



Interviewee: **Vanessa Robinson**

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Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg & Tony Buba**

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Voices of Our Region  
Vanessa Robinson

Vanessa: Vanessa Robinson. I was born at Monsour in Jeannette. My biological dad had left me and my mom when I was three so it was me and her. We moved a lot when I was a child. Ever since I was baby up until I was about I'd say eight years old we constantly moved. It was really hard not really knowing my biological dad. He was an alcoholic and I had seen him on and off throughout my whole life but nothing really consistent.

Interviewer: So did you go to Larimer... Is it Larimer School?

Vanessa: It was Norwin School District. It's actually weird because when it was just me and my mom when I was a child we did live in Salem Acres in Greensburg and when I was a child I really did like it there. I live in Greensburg now through a group home, Threshold, and I always told my mom that I was going back to Greensburg. So I did not really favor living in Larimer. I ran into a lot of problems. I decided to go down the wrong path to pick up drugs and alcohol. Ever since... It started when I was 15 and then it kept going until I was 22. When I was 22 I decided to get clean and sober and I've been clean and sober for two years now. I always had an issue with wanting people to accept me and to fit in. It was my choice. I don't blame anybody for it. I just, I mean once it got introduced to me that was just the way I wanted to live my life. Like I chose to live that kind of lifestyle. I really wasn't peer pressured. When I first did try cocaine - uppers were my drug of choice - I never tried it before and the guy looks at me and says, "You've done this before right?" I lied and said yeah because I wanted to fit in. This is when I got put into Adelphoi Village Day Treatment my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. That's when I got into drugs, started getting into drugs. Adelphoi Village is, I don't really know how to describe it. I think the best I can is it's schooling for kids with behavioral problems in school. I actually didn't go back to normal high school until my 11<sup>th</sup> grade year. My 10<sup>th</sup> grade year I had tried to go back, you know, leaving from Adelphoi and I got too overwhelmed with the people. So I did an after school program that's called VIP. So I went in after and that's how I got through 10<sup>th</sup> grade. You know, I had my reputation from being in Adelphoi and everything. There were some people that, some just didn't get along with me and others thought it was the coolest thing in the world. I mean I had a hard time in school with my peers. A lot of bullying went on with me. I actually failed 8<sup>th</sup> grade and I dropped myself out of a certain middle school because I was being bullied too much. So I transferred to a different middle school and that's when I started bullying. But when I went to Adelphoi and I got back and I was in high school I was actually the bully to an extent. I had friends that were made fun of and everything. They weren't popular. When I was 17 I did have a desire to not to want to drink and use drugs anymore but I thought I could do it on my own without a support system. I never really knew too much about services or support systems because my mother when I was child I did have some issues and she didn't think there was anything wrong with me so I was kind of pushed away from knowing about services and support groups and things like that.

Interviewer: Like depression? That kind of issues or...?

Vanessa: Bipolar. You know, I have been institutionalized. I had been misdiagnosed and I was on many medications that I shouldn't have been on. So at the end of my graduation at my party and at the end of the year I wound up in the hospital. Before I was misdiagnosed I did admit myself into the hospital because I was having trouble. So actually I went in two times that year. I did lose a lot of my friends because of some things I did that they didn't really understand. That was back in 2004. My 12<sup>th</sup> grade year, I decided I wanted to have a child. So I had gotten pregnant and I did drop out. I want to say I've also, you know, been kicked out of my house, my parent's house. I've been homeless, not necessarily eating out of garbage cans or whatnot but just like I just needed a place to stay, a place to stay every night. But when I got pregnant I got kicked out of my parent's house. That was really hard, you know? So I quit my job, I dropped out of school. During that year I did try to get me GED. I found that getting my GED was kind of complicated for me, so I did go back to high school although I was two years behind and I graduated with high honors for the first time. I never made honor roll. And actually before that, too, I went in for postpartum psychosis after he was born. And not depression but the psychosis; it's more intense than the depression. I think a lot of people are not really knowledgeable about postpartum psychosis. It seems like it doesn't get talked about a lot.

Interviewer: Could you explain the difference? Because actually, I couldn't regurgitate a definition...

Vanessa: The depression is just baby blues or the woman crying a lot and maybe isolating. Psychosis is delusions, hallucinations. A lot of people think that women with postpartum psychosis are going to hurt their kids which that has happened but for me personally I just had a lot of delusional thoughts that I thought was really going on and it wasn't. I'm also a recovering cutter. I haven't cut in three years. That was... that played a really big part of my life. I actually tried start in a support group for that and it was effective for a little bit but it kind of didn't follow through too much. I still, I have a really big passion for people who self-mutilate. It's like a really big passion inside of me to help them. Because it's I believe can be misunderstood sometimes. I did a lot of reading about it when I first recovered from it. But today with my drug and alcohol and my cutting, like everything I went through is used for good. I got a job as a Peer Support for Family Services which is mentoring teenagers with D and A and mental illness. So I really understand. So everything I went through I don't regret it.

Interviewer: So what's been the hardest part for you?

Vanessa: The hardest part was having to leave my son. He doesn't understand why I don't live at home. That's really hard for me.

Interviewer: Does your mom have him or where... ?

Vanessa: Yes. I visit him on the weekends. It's not court ordered. I just want to because that's my child.

Interviewer: So on the flip side, what's your proudest accomplishment?

Vanessa: Recovery from drugs and alcohol. Because if I wouldn't have gotten clean and sober I would not be where I am today. There's no way. My faith in my higher power was convincing me that I needed to stop and I would not have a future if I didn't. I hit four rock bottoms. My very last rock bottom was really scary. I was seeing a guy that was very alcoholic and he was addicted to crack. That was the first guy, one of my boyfriends that he laid his hands upon me and that was scary, I've had numerous suicide attempts but the very last one I didn't even remember that I OD'd on pills until like two days later. That was scary not knowing, not remembering. You have to have a desire and a wanting to want to stop the actions you're doing such as drugs or self-mutilation. There is always hope down the road. You've just got to take the first step. I want everyone to know that if they relate to me I like them to know they're not alone. And it's a process. You're not going to recover overnight. And this is just the beginning. My life is just beginning and I am excited about everything that's going to happen. I want to go for medical assisting in college but what I really want to do, I'm a writer. I want to write books. I do want to get into the music business. I would like to open up some studios and I have a passion for dance. I am truly a believer in that I am not my mental illness and I'm just me.