

## **Episode 95: Amy's office was bombed**

On the morning of April 19, 1995, a former US Army soldier parked a rented Ryder truck in front of the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building, located in downtown Oklahoma City.

Inside the truck was everything he needed to carry out his plan of terrorism and mass murder. He had a large bomb, which he created using agricultural fertilizer and some chemicals, including diesel fuel. After parking the truck, he got out and walked toward his getaway car, a yellow Mercury Marquis.

He ignited a timed fuse, and a second fuse as backup.

Inside the building, in one of the office conference rooms, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board had just begun a 9 am meeting.

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(Meeting Audio)

### **Woman**

Before the Oklahoma Water Resources Board meets, they actually sit in this room and discuss the application and vote whether to approve or deny the application. So they're the decision makers. You'll receive a copy of my proposed recommendation and can attend that board meeting and present your arguments directly to the 9 member board. They generally meet the second Tuesday of every month. So you'll be advised of that. With regard to this proceeding, basically there are 4 elements that I have to receive information regarding--

### **Interrupted by very loud explosion**

(Indistinct chatter and yelling can be heard)

### **Woman**

Everybody, let's get out of here now! (confusion and chatter) ...press the alarm!

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The blast effect was equivalent to over 5000 pounds of TNT, and could be heard and felt 55 miles away. The blast either destroyed or damaged 324 buildings within a 4-block radius. 86 cars were either burned or destroyed, and a large section of the Federal building had been reduced to rubble. News crews were shocked when they first viewed the damage from their helicopter.

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(Chopper audio)

### **Male reporter**

It looks like part of the building has been blown away. We'll have to bank around to the other side so I can get a better view of it. The explosion went off around 9 a.m. and we could feel the explosion in the newsroom at least 5 miles from downtown.

### **Female reporter**

As a chopper goes around the side of the federal building-- look at that shot it is absolutely incredible

### **Male reporter**

Wow! Holy cow!

**Female reporter**

The side of the federal building has been blown off--

**Male reporter**

About a third-- about a third of the building has been blown away. This is just devastating.

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Inside the building, 163 people were killed. Additional casualties were one person in the nearby Athenian building, one woman in a parking lot across the street, two people in the Oklahoma Water Resources building, and a rescue worker who was struck on the head by falling debris. In total, 168 people died that day. 19 of those were children. Almost 700 other people were injured.

My guest today, Amy, was in the Federal Building that morning. She worked on the third floor, at the Federal Employees Credit Union.

You're about to hear her talk about what happened to her that day. But just as amazing is what has happened to her SINCE that day.

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**Scott**

What was your job on that day, and where was your office?

**Amy**

I worked downtown in the federal building on the 3rd floor. My actual desk was just a few feet away from the glass windows of the federal building. So, basically front and center on the 3rd floor. At that time I worked- I had a desk job -and I worked in the credit card department. I had started out as a teller and had worked for several years as a teller when I finally got my opportunity for a desk job and was really excited about that.

**Scott**

This may seem like an unrelated question, but it kind of fits in with the rest of the story. Did you like your job?

**Amy**

Ya know...I was a bit on the lazy side. I liked the people that I worked with. The woman that I worked for, Vicky, I really admired and liked her. So, I was starting to reach a place where I did actually like what I did because I really liked the approval I would get from Vicky. So it really was about my supervisor not my actual work. Of course we all know now that when people quit their jobs they're usually quitting a supervisor. The supervisor has so much to do with the quality of work life. So I think I was finally at a place where I was starting to like work, but I always liked the people that I worked with.

**Scott**

Yeah. That makes a big difference when you go in. You mentioned the name of the credit union was Federal Employees Credit Union, and this building had lots of government offices and government workers. Did it ever occur to you ahead of time, that the building might be a terrorist target?

**Amy**

Absolutely not! I went to work for the credit union in 1988. We never heard stories of anything happening to federal buildings or anything like that. In fact, I remember thinking that I was at the safest place because usually the issue of working for a financial institution is you're concerned about robbery. That's always in the back of your mind. Well I never worried about robbery. We had secret service, ATF, and all the law enforcement agents all around us. They watched out for us. We never worried about somebody robbing us. So that never entered my mind.

**Scott**

Yeah a bank robber is going to look for an easier target than something like that for sure.

**Amy**

Oh yeah. So it never dawned on me that we would be a terrorist target. Ever.

**Scott**

On that day you were in your office. Some co-workers came in, tell us what happened then?

**Amy**

The morning of the bombing, it was really just a typical spring morning in Oklahoma City. I had spent the first hour of my workday running around chatting with all my friends. Basically goofing off; just talking with everybody. I was getting ready to close on my first house so I was really excited about it. I was talking to everybody about the house. When it got close to 9 o'clock I had this feeling of, "Oh my gosh I have literally goofed off like almost the first hour of my day. I better get to work." So I headed to my office to sit down at my desk and start to work. One of my coworkers, who was 7 months pregnant, came in and sat down right beside me. I was finishing up signing on the computer. I sort of had this feeling of, "Ugh what does she want?" because you know here I had goofed off the first part of my day I really needed to get to work. I didn't have time for whatever it was she needed. So I kind of took my sweet time addressing her; signing on the computer, doing some other stuff. When I finally turned to say, "Hey what do you need?" I don't know if the words ever made it out of my mouth or not because that's when the bomb went off.

The only way I know how to describe it is if you've ever been to a hard rock or heavy metal concert, and you happen to be right in front of the speaker. It's almost like that feedback static--like it's so loud you can't actually comprehend what you're hearing. Like a roar. That was my attempt at trying to describe it, cause I just can't describe it.

**Scott**

I know what you're talking about. It's more like you feel it than hear it.

**Amy**

Definitely. Then on top of that I was hearing screaming. I could hear screaming all around. I remember hearing a woman scream right in my ear, then realizing that was my own voice. I didn't even recognize the sound of my own voice. I was just so terrified. The whole time this was happening I felt this rushing sensation like I was falling. I'm thinking, "I'm falling to the floor." I didn't know this but I was actually falling 3 floors. I found out later that I was still in my chair, had fallen 3 floors, was upside down in my chair, with about 10 feet of rubble packed on top of me.

