



Life

An Unexpected

By Robin Mero

100 FAMILIES IS A RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS INITIATIVE OPERATING IN SEBASTIAN COUNTY THAT CONNECTS FAMILIES WITH A MYRIAD OF SERVICES - FROM JOB TRAINING TO SECURING HOUSING AND RECLAIMING DRIVERS' LICENSES.

THE FIRST USE OF METHAMPHETAMINES CAN CREATE FEELINGS OF EUPHORIA - A SATISFACTION OF ACCOMPLISHING TASKS WITHOUT TIRING. A HAPPIER MOOD AND AN EASE IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

Amanda Myer was vulnerable to this in 2018.

She and her boyfriend, Patrick, had moved to Arkansas from Colorado, settling into an apartment in the River Valley during the late summer's oppressive heat in order to be closer to Patrick's dad. Patrick enrolled in HVAC school while Amanda stayed home with their two children.

She was unhappy, missing the mountains.

A neighbor, a nice fellow, offered to get them high, and the feeling she got surprised her. She discovered what seemed a better version of herself. She could clean the apartment spotlessly. Take the kids to the park. Make a nice dinner. And she liked feeling happy and being nicer to the people around her.

"That's before I started to feel the physical effects of it. Something that made it so hard to stop was that I knew I could do this and it would solve all of my problems," Amanda says on a Zoom call from her Barling home.

Amanda didn't foresee the downward spiral to come. That her body would set a new baseline, increasingly demanding that she get high again or it would leave her feeling worse than when she had started.

"One of my things that made me keep using was the energy, that I could do all the things for my family that I always wanted to do but I didn't have the energy to do, or I had just been sad and didn't put forth the effort," Amanda explains.

"Eventually you're sick; like having the flu. If you do drugs, that's the only way you're going to feel better. Even now there is still a thought that comes to me: 'There's something you could do to solve your problems,' but now the thought that comes after that is, 'You can't do that, you're going to ruin your life. And you have such a way better life than you ever thought you were going to have. So don't do that.'"

Amanda and Patrick met in 2012 working evening jobs at Pizza Hut in their hometown of Atchison, Kansas - a small town on the Missouri River. Patrick was 26, and during the day he worked a construction job. Amanda, 21, was taking CNA classes. She lived three blocks from the restaurant and Patrick began driving her home, devising ways to make each short trip last longer. They moved in together almost immediately and were later joined by Patrick's son, Noah, age 7.

At that time, Amanda's confidence was low. "I never ever felt very good about myself," is how she describes it now. She largely had a happy upbringing, with stability and love from her mom and grandparents, and she describes her childhood as fairly normal.

Yet she'd also endured traumatic events. She didn't know her biological father until she was 19. Her parents had initially used drugs together; then her mother got clean and he didn't, so her mom had moved on. "Girls need their father," Amanda says. She had also experienced sexual abuse as a young girl from two different abusers.

"I didn't tell anyone for a long time, but when I did it wasn't dealt with," she says. "Then I was

◀ **PHOTO:** (from right) Patrick Myer holding son Monty, Amanda Myer, daughter Lemony, and son Noah.
Photo courtesy of Myer.

harassed by a principal in middle school, and when I said something no one believed me. It's probably why I don't deal with things now. Dealing with my problems – I never have. I definitely acted out and did cry for help. I started cutting myself and partying when I was young. There were definitely signs that something needed to be addressed.”

But Patrick was a good partner for her. After a couple of years together they decided to sell everything and move to Colorado. Patrick especially loved the idea of being free of possessions and having a fresh start. They stayed with friends. Patrick found work and Amanda became pregnant. After their daughter Lemony was born, they wanted the children to be closer to Patrick's dad, and thus the move.

Living in Fort Smith, Amanda felt depressed and wasn't enjoying Arkansas. The relief she thought that meth was giving her began to wane. She and Patrick fought more and money dwindled. One night they were arguing; police responded and arrested both Amanda and Patrick on warrants. Their daughter Lemony, 18 months, and Noah, then age 12, together went to a foster home.

After Patrick's dad bonded them out of jail, Amanda immediately called the Department of Human Services to ask what classes they should sign up for and what else they needed to do to get the kids back.

“I was putting my case together before I even had a case worker assigned. We were so depressed. For two weeks straight we just woke, ate and went back to sleep unless we had class or had visitation with the kids. And after every single one I would bawl my head off. It was terrible; to get two short hours with your kids and then see them leave with somebody else, especially when you have a little baby who doesn't understand and an older kid who's trying to be strong for the baby.”

