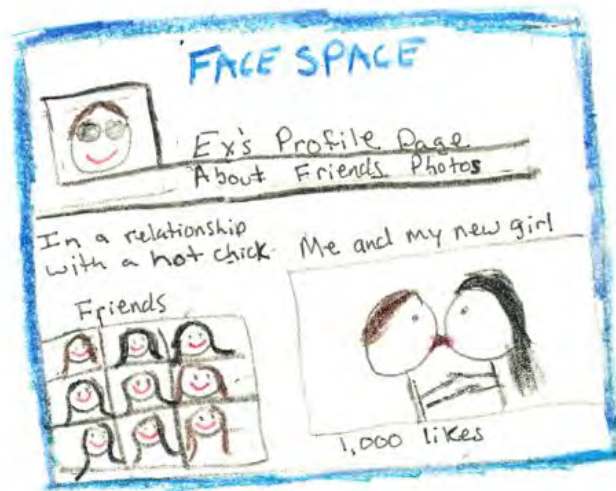
Danielle and I only spent a few days there, we didn’t even take the subway because it was too overwhelming for us, but getting wasted and hanging out with strangers felt safe. I made out with an Italian boy in the back of a cab and then never talked to him again. Then Danielle and I went Rollerblading in Central Park. We met a nice Indian man at a bar, and he let us stay at his apartment in Midtown for free. He didn’t even do anything perverted, and I took his kindness as a sign to move there.



When I was planning my move, I didn’t have many options. My plan was to save up money over the summer, buy a one-way ticket, and go. I kept listening to Tony and writing “I will find an apartment and a job in New York and live my dreams.” I had to keep telling myself why I was doing this, otherwise I’d chicken out.

I had to organize the reasons in my head, and it basically came down to understanding that if I stayed in Pueblo I’d have limited options. I’d most likely end up working for my mom at the Do Drop, which offered a lot of security. But I didn’t want security, I wanted opportunities and adventures. I worked for my mom for a few years; I was over it. I didn’t want to stay and work there and look back on my youth and wonder what else I could have done. I wanted to maybe be an actress or a successful businesswoman or get famous because famous people are loved and have great skin and swimming pools. I needed a big city, but first I was going to have to save up some money and party my fucking ass off with my friends in Pueblo.

Lisa and I knew this was going to be our last summer together and decided to do something crazy. We needed one last life-changing journey and decided to drive from Pueblo to Key West because it was only 2,200 miles away. I hope you're not like, "OH NO, NOT ANOTHER ROAD-TRIP STORY."



This road trip could not be any more different from the Crater Lake and S&M club trip. Lisa and I were older, smarter, college graduates with big plans for our future, so our partying was a celebration of life and when we smoked pot it was like a religious experience. And we almost died once and were always one step away from being thrown in jail. You might begin to ask yourself, is this book a thriller or a memoir?



I'll never forget the day we left for this trip. It was May 3, 1999, and we were hauling ass east in my good ol' pickup truck, the same truck that got us to Crater Lake and San Fran. We drove all day long, and just as the sun was setting, we crossed the border of Oklahoma and thought it was a good time to start smoking the killer weed Adam had given us.

We were tokin', smokin', and laughin', and I felt so free and was thinking about the future. I thought about how great my life was going to be. I loved smoking pot in the right environment. Sometimes it made me paranoid, but sometimes it made me feel like I was one with life. We were driving fast and listening to Will Smith's *Willennium* album, and we got mad at him. We said, "He needs to get

over himself. Who names an entire millennium after themselves?" We were judging his attitude and acting out conversations we would have with him.



All of a sudden, it got windy. Like, really, really windy. It felt like the hand of an angry god was pushing my truck off the road, and I didn't even believe in any gods. I was scared, but I just thought I was paranoid because I was so stoned. Lisa was like, "Dude. You are holding on to that steering wheel so tight. Your arms are bulging out." I said, "It's fucking windy out there!" The sky turned black and lightning storms started to dance in the sky.

Just as we hit Oklahoma City, we saw trash and debris everywhere. We just thought the town was dirty, but then emergency vehicles flew past us, ambulances, cop cars, security vehicles, and we could not figure out what was going on. In our stoned state of mind Lisa said, "I think something serious happened" and I said, "Yeah, maybe we should turn on the radio." We turned off Will Smith and turned on local stations with DJs screaming, "This is the biggest tornado storm we've had in over 60 years. An F4 just ripped through Oklahoma City, and there are many more in the surrounding areas. Take cover." I thought about how high we were and how we didn't even know we were driving straight into a tornado storm. My brother always had the best weed.



