

A Different Meaning of Toxic

Alecia Daye

When I was growing up, “toxic” had a very real meaning for me. From the time I was born until the time I was 7 years old, I lived on the streets with my mother, father, and older brother.

Baby formula is very expensive. My parents could not afford to buy it for me. You might wonder why my mother never nursed me. My mother was diagnosed with HIV when she was

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17 years old. She couldn’t nurse me because I might have gotten HIV as well. The doctors told me how lucky I was that I didn’t get it. Maybe I am lucky. However, due to my family’s circumstances, I was often given water from the Des Moines River. I was given the water in a regular baby bottle. When I think about that time in my life, I can almost taste the grime of that filthy water.

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My mother was a heroin addict, and I was often around the substance. I lived on the streets of an unsanitary neighborhood. When you walked in someone’s yard, you

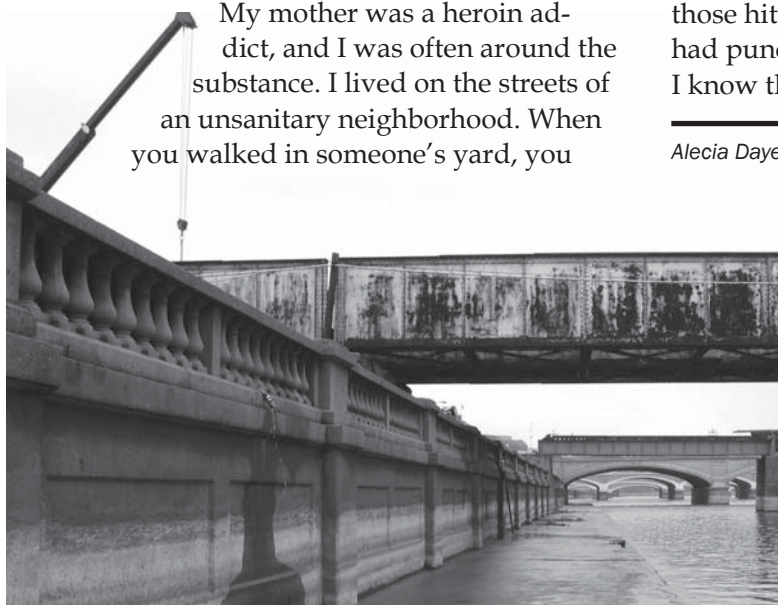
could find enough needles for a diabetic’s lifetime supply. You could always smell someone cooking. They were making meth or other drugs. In other words, it wasn’t food they were cooking.

Some people think that toxins only come from acid rain and factory pollution. But toxins had a different role in my life. Not only did I experience physical toxins but I also experienced social toxins. My environment was so unsafe, it was hard to perform daily activities, like eating a meal or going to school. Growing up like that has left me feeling vulnerable.

In my life, the best antidote to all these toxins was having someone that I could depend on. Don’t be afraid to lean on someone’s shoulder. I always leaned on my older brother and my grandparents. I have to keep reminding myself that life is going to throw punches. I just have to dodge those hits and keep going. Without a doubt, I have had punches knock me down. But in the long run, I know they just make me stronger.

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Making Sense of Toxins

Make a list of physical toxins and a list of social toxins. How are they the same? Different?

Poison is poison, but there are ways to compare toxicity, see p. 156 of the SfA Manual.