

You Can Make it in This World

It all started when I was born September 8, 1987, in the Glynn County hospital in Brunswick, Georgia. My mom was sixteen when she had me. My mom, who grew up in Detroit, Michigan, ran away with my dad at an early age. My dad was from Boise, Idaho but somehow found himself in Detroit where he met my mother. Eventually, they both decided to start their lives in Brunswick where some of my extended family lived. On September 17, 1988, my brother Donnie was born, and in April of 1990, my second brother Corey was born. In 1990, my dad and my uncle had a painting business and traveled between Georgia and South Carolina doing many jobs. My dad and uncle were always known to have a fun time when they were not working. On the way home from a job site in South Carolina, my dad and uncle decided to stop at a bar to have a few drinks. This was a poor decision. After drinking and being up all day, they proceeded to get into the work truck and make their way back to Brunswick. They did not make it far. My uncle, who was the driver, veered off the road, lost control, and hit a tree at approximately 85 MPH. Neither was wearing a seatbelt. The reports reveal that the steering wheel saved my uncles life, but unfortunately, the crash took the life of my dad on the early morning of July 12, 1990. As you can imagine, my mom, now nineteen with three young boys, was devastated. I do not remember much during this time, but I do remember shortly after my dad's passing that my grandma bought us bus tickets so we could return to Detroit where my mom's side of the family lived. I clearly remember that Greyhound bus ride. I remember the smell, and the look of uncertainty on my mom's face. My mom, who was a high school dropout, was not working when my dad passed away. Because of this, my mom chose to keep us in Michigan, and my grandma decided to step up and help us out over the next few years. I was

young, but I remember Michigan being cold and snowy. Eventually, my mom moved on and met a new guy named Kevin. I think I was five when Kevin entered our lives. Shortly after Kevin and my mom were together, they had my two sisters, Ashley, and Jessica. We lived in Michigan for a while longer, but eventually moved to Miami, Florida. I do not remember my age, but I remember Kevin and a few of my uncles taking me and my brother to our very first Marlins baseball game. I have several other memories of Miami. For instance, I remember hiding behind the couch in our house there every time the music video “Thriller” by Michael Jackson played. I had this weird fear of werewolves as a kid and videos like that gave me nightmares. My mom loved Michael Jackson and I remember this video coming on the television several times. After being in Miami for a brief time, we eventually made our way back to Georgia. I was around seven or eight when we moved to a small town called Grovetown, Georgia. Grovetown was a tiny place. There was one grocery store, one gas station, a post office, and one streetlight in the whole town. This is where we would stay and start our new lives as a family of seven.

We lived in a small, single-wide trailer in a trailer park called Wilburn’s in Grovetown. Looking back, I am not sure how we all fit in there. Kevin, a high school dropout himself, worked at a small ironworks shop making minimum wage. My mom stayed home with us. We were on every government assistance program you could think of. I remember my mom shopping with WIC and food stamps. The food stamps were actual stamps in a book, and she would tear them out when we were at the register. During this time in my life, I had cousins that lived in the same trailer park. We were all in the same situation; on government assistance, living in trailers, and trying to live the best life possible. There was an older guy, a

military veteran named Charlie at the end of our street that would let us scrummage through a junk pile in his back yard. The junk pile had everything you could imagine; old bikes, car parts, wood, you name it, it was a miniature junkyard. This is where my brother Donnie, my two cousins, and I learned how to build bikes. Charlie, who we ended up calling grandpa, allowed us to pull all the bikes from the junk pile and rebuild them. These were our first bikes. Our parents never had enough money to buy us bikes, so Charlie taught us how to build and maintain them. We would ride them all over the place. Riding our bikes was how we got away from our trailer park lives. It was fun! The wind rushing over my head made me feel free. The only rule my brother Donnie and I had was that we had to return home when the streetlights came on. Every night when we returned home, Kevin would get very drunk, and he would abuse my mother. Kevin wasn't a small guy either. He was very tall and weighed about 280, so when he got drunk, he would become very intimidating. I remember standing there as a young boy and watching Kevin punch my mother in the face. As the oldest, my siblings would always look to me to do something. Eventually, I grew enough courage and defended my mom by hitting him with a broom, which caused him to chase me down the road. My mom finally had enough, and she decided to leave Kevin. Thankfully they weren't married, so it was easy for her to part ways. Unfortunately, my mom's lack of sense led to her marry a new guy named Mike in 1998.

