

This is my story of how my past formed me into the person I am today. I was born in Ukraine in a city called Odessa, located on the northwestern shore of the Black sea. Odessa, at the time, was an impoverished and unsanitary city. There would be lots of stray animals, garbage, and even kids on the streets. My birth mother was not physically and emotionally stable in order to take care of my siblings and me. She was an alcoholic and a prostitute, one day she set our house on fire while my sister and I were in it and the government ended up separating my sister and I and putting us into an orphanage. So I grew up not knowing anything about my parents or potentially any siblings. The orphanage provided us with food, clothes, a bed, an education, and a roof over our heads.

On the other hand, we are also being isolated, starved, abused, and sold into international adoption agencies. Kids who are lucky enough to either escape the orphanage or who end up being kicked out of the orphanage because they have reached 16 years old, end up on the streets, beginning or end up stealing whatever they can to survive. For me growing up in an orphanage was an experience I will never be able to forget.

I grew up with two helpers were assigned to my age group, their primary role was to take care of us, and play with us but instead, the two women that I had ended up having treated the other orphans and me very poorly. They would put us through the same routine every day, first would be breakfast (which would be the same meal for lunch and dinner), All the kids would sit at the table eating their cream of wheat, and when they finished, they would get a piece of salami. I was not too fond of cream of wheat since I struggled to swallow it, I would end up stuffing my cheeks and running to the bathroom and puking it out. I would go through the rest of my day starving. After dinner, we all go into the room with the big television in it, and we would watch the bible. I never got to watch it because I was forced to either rub one of the women's feet or rub her shoulders for hours or until they made us go to bed. However, every night right at the part where Jesus is getting crucified, there would be three loud knocks on the window, and the lady would get up and disappear the next morning. I would go to bed terrified, wondering who else would go missing? Every day we would get a new lady, and every night she would go missing. I would try not to get attached to anyone because they would go missing. One of the biggest things that happened in the orphanage that I remember, especially in my age group, was all the abuse. I would get whipped by either a belt or a quirt, which is a short-handled riding whip that cowboys used to whip the horses to make them go faster. In my case, I got whipped because I did not obey the rules like eating my cream of wheat. My back and butt would be the places I always got whipped. I could not even lay on my back because it would hurt so much, so I would stay up for hours holding in all the pain because if I cried and woke someone up, I would get whipped again. Another punishment that I experience was with a chair in a closet; my hands and ankles were either duct-taped or tied so I could not get up or move. Depending on what you did, they would also put one piece of duct tape over the mouth so I couldn't eat or drink. I would be sitting in that dark closet for hours or even days. The only thing I could do was pray to God. All I prayed for was to be part of a family and to get out of the orphanage. When they finally let me out, I would have huge scars from where the rope/ tape where and the redness and swelling will last for a couple of days. The swelling and pain would be so bad that It made it hard for me to move my wrists or walk.

Eventually, God answered my prayers. A family was looking to adopt a young girl, right as they were about to sign the papers, they found out that she had a younger sister (me). So that day, I not only met one of my sisters but also got to meet my new soon to be parents. I was so excited; half of my life, I

wondered what it would be like to have siblings or even be a part of a family. They would come to visit Lauren and me in the orphanage every day, and they would bring us treats, toys, clothing pretty much anything you could think of they brought. Not only did they do this for us, but they also brought all these things to the orphans as well. When they left, I would cry my eyes out because I am used to people coming into my life, and once they left, they were never seen again. I did not want them to leave so that I would grab on to my mom's legs, and one of my helpers would have to pry me off. When they came back, and this time they were taking me home!

Skip forward a couple of months to where i'm finally old enough to enter kindergarten. On the first day since I could not speak English, the school decided to put me into a program called English second language (E.S.L) this program allowed me to get caught up with other students in that grade. Not only was I struggling to learn English, overall, but I also had to start from scratch. Meaning, When I came to America I had no childhood experiences, I did not know how to socialize, did not know what manners were, did not know right from wrong, I even had to learn the basics like what a federated is or what it did, a fireplace, vacuums, etc. The orphanage that I grew up in, especially my age division, we were considered too young to get a teacher. Lauren, on the other hand, got to skip kindergarten because she was taught back in Ukraine. She already knew some English after her constant visits to America. Throughout elementary school, when other kids were excelling, I was falling further and further behind. I would also get bullied about the way I looked and talked because back in Odessa, the orphanage did not have vaccinations or medicine, so I had many health problems, lots of scars, scratches, and my teeth were very discolored. So fitting in and making friends was challenging for me. Fast forward to middle and junior high school, things were not any more comfortable, My background still stuck with me, and I was still in the E.S.L program.

Nevertheless, by middle school, I could speak English pretty well; I entered into every support class, I could think of even if I did not need it. Junior high was when everything started to improve. I could speak English fluently, I finally got caught up with my grade level for the most part, and I made the big decision to enter what we consider "regular" classes. In order to do this, a preposition slip needs to be signed by the teacher for the specific class I want to enter. The teachers refused to sign the paper and assumed that I couldn't handle the class especially with my background. I then started to question how I was going to graduate high school if I was in all support classes. How would colleges look at a student with this type of schedule and test scores? So I begged my mom to switch schools because the teachers would not allow me to show my true potential due to my background. My Mom and I shadowed five different schools and some of them required an intelligence quotient test. When I got the results back my mom and I were amazed and the gentleman recommended The Roeper School to me. I was terrified because the school was known as for "gifted kids," and I did not think I could get in. He ended up sending my scores to the school, and I got accepted. Fast forward to now, I am still at a disadvantage compared to the other students at my school. My first two years at Roeper was a mixture of trial and error. I failed many tests, had to repeat classes, but I did not give up. I have managed to not only teach myself all the core classes, but also get good grades, and working two jobs after school. This to this day I am still struggling with test-taking including understanding what the questions may be asking, writing including paper set up, grammar and punctuation but If I learned anything from not only my background but also so far In life, is that with hard work and dedication you can seriously accomplish any goal no matter how big them may seem.