We spent the next few hours hovered in a shower stall at a truck stop taking cover with strangers and a little boy who threw up everywhere. I noticed he had eaten cereal and thought his parents were either cool for letting him have cereal for dinner, or neglectful because he hadn't eaten since breakfast time. We were just sitting there waiting for a tornado to hit us. It didn't. It missed us by a half mile, and we all survived. Lisa and I called our moms to tell them what happened. They said they had been talking to each other and wondering if we were alive because they had been watching the news. We were fine, just exhausted and in shock.

We weren't able to laugh about it until we got to Florida. My aunt Pam lived in Orlando, so we stopped and stayed with her for a few days. We were so smelly and disgusting, and she washed our clothes. My uncle Jim helped us fix our truck window that broke during the tornado. My cousins Shannon and Kim thought we were crazy, but I think they liked listening to our stories.



They were real clean and proper, so we made sure to get stoned in the upstairs bathroom so no one would know. We blew the smoke into the toilet and flushed it. One night, we got stoned and were standing at the top of the stairs, getting ready to go down to the kitchen to get a snack. My aunt's house was spotless. The carpet was soft and smooth, and my feet slipped out from under me like a cartoon character who just stepped on a banana peel. My feet were air-borne and my body turned stiff. I was completely straight with my hands down by my sides. I flew down the stairs like a bobsled and popped back up at the bottom. Lisa was at the top of the stairs, losing her mind in a fit of giggles. I was in physical pain from laughing so hard. I loved that moment so much because the stakes were just as high as we were. If my aunt busted us getting stoned in her house, she might tell my mom and I'd get in trouble. I felt so edgy.





The next night, we went to Pleasure Island, a strip of bars and nightclubs in Downtown Disney, a place where people could party at Disney World. My cousin Kim came with us, she was super straight-laced and was afraid of sinning. We inspired her to sin and encouraged her to get wasted.

We ended up at a dance club, and a girl started dancing with me. She was rubbing up on me all sexy, and I went with it. I thought it was funny. We were grinding like stupid, drunk white girls do, and a big bro-type guy tapped me on the shoulder and said, "That's my girlfriend, you dyke." I was so mad. I was like, "Well, maybe you're not giving her what she needs" and then he pushed me! Then he pushed his girlfriend! Lisa took a swing at him and missed. It was like a scene from an eighties movie where sweaty, skinny white boys with cigarettes dangling from their mouths get into a bar fight, then run away when the cops get there.

The doorman broke up the fight, and we all got kicked out. Kim was having a panic attack, and we had to call my aunt Pam to come and pick us up. We didn't want to leave without making it a true, hard parting experience, so while we were waiting for her to come and get us, Lisa and I peed in the parking lot.



Lisa and I were just your typical party girls—drinking, clubbing, getting in fights with dumb men. But being around my conservative family, made it seem as if we were on our way to hell, and if they weren't careful we'd bring them with us. When you're a drunk surrounded by other drunks, you're normal. When you're a drunk surround by conservatives, you're nothin' but trouble.

I liked that they thought we were nuts and out of control. I loved that we got in trouble and that we were drunk and stoned all of the time. Maybe it was because I was still blowing off steam from taking sports and school so seriously, but my appetite for partying was getting bigger. I loved it. Drinking was becoming a part of my identity, and I had completely let go of my college-athlete persona.



Lisa and I continued on our journey, toward the Florida Keys. We stopped in Key Largo and met a guy in a hotel lobby and ended up sharing a room with him to save money. We weren't scared; he seemed normal and nice. He was there for a bartending convention and told us we should go. We did. It was like an MTV beach party but with uglier people. There were a lot of liquor distributors there, giving away free booze on the beach. We told them that we were bartenders in Colorado at the Do Drop Inn and got unlimited free booze. We drank that free alcohol like a marathon runner would drink water after crossing the finish line in the Sahara. I made out with an older man with halitosis, and Lisa stripped down to her to her underwear and jumped in the ocean.



I don't remember what else happened, but I do remember Lisa drunk driving us back to our hotel and we got lost. We were in a really deep conversation, you know those conversations you get into when you're drunk and stoned and you're talking about the meaning of life and you figure it out together. We finally found our hotel and the stranger we shared the room with didn't even murder us. We were so lucky.

