

Angelica Sanchez

I grew up in Compton. My family, mother and siblings stay in Bellflower, California. After I came out of prison in 2005, I've been on my own. I have six kids. I liked to do a lot of PCP (phencyclidine), a lot of meth (methamphetamine). My mother couldn't put up with me for three minutes when she saw me on drugs. It's sad to know that when people are addicted to drugs, it's all about their drug addiction. I hit bottom. From my molestation when I was five years old, to me getting beat down, to me seeing so many friends and family members and even my ex-fiancé killing themselves.... It has been hard. I hit bottom.

In 2015, I got into this relationship with an old friend, after I ended a relationship of 10 years, which was never violent. We were both drug users. He messed around with a lot of drugs, mostly meth. He often told me about these relationships he was in and how they used to cheat on him. I used to think he was such a good friend. If I got into any kind of problems, he was always the one I used to call. In my prior relationship, he never worked so and I had to hustle, I had to do everything. So, when I saw this guy, a friend of mine for 25 years, that used to hustle and make a lot of money I thought, *damn, the grass is greener on that side*. Well, it wasn't; it was a living nightmare.

It started off good, but then I started seeing little red flags. He wouldn't let me go to my own neighborhood, see my friends or socialize. If I did, I had to give him the address and name and limit my time and tell him what time I'd come back. One time I went to go chill with my homies, get high off of PCP. Of course, I don't drive under the influence of PCP, so when I got home, he approached me with, "Look, if you're going to have attitude, next time I'm not going to let you go out." And I was like, "Whoa, I'm a grown-ass person...what do you mean you're not going to let me go out?" But we had such a good history in our friendship. If gang violence happened, he'd be the first one I'd call. So, this is somebody I really trusted.

'This means you must not care for me.'

I remember when he told me he shoots up. I have friends that shoot up all the time and they never would have offered me any because they knew how I felt about it: my ex-father-in-law passed away from being a heroin addict. The fact he chose the needle before his friends and family had a big impact on me and my friends, so much so that I decided I'd never do that myself. I also never had seen anybody shooting up. When I found out that he does it, he'd tell me, "Dude, I would never do this to anybody else. If you ever

see me shoot somebody up for them, know that I think they are a piece of shit and I feel nothing for them. I don't care for their lives or anything like that.”

One day I was out and had been with my friends and when I came back, he was like, “What did you do?” I told him they didn't have anything; the only thing they had was in their syringe so I bounced. He then said, “Remember I mentioned that you're going to end up doing it? So, you might as well do it with me.” I was like, “No, no, dude, my friends would never offer me that! They already know how deeply I'm against that and they would never.” He goes, “Before you do it with anybody else, I'd rather you do it with me. And only with me.” As he was doing it, I said to him, “Remember what you had told me? This means you must not care anything for me.” He was like, “No, it's not that. I don't want you doing this with anyone else.” But it was BS. I remember those words clearly. He denied it, but it's always stuck with me. I thought, *man, he must care nothing for me.*

I could never do it (shoot up) by myself; I'd always have to rely on him. Once, I asked one of my homeboys that's really close to me to do it for me. While he was doing it, I started tearing up and told him, “I'm going to ask you something, 'do you not care for me? Because I heard once that when somebody does it to somebody, it means they must not care.’” He goes, “No, Angie you know what? I'm going to do it to you instead of you trying to poke yourself and get abscesses. I don't think that means somebody doesn't care for you. Whoever showed you the very first time is probably the person that doesn't care for you. Now you're redoing it (so) I'm not going to let you look like those people that have sores and bruises because they don't know how to hit themselves. Now that you are here, I'm not going to let you not know how.”

‘Every time I got hit, I'd be in shock.’

When he used to shoot up, he'd flip out. Think that I was the enemy. It was his birthday and he was having something at his house with friends there...he never let me be around his friends. He started a little argument. I was like, “Dude, you know, it's your birthday...I'm going to leave. Enjoy the rest of the evening.’ I started walking towards my car. To this day I do not know how he hit me or where, I just remember opening my eyes and I was on the floor. I remember sitting on the sidewalk. Little by little I began to stand up, hoping that he didn't hit me again.

After that day, each time I got hit, I'd be in shock. But we got engaged that same night. He needed to see me and he gave me a ring, told me he was sorry. And I always said I would never be that one, but I was that one. I can't believe he has a video of it that I found in his phone, of him talking before he was going to propose to me. He's talking about how he loves me and can't live without me and that he will kill

and do whatever it is that he needs to do for me. At the time I thought it was the sweetest, kindest, *oh my God, how sweet!* But then again, I was on meth, too.

I'm going to tell you the truth, it did get worse and worse. We had an agreement that when he started flipping out, we'd have a safe word. That safe word was *safe* but that didn't help. When he flipped out, he thought demons were coming for him and I was part of that clan. I didn't understand. He dragged me by the hair; he hit me with the automatic rifle. He didn't even care. You know when they say the walk of shame? I used to walk from his house, which was maybe 10 blocks away from my house, and I used to walk it in shame. Sometimes bleeding sometimes not, with my head down because I didn't want anybody to see me. One time, he took my car and took the battery out for three days so it got towed. He came out yelling and talking like I did it on purpose. I still got hit. Another time, he head-balled me; he hit me so hard with his head, I could swear that I felt my spirit come out of me looking down on both of us. He took off his shirt, trying to put it by my nose because I'm bleeding. I had two black eyes for three weeks.

And you know what? I wasn't going to get out of that relationship. There's no way he was going to let me go, and I felt like I was going to marry him because I went through all that. *I'm going to marry this guy. I earned that space. I'm not going to let the next female get that space because I'm the one that went through this hell, I'm the one...* That's a sad way of thinking.