They went through drug and alcohol assessments and psych evaluations and enrolled in both parenting classes and therapy for drug and alcohol use. A therapist, in particular, helped Amanda with an active technique called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR).

“There was so much trauma from my childhood that I never dealt with,” she says.

In parenting class, Amanda kept hearing about 100 Families, a Restore Hope Arkansas program operating in Sebastian County that connects families with a myriad of services – from job training to securing housing and reclaiming drivers' licenses. The program doesn't provide the direct services, but rather connects clients quickly and smoothly with agencies and resources that can.

“I knew they helped people get their kids back, so I called,” Amanda says. “We went in and met Karen (Phillips, her case manager). We were there for hours. We just spilled things out about what was going on and that we were using drugs.

“When we enrolled, we needed so many things before the kids came home. They helped us write letters to get our drivers' licenses back. We needed more affordable rent and they helped us get on HUD. They helped us get our electric bill paid one month, they sent emails to get us in drug/alcohol assessment classes. So many things. And from then on, Karen was just kind of our person. She has been the person that we can talk to. She'll have a solution and she'll probably feed us.”

The agency had a crib delivered to the family, one of the requirements for getting the kids back.

“And so many rides,” Amanda says. “We had some car trouble; we didn't have a car for whatever reason, but I remember Karen taking me and my husband everywhere we needed to go – to work, to therapy, anywhere. So many times calling late in the evening because something happened; I just needed somebody to talk to me, and I had somebody.”

Amanda and Patrick got married, and the kids came home in October 2019. Amanda still faced a slow climb. She relapsed. She struggled to find a good job fit. She had another baby, a boy they named Monty, and the family lived in a shelter for a time.

“To say how hard it was doesn't sum it up,” Amanda says. “When we wanted to get clean, Patrick and I definitely had to rely on each other. I tried to be around other people who weren't using. I got rid of all the people on Facebook that I did drugs with.”

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Amanda enrolled in cosmetology school because she needed work and she wanted something fresh for her mind to focus on; it was not a great fit for her, but she persevered. She also did some volunteering for Karen in the 100 Families office.

What Amanda didn't know was that she'd impressed Karen, who saw in her the potential for helping others. Karen asked Amanda if she would like to work as a case manager. Amanda successfully interviewed with the 100 Families county coordinator and now works full time to be the same resource and anchor that she benefited from before.

“All across America there are struggling families who need help to be productive and keep going in their lives,” Amanda says. “There are times I can just be there to support people, and that is probably the biggest thing for me. I always want to make sure people know that the most important thing that I got from 100 Families was the support – people that I can call when things aren't going right, or you know, to talk to, that I know are going to listen to me, definitely help me to come up with a solution and not just say, ‘I'm sorry.’ I don't know how other places go about reunification properly without something like (100 Families).

“Most people want opportunity but don't know how to go about finding it,” Amanda says. “It's hard

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- AMANDA MYER



▲ **PHOTO:** Amanda Myer credits a big part of her recovery to 100 Families, a Restore Hope Arkansas program. *Photography by Andrew Kilgore.*

for people to give you a second chance, and when there is a group of people who want to help you take control of your life and get everything back together, that's a great thing to have behind you. I don't know anywhere in America that wouldn't benefit from something like that."

The 100 Families program is lifting people out of crisis but also helps them stay out, she says.

"Generational poverty is a real thing. I have clients who come in and their parents are my clients, too. They're just surviving the only way that they've ever known how. To be able to take those people who, kind of like me, never thought they would have a real career, helping them get to where they can pay their bills and have their own stability and don't have to rely on anybody else to support them," Amanda says.

"Now I care about things a lot more. My relationship with Patrick has changed a ton. We work harder at being a couple, and at being parents. Now that I have a career and have something that's mine that I work for ... I didn't realize how important that was. I never thought I was going to have that. (In my mind) we were never going to have nice things, or not just nice things but not even decent things.

"I think I am lucky; my husband and I built everything that we have now. We really started at the bottom with nothing and worked our way here through a lot of hard work, but luck also. I can think of so many times that I went into Karen's office with a need and it was met. And now I try to follow that kind of example. If somebody ever told me that I was their Karen, that would mean the absolute world to me." ◀