On our way back to Colorado, we were exhausted but managed to stop in New Orleans and Austin and got very fucking drunk in both cities. When we made it back to Pueblo, we told everyone our crazy stories and got on with our lives. Lisa had a boyfriend and they were getting serious, and I was obsessed with my move to New York. I was working at the Do Drop during the day and bartending at a dance club in Pueblo West at night. I wanted to save up at least five thousand dollars for the big move. I saved money by living with Grandma Babe and eating for free at the Do Drop. I'd stash all of my tips in a big bucket in my bedroom.

When I wasn't working or drinking, I was at the school library using the Internet. I'd research New York City and try to find an apartment. There weren't that many websites for apartment rentals back in 1999. It seemed like it was going to be impossible, but I met one guy online that seemed nice and normal. His name was Jeff. He was renting a room in Queens. He had to rent it out right away, so he gave the room to someone else. But we began a friendly e-mail relationship and planned to meet up when I got to New York.

## To Do List

- ☒ Get drunk in New Orleans
- ☒ Get drunk in Austin
- ☒ Sleep at Grandma Babe's
- ☒ Work at Do Drop + Dance Club
- ☒ Email Strangers on the Internet
- ☐ Save \$5,000
- ☒ Become very delusional

It was weird talking to my family and friends about moving. I don't think they could comprehend or understand why I was doing it. A few people were like, "Pssshhh. You're moving to New York? Yeah right" or "You'll only last a day out there." Some people were supportive and said stuff like, "Good for you. You only live once."

I loved talking to my aunt Sabrina because she was positive and encouraging and she said she worried that I was going by myself, but to go for it. She'd say, "Live your dreams, girl!" I also loved talking to Hoss, the manager of the Do Drop. He had worked for my mom ever since I could remember and had become like a pseudo-father figure. He truly cared about me and my siblings. He'd

offer guidance and support, and my family loved him. He was from Iran and couldn't go back there because they would kill him. He had an accent that made whatever he said sort of funny, especially when he messed up catch phrases or tried to speak in American slang.

We'd sit down and have heart to hearts, and sometimes I'd cry when I talked to him. I don't know why. I think maybe because I didn't have a lot of "big picture" conversations with anyone (besides Lisa when we were wasted). When I talked to Hoss about leaving my family and trying new things, I would weep because he was so sweet about it. He said he believed in me, and I could always go back to Do Drop if I wanted.



I drank like a pig all summer. I started fantasizing about drinking during the day because it made me feel good just knowing that I'd be buzzed soon. Simply thinking about getting drunk was very comforting to me. Partying was slowly becoming one of my main priorities, and I'd seek out ways to drink, even sneaky ways. Sometimes I'd slip some vodka in my soda at work or have drinks BEFORE I went out drinking. When I was sneaky about it, I knew it was a little "off," but being drunk made me feel so incredible, I didn't care. And everyone I knew drank a lot, so I fit in. I was just like everyone else.

The people who worked at the Do Drop were my favorite party pals, there is nothing like getting tanked after a long and busy waitressing shift. Danielle, Lisa, a few other waitresses, and some of the cooks would meet at Eiler's, a dive bar down the street from Do Drop. Lisa and I would dance on the bar and take off our bras and smack the bartender in the face with them. I would drink Colorado Bulldogs; they're White Russians with a splash of Coke. They tasted like tiny little milk shakes. I loved how hyper and confident I would get after I had five of them.



Occasionally, I'd party with my family. My aunt Jacque and uncle Bob were a blast to drink with; both of them were very funny. Jacque would tell a joke, and Bob would have a tagline for it, and then they'd both crack up at themselves. One time, they had a huge party at their house. Lisa and I showed up like we were doing everyone a favor for being there. My aunt Sabrina and uncle Sam brought over some moonshine and everyone got plastered. People were literally howling at the moon.

Lisa and I kept playing "Wannabe" by the Spice Girls over and over. Bob hated that song and said he was going to either shoot us or shoot himself because he hated that song. We were like, "Shoot yourself!", and then we'd play the song again. Then Jacque made us turn it off because she said Bob was seriously going to shoot us. We said okay because he had guns in the basement.