He used to make so much money. On Friday he'd go be with females at motels and come back on Monday broke. I didn't want to argue with him because I didn't want to get hit. Oh my God. It was hell, he would go from there to hitting me, breaking my windows. If he had enough money the next day, he'd get the car fixed. But that wasn't the point; the point was I had to drive myself from my house to school with a broken window, three, four...so many sometimes. Embarrassing.

My son would be like, "Mom, what's going on?" "Nothing. You stay out of it. Just mind your own." Because I never wanted him to get hurt. Luckily, he loved my kids but you know what, they weren't his biological kids. He never hurt them; he only differed with them. Luckily, I only had my second oldest here and he was graduating.

I chose to get sober for my kid.'

There was a time that I had to live with him because my friend was living here. He couldn't be in the same household with me because he'd say I was sexually active with my friend. He'd say I was sexually active with my brother even... whoever it was, any man that came by me, he thought something was going on and I would get an ass beating. It was crazy. I'd like to tell you that I ended that relationship myself, but no. He

ended up going to jail. From there he wrote me, “You’re a cheater and this is not going anywhere.” I would say back to him, “This day is the day I moved on, because honestly, I’ve never cheated on you.” I planned to leave him.

I found out about gang rehabilitation and program here in the City of LA. I’m 40 years old now so this was my 38th year. On November 26, 2018, I chose to go sober. I did it for my kid. He was too young and beginning to go the same path I had as far as gang-banging. I needed him to stop. Not only that, I never thought I’d hit rock bottom, but I did when my mom got stage four cancer. In her will, she said, “This kid is going to go with this family....” I told her, “This is not going to happen. When you pass, the kids are coming back to me.” It was sad to know that she felt like I was not in good enough shape to get my own kids back. I hit rock bottom, felt like I owed my mom some peace. To leave the world knowing that I have a good head on my shoulders and my kids that she raised are going to be okay if they come back to me.

As much as I love drugs and that life, I don’t think I did pretty bad. I have my house, I always had my car...I just chose the wrong relationship. So, I made a conscious decision to go sober for her, to give her peace of mind. I feel like I owe her that much. This gang rehabilitation and re-entry organization has an 18-month program. You learn to work, do customer service. If you don’t have your high school diploma, you get your GED. They help you with school and they pay you for that. You get maintenance and then you get paid. You go from part-time to full-time, and after, you should be able to go forward and fly. They never say no in order to help you.

I could say that was my turnaround. When Axel (ex in jail) got out, I was already sober. I chose not to be with him anymore. As much as he came around, I was, *no, no, no*. Now I have my 13-year-old with me. I stay sober in the midst of it.

‘I have to give all my time to my son.’

In January 2019, my ex took his life. He said that demons were coming for him. He called me for help and I didn’t answer him that night. I knew that I wasn’t going to be able to help him. Would he have let me go? Either he was going to take his life away or it would have been mine.

I have to give all my time to my son. I want to be in recovery but I want life to be about him too, and not only about me anymore. Father G. helped me put him in a good school in East LA. Now he’s a straight A student; he was an honor roll student twice in a row and student of the month three times. He’s just done a whole turnaround and that was the best gift ever, besides my recovery, besides my mom praying for me.

I walk with my mom every morning after I take my husband to work because this year in June, I did marry a wonderful man that does not put hands on me. He's in recovery as well. I'm not going to say it hasn't been hard; it has been hard. But we have a goal and that's to take it one day at a time. I can't tell you I'm going to be sober next week; I could tell you I'm sober today. It feels good to be a part of my mom's life, for her to enjoy walking with me every morning.

Every day I go to work with my son in the morning. Knowing that there's people that care and people that I can help make a difference to keeps me clean-- knowing that I could help somebody else. I love doing this now. I love letting people know there's places you will go for help. There's hope out there and people that are willing to work with you, give you a second chance without looking at your background.

I love going to that program because everybody comes from the heart and you feel it. This organization keeps me very, very active with meetings; if I don't stay active, then life gets boring and then you want to go to drugs. There are social workers that tell you that they want to help you. We have meditation, counseling, our therapist, a psychologist. We have people that actually care to do the work with us, that actually want to help us.

There were many times that I was like, *who do I talk to?* I'd come home and ball up and cry and wait until all my bruises were gone to see my mom and my kids because I'd never want them to see me like that. Today, it's nice to know that I don't have to worry about that.

We need more organizations that will actually care and provide methods for prevention and tell you that you're worth it. I think there have to be more non-profit organizations like these that have resources that we need, not resources that other people think we need. Resources at one place that we could go to get an education, customer service skills, different kinds of job skills. I was a baker and also head of the farmer's market. Before that, maintenance. The farmer's market gave me customer service skills like how to interact and talk to people. In our world, we don't know how to talk to people. We're loud, don't care and we're ghetto and you can't interact like that in the world.

These non-profit organizations cannot do it by themselves. Everybody at the program I attend donates their time. God, that's a lot of people that donate their time. People that really do help us. They don't judge you and meet you with open hands. There's hope for us, whether it's seeing your homeboy shot and killed, or your family member taking their lives, or you going through domestic violence--there's people out there to help you. Don't be scared, don't think that people are going to criticize you. Don't stop at the first experiences that you have. Try another, keep going. Somebody out there is going to hear you and help you from the bottom of the heart. It took me that 18-month program and it was probably only in the last six months that I opened up. Keep trying.

Recorded at:
Los Angeles County, CA
11/24/20
6:04 pm