**Scott**

That part just seems so incredible. Somebody listening to this right now, picture if you laid on the floor wherever you're at right now, and look up. The ceiling is probably 8 feet, maybe. So

you had another 2 feet on top of that, and this is all concrete and all the building construction and everything; yet you're still alive at the bottom of that.

### **Amy**

The way they described it, the concrete slabs of the 3rd and the 4th floors had cracked and formed some shield of some sort, which is why I wasn't crushed to death. There was some amount of concrete protecting where I was to some degree. There were little bits of rubble encased all around me, but the heavy parts were a little protected because of the slabs of concrete above me that had fallen.

In that split second, I hear this noise, I feel this rushing sensation, I can hear people screaming. My first thought was that somebody had come in and shot me in the back of the head, because that thought of robbery is always back there. Even though I didn't really worry about it, being in the federal building, my first thought was, "Oh my gosh, somebody's come in and I've been shot." That was how powerful it was. It was the only thing I could think as my mind was trying to connect the dots of what had happened. Then very quickly, everything was quiet. I tried to move. I couldn't move. I tried to close my eyes to see, but it didn't matter whether I opened my eyes or closed my eyes, it was just pitch black. I remember my mouth-- I thought that maybe my teeth had broken off in my mouth because my mouth was full of what felt like teeth. It was concrete bits. I remember just screaming, "Help me! Help me!" and nothing. I wondered about Robin, my friend who was sitting next to me and I called out to her several times. There was nothing. Occasionally I would hear someone moaning off in the distance, but nobody ever replied. It was hot and I remember there was this smell that-- if I ever smelled it again I would know what it was. It was just this awful burning smell that I'm assuming was fertilizer burning, I don't know. I remember wondering when it first happened, "Am I dead? Did I die?" I couldn't move, I couldn't see, it was just so...unbelievable. I couldn't figure out what had happened. Then I could hear a siren going off in the distance. I decided, "Ok. There's a siren going off in the distance. I'm alive. I'm hearing this." Then I thought, because nobody would answer, I thought, "I don't know what just happened but what if everybody else is dead and I'm the only person left alive and I'm just here until I die." I really could not understand what happened.

That whole thing was about 45 minutes. Then I heard men's voices. I heard them say, "Let's split up. Let's look for the daycare babies." I heard this and so I thought, "Oh ok." I was a little confused because I worked on the 3rd floor; the daycare was on the 2nd floor. I did not understand that I was at the bottom of what was once this 9 story building. I started screaming. I heard this man say, "I hear you! I hear you child! How old are you?" I remember wanting to say, "2! I'm 2!" Because I was thinking, "If I say I'm 28 he's not going to come get me." I paused and said, "I'm sorry. I'm 28." He said, "That's ok." Then he started yelling, "We have a live one! We have a live one! We need backup! We need help!" He said, "We can't see you, we have to follow the sound of your voice so keep talking to us." I said, "What happened?" He said that it had been a bomb. In 1995, for listeners who weren't around then, this is not a thing that happened, terrorist attacks. I did not even know what a car bomb was. In the United States we just didn't deal with that kind of thing. I thought when he said it was a bomb, I'm picturing like, we're at war and some airplane just dropped a bomb on our city. It took me a while to understand that this bomb had only happened to my building.

They started working their way closer to me and my right hand was sticking out of the side of that rubble pile. So they were able to come across my hand. When they got to my hand-- I'm not understanding that I'm buried in all this rubble, I'm still thinking I've just fallen down and I don't really know. When I feel them grab my hand I'm thinking, "This is gonna be 1, 2, 3 and they're

gonna pull me out." I'm thinking, "This is it! It's over, I'm saved." About the time they find my hand I heard all of this screaming in the background and these men yelling, "There's another bomb! There's another bomb! We need to go. Let's go. Let's go." I realized at that point that they couldn't pull me out. They started saying to me, "Amy we're going to be right back, we just need some more hydraulic equipment. We're going to be right back." But I could hear what was going on so I just started saying my name over and over again and saying, "Tell my family I love them." I knew this was it, I now understood what had happened and now there's another one so I'm not getting out. I was getting ready to die.

**Scott**

So they were saying they just needed more equipment but that was just to placate you so you wouldn't worry as much, but you knew that any minute another bomb could go off and then you'd really--

**Amy**

Yeah I mean, they were yelling, "There is another bomb!" I remember hearing another one of them say, "There's another bomb it's gonna be worse than the first. We've gotta go!" They did need equipment; but I could hear what was happening. If you have ever watched footage that they play sometimes at the anniversary; you will see the footage of people running from the scene. That footage is during that second bomb scare, it's not during the first one. When the first bomb went off there was nobody in the streets, they were all in the building. When the second bomb supposedly was going to happen, that's when you saw people running everywhere, blood streaming down their faces, just panicked and running. That was when they thought there was another bomb.

**Scott**

But in reality there was no second bomb.

**Amy**

There was no second bomb. There was about 45 minutes where my reality was, "There is another bomb. I'm getting ready to die." When they left that's when I experienced what a lot of people refer to as your life flashing before your eyes. Just those moments where you realize, "This is it. This is really, really it." You're thinking about your life and all of the sudden realizing what really is important. That you lived a life that you didn't really live. The deep crushing regret that I felt was just terrible. It's something I would not want anyone to ever go through. Which is why I speak so much about my experience, because I want people to really think about their lives and not take it for granted and to live with intention; because you don't realize until it's over.

There's a book I read called, "Regrets of the Dying" by a woman named Bronnie Ware who was a hospice nurse. She interviewed all these patients she had that were dying and asked them what their regrets were. The number one regret was not living a life true to themselves. We get so caught up in our day-to-day stuff, taking care of kids, groceries, errands, work; we don't stop to really think about how we are actually living our lives. Are we really living a life true to ourselves? We don't think about these things until we are about to die. Then all of the sudden it's like, "Whoa. I didn't live my life the way I should have."

**Scott**

Right. What was I thinking?

**Amy**

That's what I experienced during that 45 minutes, just all of that realization. I'm getting ready to die and I never even lived. I just kept begging God for a second chance, a do-over. I was thinking, "I'll live differently. I'll do anything. I just want a second chance."

**Scott**

Now how does that fit in-- there was a point when you were still trapped where you assumed you were going to die and you decided, "I'll just kill myself."