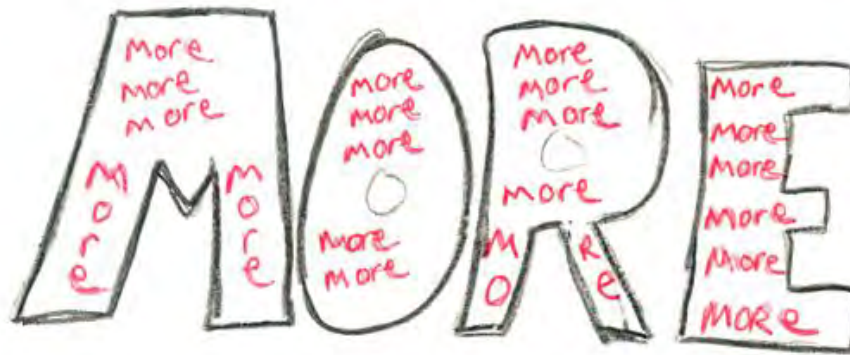
Then we found other ways to be obnoxious. The salsa dip plate was shaped like a sombrero. Lisa put it on her head, and it fell off and salsa spilled everywhere. I loved the nonsense. I loved laughing at something I would normally be worried about.



To be unapologetic and full of confidence felt incredible. It was like a spiritual experience. I spent so much time worrying about everything and trying to get people to like me. Not caring about anything made me feel like I was connected to some all-knowing being that made whatever choice I made feel like the right one. Alcohol had a powerful effect over me, and I was completely unaware of how much I needed it.

I'd drink with whoever would drink with me, even my mom. She didn't drink much, but her crew of fun-lovin', happy-hour-goin', middle-aged lady friends would throw 'em back a couple nights a week, and I'd meet up with them and let them buy me drinks. I liked drinking with older people because their conversations were different than the ones I had with my friends. They talked about mortgages and ex-husbands and if they said something a little edgy, they'd laugh real loud about it. I'd have a few with them, then go have a few more at another bar with friends, then after the bar closed we'd go to someone's house and drink more. It was the perfect party schedule. All I knew, or I guess didn't know this, or pay attention to it: if I had one, I had to have a lot. The second I got that warm fuzzy confident feeling, I craved more, and after I was already drunk and wobbly, I still craved more.





I don't think I spent much time with Autumn and Rochelle that summer. Autumn was a teenager, and Rochelle was in middle school, too young to party. Sorry, little sisters! I should have been taking them to the movies or to the mall or something cool big sisters do, but I didn't because I only gravitated toward people and situations that involved alcohol.

That's why I loved hanging with Adam and his crew. They were a bit older than me and always gave me booze and pot and taught me that watching the Animal channel when you're high is one of the funniest things you'll ever experience, because when turtles have sex they grunt like porn stars. Since I was open to experimenting with different ways to get high, I was thrilled when one of Adam's friends offered me mushrooms, which I discovered, enhanced whatever mood I was in to the millionth degree. One time I took them and I could not stop crying; the other time I took them I could not stop dancing.



Every time I drank or did a drug, I could not believe how much it changed me. For the most part, I would just turn into this version of a person that I wanted to be—wild, fun, crazy, funny, confident, and sexy. I was probably just obnoxious, but in my mind, I was the best. I began to not like the person I was when I was sober. When I was sober, I was sort of serious and cranky. I knew that if I just had a few drinks in me, I'd be more likable, or more importantly I'd FEEL more likable.

I don't remember what else happened that summer. I just remember working a lot, drinking a lot, and living with my sweet grandma Babe. She was hilarious and very nice to everyone, and I loved that she didn't tell me what to do or try to control me. She was always asking me questions about my life and telling me to take off my pants so she could wash them. Whenever she saw me drunk, all she'd do is wave her finger at me and shake her head like, "That stuff is bad news, kid." She had lost her husband to alcoholism, and her son (Uncle Woody) was following in his footsteps.



The summer was coming to an end. I bought a one-way ticket to NYC, put my notice in at the Do Drop and the dance club, and figured out what stuff to put in my two suitcases. I saved up six thousand dollars and thought I was so rich. I gave my grandma a care package and thanked her for letting me stay with her all summer. It had a book, some money, a white sweatshirt with an illustration of a teddy bear holding a balloon, and some chocolate. My family and friends threw a surprise going-away party for me at Eiler's, and I felt very, very loved and supported. We all drank like sailors on a sinking ship. After the bar closed down, a few of us ended up driving out to the Pueblo reservoir and sat by the lake and stared at the stars. I was ready to go.



OKAY, ARE YOU READY? HERE COMES MY BIG MOVE TO NEW YORK. IT WAS MY FIRST STEP TOWARD ROCK BOTTOM. IT WAS LIKE ONE OF THOSE STEPS YOU TAKE RIGHT INTO A PILE OF DOG SHIT, BUT YOU DON'T REALIZE IT UNTIL YOU GET HOME.

