



YWCA
EDMONTON

A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

Living the Dream

the story of Melissa Baird

Warning: disturbing content

I had a rough childhood; I can recall at least 6 times I should have been dead My father was a drug abuser, drug dealer, and an alcoholic. If my father woke up in the morning without drugs by his side it was our fault. The day my mother brought me home from the hospital was the day my biological father hit my mother for the first time. She tried to leave and run for help; but when my mom got outside my father held me, a 1 day old baby, off the balcony over a snow bank and threatened to kill me if she didn't come back.

When I was 4 years old my father was drunk and trying to cook food. He lit our house on fire. I was watching cartoons when the house filled with smoke and I could barely breathe. I ran upstairs to tell my mom, we called 911 and ran outside. We saw our home burn to ashes. I don't have many good memories of my childhood.

At the age of 12 my mother had gotten a slipped disc in her spine confining her to bed for a long time. I remember walking home from school having to explain to my friends why I could not come out to play after school. I had to go home cook a full meal, do dishes, and bath my 4 sibling and put them to sleep. I at 12 years old had to take on the task of my adult mother.

When my mom finally left my biological father she moved my siblings and I from Edmonton to Japan to live with an American man in the military. From Japan we moved to New York and when I was 16 we moved back to Edmonton. My mother was a single parent again and I worked to help support my family.

When I was 17 I moved out on my own thinking how easy and great life would be. How wrong was I !?!

I worked full time and went to school full time. Things were okay until I turned 18. I stopped going to work and could rarely wake up in the morning to get to school on time. I loved to go out, dance and have fun. I was living the dream! I had more friends than I could ever ask for and I was free to do whatever I wanted.

September 2008 I suspected I was pregnant, but didn't believe my instincts, I thought I was invincible. The morning of October 1st on the way to buy a pregnancy test I texted my mom to let her know I thought I may be pregnant. Sure enough, I was. My mom told me I needed to sit and think about how I would get by, if I was ready and not to base my decision on anyone else. I went back and forth on my decision.

Finally, I decided I would keep my child and never look back. I didn't know how I would do it but I was determined. The father of my baby was supportive and ready for the road ahead. My so- called "amazing" friends didn't stick around. All I had left was my family, who live far away, and my boyfriend, who is nothing like a "girlfriend". I couldn't confide in him for "girl talk" and he couldn't understand anything I was going through. I got lonely fast.



Living the Dream cont'd

I went into labor on May 18th 2009 at 8 pm. Labor lasted 36 hrs in total; for 31 hours I withheld pain medication in the hopes of going all natural. After my beautiful son Benjamin was born I was very proud and happy, but mostly, too tired to realize how amazing it was. I was in a lot of pain, could barely move, and desperately needed sleep.

The first few weeks at home with my baby I would describe as exhausting and a reality check. I remember one of my first moments home, I phoned my mom crying and asked when am I ever going to be able to get a full night sleep? She replied, “never.”

It was that very moment I realized this was my life now. Parenting is the biggest challenge I have ever faced. Even with supports in my life I still feel like I am doing it on my own. Everyday I go to school with Benjamin and a load full of books, by the end of the school day I am exhausted but I still need to be a parent to Benjamin, do my school work, and clean my home. I would not change my new life for anything; although I do wish I had waited and understood more of what would come with having a baby. I could be so exhausted and have had no sleep the night before but as soon as I see that beautiful smile on my son's face it gives me all the energy I need to get through the day. It is very challenging to get through my life as a teen mom when I am being faced with judgment from the public everyday. People in the public look down upon me because I am a teen mother, just because I am young does not mean I am less of a mother than anyone else. I do my best to turn the judgment into motivation.

I am currently attending Braemar School – a school partnered with Terra for pregnant and parenting teens. Terra has helped me a lot by providing me with resources to succeed and daycare so I may attend school. Recently I joined the Youth Leadership program at Terra. I volunteer as an ambassador because I want to give back to the community for the support I have received. I also want to show the community that teen parents can succeed.

I am so excited to graduate this year. Everyday is an empowering one at Braemar. After graduating this year I am attending Grant Mac Ewan College for the social work program. I am a survivor not a victim and I believe that there is a reason I am alive today, and that's to help women like myself. One day I hope to be a Terra worker and give back for everything that has been given to me. I am **now** living the dream, just a different one, trying everyday to give my baby a better life than what I had, and trying to break the stereotype of teen moms.

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