**Amy**

I did, I really did. My first thought was it was really hard to get air. I sort of had to lift my head up in this crevice to really breathe in some air. I remember thinking, "I'm going to quit breathing. I'm going to quit trying to breathe and die." Yes that sounds ridiculous and it is; but it was just an attempt to try and control my own destiny I guess. That didn't work. Your body will fight to live and breathe. So then I thought, "Ok I'm going to try to fall asleep. I'm gonna make myself fall asleep because if you die in your sleep that's not going to hurt." (laughs) You know? So I tried to fall asleep, and that didn't work. You can't make yourself fall asleep either. So I had all these thoughts racing through my head, trying to figure out what to do.

**Scott**

People hearing this might think, "Well that's so silly, why would she think those things?"

**Amy**

It's so stupid, right!

**Scott**

But nobody has been through what you've been through.

**Amy**

Right. In those moments you're just freaked out, panicked and trying to do anything. I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything. So all I have is my mind to think and that's it.

**Scott**

I'm just picturing the claustrophobia of that. Of course that had to be the least of your concerns though, right?

**Amy**

I mean, I'm terribly claustrophobic. (laughs) I really am. I always have been, but that just didn't even enter my mind.

**Scott**

That's amazing.

**Amy**

It was such terror and such panic you couldn't even dissect-- and it all happened so fast you couldn't really process or dissect every moment because it was all just so much so fast. Just that desperate, "I want to live." It's amazing the strength you have when you must have it, suddenly it's there. So I laid there and did this bargaining and pleading for a second chance saying, "Please God just get me out of here." I remember another thing I did was I thought-- so I grew up in a Christian faith-based home. I went to a children's church as a kid and you'd always

have to memorize scripture and they gave you candy. That probably wasn't the right thing to do. So here I am-- I have to say too, I was 355 pounds so I--

**Scott**

That's a critical part of the story.

**Amy**

Yeah. So I was 355 pounds and I'm trapped under the rubble. Some of the regret that I had was that I had let relationships back home drift away. This was before cell phones, social media and email. I didn't want to go back home to have people see me because I had gained so much weight. I had gained 200 pounds. I didn't want anybody to know. Therefore, I let relationships slide. Those were some of the regrets I had while I was trapped, not maintaining those relationships.

I remember thinking, "Ok, I'm going to remember one of these scriptures. I'm going to quote a scripture." I guess I was thinking it would be like a meditation. So the scripture that popped into my head was this one that I'm sure a lot of people have heard, whether they're of Christian faith or not. It's, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." That was the only part I remembered. I was laying there thinking, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...well, crap. I'm in the freakin' shadow of death. I don't even know what comes next in the scripture or what happens next. How appropriate." It was just the irony of it, you know? I sort of went through this whole-- I flunked out of college, not that I think college is the right answer for anything. I was just thinking of all of the opportunities that I had in my life that I squandered and wasted. Then, of all the really weird things to do- as if all these other things aren't weird - this song popped into my head that we used to sing in church when I was growing up. I began to sing. As I sang, I felt this incredible peace come over me, and I knew I was going to be ok. I did not know that meant I was going to make it out alive. I really thought I was going to die, but I was at peace with what was getting ready to happen.

Of course, there was not a second bomb, and they came back and started working to get me out. It wasn't as easy as 1,2,3 to pull me out. It took over 6 hours for these men to finally be able to pull me out.

**Scott**

They were in danger themselves.

**Amy**

They were in danger. The wind had begun to pick up, and what was left of the building was extremely unstable. There was a very large industrial size refrigerator that was dangling, just by conduit, over some of the broken concrete that was swinging above the pit where I was located. So the danger for these men was that at any point something could fall and crush them. Because of that, there was an emergency physician on standby to amputate my leg if needed. My leg was what was preventing them- it was so pinned -it was preventing them from pulling my whole body out of this hole. Every so often I would hear them talking about, "her leg" and I figured out what was going on. So I said to them, "If you need to chop something off to get me out, chop it off." I know that sounds really crude, but that's where I was. That was the situation. There was a girl I met later on, and she's just the most wonderful woman, Dana Bradley. She was the last person rescued, and they did have to amputate her on site to get her out. My

rescuers just kept saying, "Give us 20 more minutes. Give us 20 more minutes." They did this for a long time and because of that I still have my legs. They risked their lives to get me out in one piece. It would have been easier for them to just go ahead and amputate so they could get me out quickly and get everybody to safety.

**Scott**

Did you feel pain in that leg at that time?

**Amy**

I felt no pain until they pulled me out and then everything came alive. They said, "We're gonna count to 3 and pull. This is probably going to hurt." Of course I've been saying, "Chop it off." Acting all brave (laughs) so I'm like, "I don't care, pull me out!" Then they pulled me out and wow, everything did come alive. As I looked around it was like a movie scene, the only way I can describe it, like it wasn't real. My brain was telling me, "What you're seeing is not real." That's how crazy it was seeing the remains of the building. I remember seeing the staircase that would have gone up to the 2nd floor was still intact. There was a piece of Native American artwork hanging there that was still hanging there perfectly as if nothing had ever happened. Then everywhere around it looked like a bomb had destroyed it.

They put me on this gurney and took me out of the back of what was once the federal building. The sky was dark and gray. It had been a beautiful spring morning but now it looked like the middle of winter. It was cold, gray and starting to rain. Looking up at that sky and taking that first breath of fresh air, I remember promising, "I will never live my life the same." They took me to the ambulance. It's kind of funny (laughing) in the ambulance the nurse asked me, "When's the last time you had a tetanus shot?" That was when I lost my shit, right then (laughing). That's when I lost it. Here I am in the building saying, "Chop it off if you need to chop it off" I get in the ambulance and they start talking to me about a shot and I freak out. I hate needles. I'm bawling, crying, "I don't want a shot!" That nurse -I'll never forget it was a male nurse- he's looking at me with his eyes like, so big. He said, "You mean to tell me, you have been trapped in that building and you're scared of a shot?" and I'm like, (imitating crying) "Yes!!" He said, "Well I'm not giving it to you. I'm getting my supervisor. (laughter) I did get the shot. Then they took me to the hospital and I ended up in the ICU. That's when I started piecing together -the nurses had the news on in ICU and we were watching it- so that's when I started piecing together bits and pieces of how bad it was and what had really happened.

