

Kasey and the Troubled Teen

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Kimberly: I take great pride in my little sisters. It's borderline maternal. I also have this admiration for them that one might feel for a cool older sibling. It's a strange mixture. This holds especially true for my sister Kasey. I think it's because she's been through more than I could ever fully grasp. She's everything: bold, kind, adventurous, tough, unapologetically herself against all odds.

She's always had an air about her, even as a child. She had an old soul even then. She was just Kasey.

Kasey: I was a tomboy, daddy's girl. I rode horses. I went hunting and fishing a lot. I was a cool kid. Yeah, I had a lot of fun.

Kimberly: Kasey the equestrian—she started riding horses at five years old. She was a natural. Our tough rancher aunt said so, so you know it's true. Kasey the artistK— she could draw a pretty anatomically proportionate horse, solidifying her status as a horse girl. Kasey the lizard wrangler, Kasey the monkey bar master, Kasey the problem child, Kasey the downcast girl, Kasey the troubled teen.

In 2013, I graduated from high school. I finally had the freedom I'd wanted. Kasey was about to be stripped of hers.

Newsreader: New tonight, we have response from the Shasta County School, advertised as a Christian school for troubled youth that's once again the center of controversy, now facing consequences from the state.

Kimberly: She was sent to Riverview Christian Academy, a residential youth treatment facility for troubled teens hours away from home. We hardly got to see or talk to her. She lived there for over three years. It was meant to help her. We found out it was doing anything but.

Newsreader 2: And a new report from Buzzfeed says, the California Department of Social Services has received several complaints in the past decade about Riverview.

Newsreader: They said Staff restricted students' communication with parents, took kids off of antidepressants cold turkey, prohibited girls from speaking for days or even weeks at a time, and failed to report allegations of abuse.

Kimberly: I didn't know it then, but Riverview was one of thousands of under-regulated youth treatment facilities that make up the troubled teen industry.

My sister and I had shared so much of our lives together, but this was a place I couldn't follow her. I didn't like that. So a little while ago, I called her up. I wanted to understand the time she'd lost and that I'd lost with her.

Kasey: I was tricked into going. I felt really scared and helpless and defeated. I was just confused.

Kimberly: What would you find yourself thinking about while you were there?

Kasey: Um, I would just think about doing normal kid stuff. Even just going out to eat. I wanted to hang out with my friends. I was curious what high school was like.

There was certain points of the program where I just every day would daydream about dad walking in and taking me out. I would go crazy, like, I just wanted to leave so bad. I would plan escape plans in my head all the time. Like, how could I get out of here? What will I do? How can I survive getting out of here?

Because you know, like, I was a kid. I didn't have any money. I didn't...there's no way for me to get around. I like thought about maybe being homeless, but then I'd be like, then I was like, you know, that doesn't really sound fun. So I guess I'll just tough it out.

Kimberly: Kasey always did tough it out. When she should have been dreaming about what to wear for her first homecoming dance, or thinking about her next barrel race, she was facing something unimaginably cruel Instead.

What kind of treatment did you and your peers face?

Kasey: There was a lot of bullying going on. The staff would always ask me, what are your dreams? What do you wanna be when you grow up? And since I

was young, I would always say like, I wanna be a model. And they laughed at me. They, they all cracked up and they're like, how are you gonna be a model when you're fat?

They would just always shoot that down for me and they would tell me that when you get out of here, you're probably gonna be a loser and a drug addict by the way you act. And it made me feel just really confused and I kind of started to believe it. And I struggled with my confidence and I just didn't really know what I was gonna be, and I still struggle with that to this day.

Kimberly: This was hard for me to hear because I'd always known my sister as someone irrepressible. Tough. But even through all that, she didn't lose that intrinsic self-confidence. Somehow it all just became fuel for that confidence.

How do you feel about telling this story, and do you feel like you've been able to leave it behind?

Kasey: You know, it's still with me. It used to be something that I thought about every day, you know, and it would really just have me [00:06:00] thinking like ... Did this ruin my life? And I feel like I'm at the point where I know that, okay, it didn't ruin my life. I'm okay. You know, I had nightmares every single night about it for years, and I still have nightmares about it to this day, but it's not as often.

The nightmares are always: me getting sent there and me trying to figure out how do I get away? How do I get off of this mountain? I hope that someday I could fully heal from that, but I think it might just be kind of stuck with me and it happened and I feel like I am who I am today because of it, and I don't really know if I would change it.

At this point, like I don't really think like that. My life isn't the best, but it's not the worst, and I feel like I like who I am, you know? And I kind of like where I'm at. So that is what it is.

Kimberly: I like who you are.

Kasey: Thank you.

Kimberly: Upon first meeting Kasey, she may seem a little shy, serious even. But it doesn't take long for her to crack and reveal this sweet, fun-loving goofball.

She's the brightest light. I asked her what she wanted in life.

Kasey: I don't know exactly what I want, but I know that I just want to live peacefully and fruitfully. I definitely like want to be surrounded by animals. I wanna make enough money that I could live on a ranch and possibly have like an animal rescue.

I feel like that would make me happy and I like to have [00:08:00] fun, so money's a big part too, of what I want.

Kimberly: Mm-hmm.

Kasey: I'm not quite sure how I'm gonna get it, but I'll figure it out.

Kimberly: You always do.

Kasey: Yeah.

Kimberly: What's something that you love about yourself?

Kasey: My resilience.

Kimberly: Mm-hmm.

Kasey: You know, I have gone through a lot of stuff that's pretty crazy and I've just always dusted myself off and get back up, you know? 'cause I just, I feel like that's all you can do. That's just what I've been doing my whole life. I could really like break all the way down and build myself all the way back up.

Kimberly: That's beautiful.

Kasey: Yeah. It's, [00:09:00] it's, uh, it's a talent.

Kimberly: That school took a lot from Kasey, but maybe it also showed her that nothing in this world could take away who she is.

Kasey: How do we end it? It is just, it is just...

Kimberly: I'm just gonna hang up on your ass. That's how we end it.

Kasey: Okay.

Kimberly: Okay. Okay. I love you.

Kasey: Love you.

Kimberly: Wow. We talked for like a long time. Um, I'll call you tomorrow.

Kasey: Okay.

Kimberly: Okay. Bye

Kasey: Bye.

Kimberly: Soon after our conversation ended, I had to make additions to my ongoing list of Kasey's qualities.

They included Kasey the indomitable, Kasey the resilient, Kasey the beautiful human being.