Mike seemed cool at the beginning. He had a construction job and made decent money from what I remember. Any person who voluntarily takes on a woman and her five kids deserved some credit. Shortly after my mom and Mike met, Mike was charged and sent to prison for a terroristic threat. This was before 9-11, and he was sentenced to 4 years in prison. When my

mom and Mike met, she still was not working. It was extremely difficult for her to find a job as an uneducated, high school dropout with five kids. However, she was eventually able to get a job at Kmart. She worked for minimum wage, but it was a job. We moved between Grovetown and Augusta, Georgia during this time. My sisters eventually left to be with their grandmother in Michigan, so it was just my mom, my two brothers, and me. While Mike was in prison it was tough for my mom. I remember her working a lot. By 2003, she worked her way up to a department manager at Kmart. Because of her long work hours, I was required to take on a bigger role at home. I would feed my brothers and make sure everything was taken care of. Our school years were tough during this time. We barely had clothes to wear, and I remember always having shoes that were hand-me-downs. My mom would take us to a shelter where we could pick out free clothes and shoes. We also made frequent trips to the food bank. I remember the food bank would give us a ton of Spam. We had Spam a lot as kids. It was usually Spam and Ramen every night for me and my two brothers. Mike eventually got out of prison around 2004, and he was a different person. We then moved to Harlem, Georgia and Mike got his old job back, and my mom quit her job because Mike wanted her to. Mike ran the household like a prison. For discipline, he would make us get on our knees and put our hands on our heads for hours. Mike was very abusive towards us three boys and my mom. I remember the lights and water being turned off many times as a kid. My mom had me take several two-liter Coke bottles and fill it up behind a gas station so we could flush our toilets. Many times, I wanted to run away, but in the back of my head I knew I did not want to live the life that my mom did. Running away would have resulted in me quitting school and leaving my brothers. One thing that kept me going while in middle and high school was football. Football

allowed me to stay out of house and kept me engaged with school. As me and my brothers got older, we got tired of the abuse. We all eventually left my mom. My brother Corey moved in with a friend, while Donnie and I took shelter at Donnie's future wife's grandma's house.

After high school I went to college. I attended Augusta Technical College, but it just was not for me. Instead, I decided to work at Wal-Mart as a buggy pusher while I figured my life out. My brother Donnie and I both worked at Wal-Mart as buggy pushers. After a few years, Donnie and I decided we wanted something better. We decided to join the United States Air Force. Donnie was nineteen and I was twenty. I served in the Air Force from 2007-2018. The Air Force was tough at times, but it gave me what I needed for the rest of my life. I'm very grateful for the Air Force and what it taught me. Today, I am an engineer at Lockheed Martin, and I specialize in low observable technology. It is an interesting job, it pays well, offers great benefits, and provides me, my wife, and two children what we need. My brothers have been successful as well. Both served in the military and started their own lives. My sisters have also done well. One thing that keeps us going as adults is that we never want to live the life of our childhood again. We do everything we need to do to make this the best possible life. Statistics would show that my siblings and I would not stand a chance at a successful life. We had no father figure, we were abused, we were poor, and faced several other obstacles. The odds were always stacked against us. I could go on for days about my life. The point I am trying to get across is no matter what statistics and people say, it is your life and your choice to make it how you want it. Never let naysayers determine your outcome. There will be many people doubting you. Turn that into fuel and thrive in this world.