Media descended upon Oklahoma City immediately. The hospital PR guy had come into my room and said, "Hey Bryant Gumbel is out in the hallway. He wants to interview you." To set the stage, back in the day the Today Show had 2 anchors Bryant Gumbel and Katie Couric, and there was always this rumor in the tabloids that they didn't get along or something. I don't know, I think it was the drugs they gave me, I have no idea but I can not believe I did this. This is what I said, "Well I don't like Bryant Gumbel. I like Katie Couric." (laughter) So the guy comes back in and says, "Ok. Katie Couric does want to interview you via satellite" because they didn't send Katie there, they sent Bryant. So I go via satellite and do this interview with Katie Couric. She asked me about the wound on my leg. Well, they had told me that all I had was a cut on my leg; I'm picturing a Band-Aid situation. So I said, "I just have a cut on my leg." I hadn't seen anything because I was so beat up and sore I literally couldn't move. I was like a mummy, I couldn't move and I was bandaged all up so I couldn't see anything. So we end that interview, and they take me immediately to this whirlpool and they start taking the bandaging off my leg.

**Scott**

While you were on TV?

**Amy**

No no, as soon as we finished the interview. So, here I am telling people on national TV, "I have a little cut on my leg, I'm good." Then they take me to this whirlpool, they drop me down in there, they start taking the bandages off. That 'little cut,' no, my leg was blown open. I saw the bone in my leg, and I thought I was going to pass out. It was gray--I remember so vividly I saw my flesh, my bone, my everything. It freaked me out. I thought, "You can't stand up. Stuff is going to fall out of your leg" (laughs). I didn't know a person could live with a hole that big in their leg.

**Scott**

Yeah nobody wants to see their own bones. That's for sure.

**Amy**

No! No, but I have thought since then-- nowadays we all have our cell phones and our cameras and the gross part of me is like, "Man! I wish I had a picture of that." (laughs) But, ugh yeah it was terrible.

**Scott**

When did you find out about the outcome as far as your coworkers?

**Amy**

Well, right away in the hospital I was just convinced that, if I made it out alive there are other people. I was wanting to encourage everybody like, "Don't give up hope. They're in there, they just have to get to them." I really held on to this thought that, "They're in there, and they are going to get them out." Then, as the days ticked on there were no other survivors coming out. There was me and Dana Bradley and nobody else. It became evident that they weren't going to come out. The phone would ring constantly in my hospital room with my coworkers' family members calling asking if I remember what they wore that day. You know like, "Do you remember what Christy had on?" It was terrible because I talked to Christy, I spent that first hour of my day running around talking to everybody. I kept thinking, "how can I not remember what they were wearing?" I could only remember what my best friend Sonya had on that day and that was it. I couldn't remember what anybody else had.

**Scott**

The family wanted to know that because of the search?

**Amy**

They were trying to identify bodies. They were having to identify bodies based on clothing and things like that. It was awful. This was before cell phones, so news traveled slower. We had to wait for the newspaper to come out, or some of the news was running 24/7, but the newspaper would print everyday whose bodies they found. Who was deceased and who was in hospitals, so we could keep track of who'd made it and who hadn't through the newspaper.

**Scott**

So that's how you-- you read your friends names in the newspaper?

**Amy**

Yeah. I remember Billy Graham and president Bill Clinton came to town to do a prayer service. I don't know what day it was. I was in the hospital for 8 days, so somewhere during that 8 days

they had this big prayer service. This big multi-faith thing, and it was on television because they were filming it live. I remember sitting in the bed like, "Oh my gosh there's Bobby!" That was one of the first moments I could see people that I knew walking in, so I knew they were alive. 168 people being killed, you can't keep track of that many names. I found out that 18 of my 33 coworkers were killed. 100 out of those 168 I knew because they had accounts at my credit union and they came in to get money everyday. We didn't even have ATM's back then, so they came to us to get their \$5 for lunch or whatever. So even now sometimes, somebody will say a name and they'll be like, "Oh they were killed in the bombing" and it's like, "Oh yeah." It's just hard to remember that many people that died. We lost 18 of 33 coworkers; I mean think about that. If you worked in an office with 33 people, over half are killed. It was terrible.

**Scott**

One of your customers came to visit you in the hospital. Can you talk about that?

**Amy**

Oh gosh yeah. The day before the bombing, I think it was, I had had a call from a man who was going through a divorce and wanted to take his wife off the account. Well it doesn't actually work that way, you can't just call up and remove your spouse. The spouse has to actually agree to be taken off. I tried to explain by saying, "Ok well I'm going to need both of you to sign a card to remove her from the account." He did not like that and was talking down to me the whole time saying, "Honey, get your boss on the line. He'll understand. Let me talk to him." Well my boss was a woman, the CEO was a woman, in fact it was mostly women where I worked. So I remember finally just being equally ugly back to him, saying, "Well SHE is at lunch I will have HER call you back." I remember he called me an ugly word. So that's how that went. Then one day I was laying in the hospital and it was one of those moments where nobody was around, which was unusual because the room had been flooded with people and family. This big ol' man walks in, I mean he looks like he needs to be a bouncer at a bar somewhere, he was tattooed up and down and looked like he was getting ready to beat somebody up. I was a little nervous like, "Who is this guy walking in?" He walks in carrying a rose. He gets closer to my bed and I look at his face and I can see that he is emotional. He's got tears running down his face, he's choked up, he can't talk; then he says his name. Then he says, "Do you remember me?" It was that guy, it was the jerk. I just nod, and he just says, "I'm so sorry." Then he just lays that rose down and he can't talk, he just starts crying and leaves. I was crying too. It was just one of those things where you realize-- maybe in his shoes but, also in mine too since I was ugly back to him. You think, "You know, we don't have to be ugly to each other. We're both humans." I guess that probably drove home to him that the person on the other line was not a robot but a person.

It changed a lot of Oklahoma. You saw the good come out in so many people. We just put our differences aside and came together to help each other get through this time.

**Scott**

The person who bombed the building was executed by lethal injection 6 years after the bombing. Did you ever try to contact him or communicate with him at all?

**Amy**

No, not at all. I had the opportunity, I could've gone and seen the execution and I did not. Instead, Katie Couric actually came back to town to do coverage during that time frame. So, I opted to go do an interview with Katie Couric.

**Scott**

You're a real Katie Couric fan aren't you? (laughter)

**Amy**

I'm a Katie Couric fan (laughter) so I went to hang out with her. I didn't want any part of it. I will say this, there were 2 people that were involved. The accomplice is actually still alive and serving time in prison right now. I've never made any move to contact him at all. I don't usually talk about this because-I don't know it just doesn't come up- but I did go through a time where I was thinking a lot about forgiveness and what forgiveness means and I usually will pray in the morning. So, I did go through a season, I don't know maybe a week or two not very long, where I actually prayed for that person. I thought, "Maybe this is a place of healing where you can actually pray for that person's soul, or pray that they come to some sort of reckoning of themselves." I didn't want to contact him or anything like that though. I'm not saying I'm all perfect about it, because later a news story came out that he was complaining about the food he was being served in prison. He didn't like the food. I was like, "Are you freaking kidding me? I'll give him some food. Let's put poison in it." (laughter) So it's not like this perfect Christian who forgave.

**Scott**

(laughter) Oh, so you're human too?

**Amy**

Oh yeah I went straight back to, "I'll give you some food with some rat poison in it."

**Scott**

Right, right. So at this point, your credit union, your employer, that was the only location you had that was completely destroyed.

**Amy**

That was it.

**Scott**

Half your staff is gone too. What do you do?

**Amy**

What do you do? In an instant our entire business model was destroyed. We existed to serve the people in that building and that was our only location. That's gone, the business model is gone, more than half the employees are gone; what do you do? Well, the credit union industry as a whole is very collaborative. All credit unions' missions are: "People helping people." What happened was credit unions coming together from all over to help us. There was a large credit union in Oklahoma City, they were so large they actually had a mock teller line to train new tellers in this fake line. They let us open 48 hours later using that fake teller line. We opened up inside a competitor's office, so we were able to open 48 hours later. There was just a handful of us left, but we were clear that we wanted to survive. It was very important to us, we did not want to merge, we wanted to make it. So we began getting very intentional about what needed to happen next. You know, "What do we need to do?" The next step, the next step, the next step; to survive. We did and we're 6 times larger today than we were then. I look back now and I think, "We shouldn't have survived, we shouldn't have made it. I don't know how that happened." That's just an amazing story right there to me, that our credit union made it.

**Scott**

Well, it says something about the nature of credit unions too. Can you imagine Bank of America saying to Wells Fargo, "Hey come and use one of our buildings?"

**Amy**

It's funny, I have said that so many times. Not to slam any other bank or anything, but you typically don't hear that with other banks; but you will see that with credit unions. They will come together to help each other.

**Scott**

So your credit union, it's a different name now, but it's much larger. You yourself are much smaller.

**Amy**

(laughter) Yeah.

**Scott**

How did you do that?

**Amy**

Well, I'd like to tell you, that when I left the hospital, you know, queue the "Rocky" music and I go running down the steps to change my life. It didn't exactly work that way. I first had to work through a lot of grief. A lot of grief. A lot of emotional trauma. As well as rebuilding the credit union, I was totally focused on that. Through the process of rebuilding this credit union, we got really good at setting goals and accomplishing those goals. I realized, "Why is it that I can do amazing things at work -I'm a rockstar at work- but my personal life sucks? Why can I not get it together?" I had never lost that moment of, "I want to live my life differently." I meant that, I really did. There were things I did change right away; but there were bigger things I wanted to change. I wanted to go back to school. I wanted to lose weight, I didn't want to weigh 355 pounds. I wanted all those things different but felt paralyzed to get there.

I remember we had a new CEO come in -our old CEO retired- and I remember she said to me one day, "Amy I want to ask you a question, what do you think we need to change here? What needs to be different?" I'm like, "This is the CEO; is this a trick question? I'm not sure how to answer this." I kind of had a 'deer in the headlights' look. She said to me, "No imagine you have a magic wand. What would you do differently?" That sounds so silly, but that little twist of, "you have a magic wand, what do you do" made it safe for me to dream and give my suggestions. I thought about it and said that we needed a great culture, I described it as, "We're gonna sing Kumbaya in staff meetings." (laughter) Then she said, "Ok. Given your current situation and limitations; what are the smallest steps you can take today to help get us there? Write that down, that's your action plan." I left her office thinking, "What just happened? I'm not even in management yet and suddenly I'm responsible for our culture?" But it was exciting. I later looked back and realized it was exciting because what she gave me was hope. The definition of hope, by the authors of Hope Rising: The Science of Hope, they say, "Hope is the idea that your future can be better and brighter than your past and that you actually play a role in making that happen." So hope is action. Hope is something you do. Hope is a verb. So I thought, "Ok I can do that." I pulled out an index card and thought, "What are the things I want to change in my life, if I had a magic wand?" I took it further; I looked at financial, relational, I looked at every aspect and wrote it down. I even wrote it down as if it had already happened. Later I found this Word document, I did it in Word doc. It gave me chills because everything had come true. One thing that had come true was slightly different, because I had written about what my marriage would

look like and I wrote this beautiful love story of this marriage. It happened; but it didn't happen with the person I had been married to. I actually went through a divorce and remarried. I look back now and all those things I wrote down actually did come true.

What happened was, writing it down gave me clarity on what I really wanted, then I chose one thing. I chose what I thought would be the easiest thing, cause I thought all of them including weight were pretty tough, but I thought, "Maybe I can go back to school." So I started with that one and the first step with that was to just get my transcripts. I had flunked out of college, I had a 0.50 grade point average, so I had to find a college that was even going to take me. That was step one, I went back to college and got my degree. Then I had so much confidence I went ahead and got my masters. Then I thought, "I have all these research skills now from going back to school and all this confidence. Let's tackle the weight." I started researching different ways people lose weight, treating it like a research project taking my emotion out of it with the mindset of, "Let's just tackle this thing." I ended up having a bariatric surgery called a gastric sleeve and lost 200 pounds. I didn't just want to lose weight, I wanted to be fit. I wanted to be able to ride a bicycle and walk up a flight of stairs. That led to finding a bicycle. I was still heavy and in the process of losing the weight; but I found a bicycle that would hold me and started riding around in my neighborhood.

I kept going through this thought of "magic wand," thinking, "Given my current situation, what are the next steps?" I do it to this day. I do it almost every morning. I'll do it about a problem and think, "If I had a magic wand, how would I fix it and what would I do?" Then I go back to, "Given my circumstances, what can I do?" What that does is it takes you out of being the victim. When you're a victim you're helpless you can't do anything. I could think, "I got blown up. I got divorced. It's out of my control. I can't help it." Instead you have to own what happened to you even if you didn't do it, cause it, or it's unfair. You actually have to take responsibility for what has happened to you; and that sucks, but you do. Otherwise you will not move forward and overcome. I finally had to say, "Ok given my current situation, I just went through the bombing, I just had all this stuff happen. What can I do to move forward?" That takes you out of being the victim. So I just kept doing that over and over again. I look back now and I went from a teller who couldn't balance a cash drawer, who flunked college because I couldn't pass a math class--

### **Scott**

You even failed remedial math.

### **Amy**

Remedial! Not even the legitimate one, the fake one you take before you can take the new one. Now, I am CEO of a financial institution, I have a masters degree, I went from 355 pounds to completing an Ironman. An Ironman is a 2.4 mile swim followed by a 112 mile bike ride finished by a 26.2 marathon; all within 17 hours. I look back and I'm amazed. If you would've told me I would've done all of that 25 years ago; I would've looked at you and said, "Uh huh. Why don't you also put on that list, get a rocket and fly to Mars." It would have felt that ridiculous. That's the power of constantly evaluating your life and taking steps to move forward.

### **Scott**

I just heard somebody recently talking about how it's always a mistake to measure yourself where you are today, to your ideal self; because that's always going to be a disappointment and you're never there. If you measure where you are today with where you were in the past you can see what progress you've made. You and I could talk for hours about human endurance sports and ultra marathons and ironmans and all that; but I've got to ask you this. When you

cross that line in the ironman, the announcer always announces your name and says, "You are an Ironman," what's going through your head at that point?

**Amy**

Ugh you're going to make me cry just saying it (laughter). I could talk about that Ironman journey. It was tough. I thought I wasn't going to make it. I will tell you I came in last. It was hit or miss whether I was actually going to make it in time. So when I rounded that corner and I saw the lights and that big chute on that finish line and I looked up and saw myself on that jumbotron; it was like slow motion. I remember every moment. The hands giving me high fives over the railing. It's midnight and there were still people there cheering me on. I saw my husband at the finish line; my coach was standing there and they had the medal. Then the voice of Ironman, Mike Reilly says, "You are an Ironman." I was so overcome with emotion. Then they put the medal around my neck. I mentioned I grew up in a faith based home, and after the whole bombing and everything I really embraced my faith again. One of the things I thought of was that in the Bible they talk about life being like a race, an endurance race. I thought about whatever heaven is like, if it's anything like finishing-- you know this is what we dream up on earth. To cross this finish line and be given a medal and how that feels. Then what will it feel like when we cross over to eternity, after running this race of life. So I had spiritual thoughts like that also. Honestly I felt badass, and I was so proud of myself. That is probably one of the things I am most proud of in my entire life, because it didn't have anything to do with the bombing. There's been a lot of promotions I've received and now I'm CEO, but there's a little voice in the back of my mind that says, "Well..you survived. If your coworkers might have lived they would have gotten that promotion." But this was something I did. I got up at 4 a.m. to run. I ran in the rain. I swam in the crazy wind. I did this. My body, even though I've done this, I'm still an unlikely athlete. I'm still on the heavy side. I'm still not quite what you think of when you think of an Ironman; but I did it. It proved to me that I can do hard things and I can do what I put my mind to.

**Scott**

People listening to this might think that when you cross a finish line, in some huge event like that, your thoughts might be, "Wow I'm sure glad it's over, I don't have to run anymore." That's not what it is. I've seen it happen to me and I've seen it happen to so many people when they cross a finish line. It's just an overwhelming emotion, that you did it.

**Amy**

Yeah. I mean just you even describing-- when you said, "You are an Ironman." You saw my eyes fill up with tears because it's still emotional to this day thinking back on it. I think when you do these events it represents the hardships you have in life. It's very symbolic when you cross that finish line that you can overcome. It's really not about overcoming that particular race, it's you overcoming the hard things in life that you deal with.

**Scott**

Exactly. You think, "I just did this. What else am I capable of?"

**Amy**

Yeah, right.

**Scott**

Ok I'm gonna ask you this and I'm sure --I think probably people are wondering this. You failed remedial math yet you went to college and got your masters in business. You weighed 355

pounds, you lost that weight. You were a couch potato, you completed an Ironman. You were a teller who, by your own admission, was a lazy worker, and now you're the CEO of that credit union.

**Amy**  
Right.

**Scott**

You know we hear stories of people changing their lives after some kind of traumatic event; but is it possible for people who are just in a rut? They haven't had any big tragedy happen to them, how does that person get in that mindset to change things?

**Amy**

I absolutely believe that it can happen. I know people who have changed their lives without any traumatic event. You have to be intentional. I really do believe it is as simple as sitting down with yourself and asking yourself, "If I had a magic wand. Who would I become? What would my life look like? Who would I be?" Ask yourself those questions. Start there. Asking yourself, "Who is it I'm wanting to become? What am I wanting to do? What is my life-- what am I really doing here and where do I want to go?" When you start asking yourself those questions and answering those things-- I believe our brains are so smart; they're like an app running in the background trying to figure out how to get there. You will start figuring it out. Then when you take that and you say, "Ok what are the smallest steps I can take?" Start every single day taking the tiniest step. Then you look back and those small consistent steps over time will transform your life; but you have to just take those small, tiny, tiny steps. It doesn't happen overnight, it's a process. It starts with allowing yourself to dream. I think particularly as we reach middle age. A lot of people have been knocked down so many times they just don't want to get back up anymore; we've had life beat out of us. You have to really allow yourself to dream again. Life isn't over. Middle age is just the beginning, are you kidding me? I'm living into my 90s. My dad lived into his 90s. I'm not ready to sit on a couch and wait to die. Heck no!

**Scott**

Would you say today-- would you call yourself a different person? Or maybe I should rephrase that. People who knew you before the bombing and who still know you now, what would they say about your transformation?

**Amy**

I had a friend tell me -now she knew me after the bombing not before- but she knew me before the transformation. Like I said this transformation wasn't me running out of the hospital and suddenly I was transformed. It was quite a while after that I could get traction. She says I'm the same person. She says she sees me as the same person just outwardly changed and with these accomplishments and achievements; but she says I'm the same. I don't know. I don't feel like I'm the same person from before the bombing, I definitely don't. Now, here's a question though, would those changes have happened overtime? That's a good question because I know a lot of people, as we reach middle age, we look back and we realize we've grown. Hopefully we all have, right? We're not the same immature, silly, whatever we were when we were younger; we've grown. So maybe that growth would've occurred whether the bombing happened or not, I don't know.

**Scott**

You have to think most people aren't going to sit down and have the intentionality to say, "I'm going to physically write this down, what do I want to change? What do I want to be?" Yet you did that.

**Amy**

We'll do it every now and then, like at New Year's, but just do it all the time. Like I do it with coffee, have my coffee, sit down-- and it may not be every single day, it might be 5 days a week; but I do it often. When you do it often it doesn't take very long, maybe 10 minutes I'm sitting there thinking about it, revisiting what I wrote the last time, asking, "Am I on track?" you know that kind of thing.

**Scott**

Even if it's just something you want to do that day. Like saying, "If I got these 3 things done today, that's going to be a good day" so then you focus on those things. So you've written a book?

**Amy**

Yes!

**Scott**

You've actually already mentioned the name of the book, but your book is called, "Hope is a Verb." Can you just elaborate on that a little bit and what that book is about? I've read it, I already know, but go ahead.

**Amy**

(laughter) My intention for the book was to encourage others by sharing my journey in a way that the reader would maybe see themselves in my journey and be encouraged on their own journey. It does talk about my experience through the bombing, but it's not just about that, it's about the transformation and aftermath. Also the idea that hope is a verb, which is the idea that your future can be better and brighter than your past, but you play a role in making that happen, you have to take responsibility for your life. I'm sharing it from the first person experience of how I've done it but my wish is that it would impact the reader and inspire them a little bit for their own life.

**Scott**

We'll have a link to your book in the show notes of this episode so if anybody wants to get that they can. I should say, it goes into a lot more detail about what happened than what we talked about here and it's really good. If people want to contact you how can they do that?

**Amy**

Go to my website, [amydowns.org](http://amydowns.org) and I've got links to my social media pages on there.

**Scott**

Great. You do public speaking as well right?

**Amy**

I do.

**Scott**

I know we're kind of coming out of Covid, are you back to speaking in person now

**Amy**

Yes! I am! Just this month I've had 2 keynotes that I've been able to deliver in person to a live physical audience and it's been wonderful. A lot of conferences have been getting scheduled and back in place so it's nice.

**Scott**

So anyone hearing this that has a company or a group they should contact you and that would be an amazing thing to experience.

**Amy**

Yes! I have to give a plug to Oklahoma City. We have a brand new convention center. It is amazing, it is a great place to bring a conference. So, I have to give that little shameless plug.

**Scott**

Well Amy thanks for sharing your story. It's pretty amazing.

**Amy**

Thank you! Thank you for having me.

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Amy's story is definitely one of my favorites. She is just so incredible. She's also done a TEDx talk, and there's a video of that. I'll put a link to that along with everything else in the episode notes at [WhatWasThatLike.com/95](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/95).

Sometimes people ask me how I come up with ideas for this podcast. Well, in some cases, they come as suggestions from listeners. That's what happened with this one.

My nephew Scott listens to this podcast. Earlier this year, he moved to Oklahoma with his wife and their little girl. They were visiting the Oklahoma City National Memorial, and he sent me a text message asking if I've ever thought about interviewing someone who survived the bombing. And that's what started the ball rolling for this episode. So thanks, Scott!

And if you have an idea for an episode, that's how easy it is. Honestly I don't think I'll ever run out of stories for this show, but I'm always looking for new ones. You can send me your idea by contacting me through the website.

And I'd love to hear what you think of Amy's story! If you want to chime in with an opinion or a question, you can do that at the private Facebook group we have just for listeners of this show. You can join at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook). We're coming up on 2000 people in that group now. And sometime in the near future, we'll be moving that group OFF of Facebook to a different platform. But I'll give you all the details about that when it happens.

And before we get to this week's listener story, I wanted to let you know that you can support the podcast and get all the new episodes ad-free, as well as extra bonus episodes that have actual 911 calls and the stories that go with them. And most importantly, your support tells me

you like what I'm doing and that's always a huge encouragement! You can sign up to support the show at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/support).

And now, this week's Listener Stories. That's right, I said "stories" – plural. I knew this episode with Amy was coming up, and I just LOVE to hear stories of people overcoming adversity.

So, I asked the people in the Facebook group to tell me about something they've done, that just seemed SO big and difficult, they didn't know if they'd be able to do it. And they came through! And some of them called in to tell what happened. So that means we don't have just ONE Listener Story – we have FIVE Listener Stories. These people are amazing and I'm glad you and I get to hear what they've been able to accomplish.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

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### **Female Caller #1**

My father was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1990. By 2004 the situation was becoming too much for my mom to handle alone. I'm one of 4 children, the 3rd in line, but because we lived in the same town I guess I felt more responsible for them. To make a long story short we sold our home and built-on to theirs and I became a caregiver for the next 13 years. My parents were not the overly lovey-dovey type. Yet here I was, possibly the least favorite kid, which is a whole other story, set up to take care of them for the rest of their lives. When I knew my dad was actively dying, the thought of even asking for Hospice help and then calling my siblings to tell them that; it paralyzed me. I was so afraid of the deaths, the emotions, all of it. My family all came and we surrounded his deathbed and had the most beautiful send off. 12 years later my mom had a stroke and was in bed for 2 years. Again I didn't know how I was going to do this, I just knew it had to be done. Caregiving is a really really hard job. Changing your parents' diapers is just something you don't expect to do in life. Fortunately my family was great. My kids would keep my mom's spirits up and mine. I remember one night listening on the baby monitor to my daughter singing her heart out and my mom jokingly telling her she was really good. My siblings would also come whenever I needed them and I was graced by their gratitude. Inside I was still so scared of my mom dying. Her death was just as scary to me as my dad's. Giving her the morphine that was prescribed by Hospice felt like I was aiding in her death somehow. Again calling all the family when I knew it was the end was the worst feelings I ever had. I held it together until a car ride to the hospital behind an ambulance carrying my mom where I think I just scream-cried for about 20 minutes. We took her home from the hospital so she could die in her house in peace surrounded by her family. I miss my parents terribly. I miss the life we had when we were all living together and making the best of their health struggles; but I'm at peace with the death we were able to give them.

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### **Female Caller #2**

Hi Scott! Love the show. In response to your prompt on Facebook, something I did that was incredibly difficult that I never thought I would do was a CrossFit competition. Growing up I wasn't super athletically inclined, but in my 30s I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and the weight was creeping up so I knew that I needed to start some kind of physical activity consistently. I knew as I got older the harder it would be to start. On a whim I joined a gym. Unbeknownst to me they did CrossFit style workouts as well as HIIT type workouts, and I absolutely loved it. It was the first time I had ever consistently gone to the gym. After about a year of going there a group of the members decided to do a CrossFit competition and actually

asked me if I would join them. I said, "Yeah, ok let's do it!" My goal was to not place last; and I actually placed 8 out of 11. So I considered that a success.

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### **Female Caller #3**

Hi Scott! Thanks for letting me be on your show. It's about my daughter. We had a wonderful relationship. Then in 2016 I found out she was an IV drug user; heroin was her drug of choice. Our relationship went downhill from that. I'm a tough love kind of mom and I could not be an enabler and watch my daughter kill herself. So she was homeless for quite a while. Then in 2017 she found out she was pregnant and she got arrested. While she was in jail she had to go to the hospital and there she found out she had necrotizing fasciitis in her arm. So she went for several surgeries and skin grafts; all of this while she was pregnant. It was just crazy. So when she was released from the hospital I brought her to my house, and she went on a maintenance program that would keep her from having withdrawal symptoms, so that she would not lose the baby. She did wonderful and the baby did wonderful. We knew that he was going to have to withdrawal at birth, and he did great. It was easy and we were at a wonderful hospital that took great care of him. Now he is just a healthy, wonderful, energetic 3 year old boy. But when he was 3 months old, my daughter relapsed and I had to take him in, which was very scary. I'm 50ish and when you're handed a 4 month old baby, it scares you it's hard. There's a lot you have to do, you have to find daycare etc. I wouldn't change it for a million dollars. So, this year, about 75 days ago my daughter decided she wanted to get clean. She is doing absolutely wonderful, she's in a great program in our town. She's going to meetings, she's working that program, she's helping others, she's been working out of a sober living house. She's back living with us and we are gradually working her back into his life and he absolutely loves having his mama home. So there is a light at the end of that tunnel, and you can do it if you want to do it. I'm so proud of my daughter. She will never know how proud I am of her and what a good mother she's becoming. I just want other people to know, if you're struggling, if you have to take in a grandchild; do what you need to do. You will not regret it for one minute. Be there for your child when they say they're ready to get help. I would walk on water to help my baby and I'm so proud of her.

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### **Male Caller**

Hello my name is Devon. I've always had a dream of owning rentals, flipping houses and being involved in real estate. In the beginning my wife and I started dating at 15. We ended up getting married and had a kid at 17 and moved out and finished our senior year on our own. As you can imagine, the place that we found was not ideal. Not a lot of people want to rent to 17 year olds. We didn't have a stove or microwave, all we had was a hot plate and a pot to cook our single meals in. The car we had was a 5-speed, it didn't have a starter in it, so we had to push it down the road and pop the clutch to get to work everyday and the same thing on the way home. We learned pretty quickly that this was not going to be the lifestyle for us. So we worked really hard to build our credit and at 19 we were able to buy our first home. We spent a lot of time fixing it up and working on it. We found out after we bought it that the people actually had pet raccoons, so the house was a mess. We lived there for about 5 years. During that time we had another child and decided it was time to move on to another house. So we converted that into a rental and upgraded our life a little bit. Then we repeated this process to the point where, just before the pandemic, I was able to have 3 rentals, and the property we live in now has 25 acres and two ponds in a very beautiful area. Shortly after that after the pandemic got started, unfortunately I found out that I was diagnosed with cancer. Although I had been working on the real estate stuff, our focus went to family stuff. So during this time all of our focus, all of my energy, all of our money pretty much went all in on the real estate thing, to follow my dreams.

My family was fantastic in supporting me during this time. Which by the way, totally cured, definitely going to live many more years. Anyway, during that time I put in everything I had and was able to flip a home. As of now we've got 9 rentals and we'll probably be able to retire by the time I'm 40. I was able to purchase the car of my dreams, which was a Tesla Model 3. We're very happy.

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#### **Female Caller #4**

My name is Megan. This November 1st marked 5 years off of opiates for me. I used different pills and dabbled in heroin but my drug of choice was fentanyl. There's been a drug epidemic around the world and a large increase in deaths from fentanyl. I started drinking around the age of 11 and progressed to cocaine when I was 14 when I was hanging out with my older sister. Unfortunately she is still suffering from her addiction. The next year was when I first started using opiates. First, OxyContin, doctors used to over prescribe so they were everywhere. When that started happening less, I progressed to heroin and hydromorphone; and eventually I tried fentanyl. Actually the first time I tried it, I was with my boyfriend and I overdosed. I had to be rushed to the hospital and revived with narcan. You know what I didn't do after overdosing? Try to get sober. It wasn't until over a year later that I would decide to finally try to get off of drugs; but that boyfriend wasn't ready, so we had to go our separate ways. This January he was shot and killed by police. I've been living with a lot of guilt. I know you can't help someone who doesn't want help; but it's hard. So, onto the good though. At the end of 2016 I made the decision to try to better myself. But physically it was just unbearable. I won't go into too much information or details, but after being so dehydrated from withdrawals, I started medication assisted treatment of Suboxone. The doctors and nurses at the clinic were absolutely amazing. Seriously, they saved my life. I was able to taper off of the Suboxone, just in time for me to get pregnant unexpectedly. My ex left me as soon as I told him, and it was a really hard time physically and mentally because I was really sick with hyperemesis gravidarum. But I pulled through and I have a sweet 3 year old son. Now I'm in school full time for child and youth care. I have a great boyfriend and we're planning our future together. In my Facebook memories I see pictures of me and you can see it in my eyes how high I was. It's a good reminder that I've come a long way and I have a lot of things to look forward to in the future.

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