

## NOTES

Children are often deeply influenced by the people who raise them. With an estimated 25% of American children growing up in households where substance abuse is present, it should come as no surprise that many children feel abandoned, unloved, and are often left to care for themselves and their siblings. In his extraordinary memoir, Billy Barnes shares the true story of growing up with a drug-addicted mother and of the debilitating toll substance abuse took on his family as a whole. This selection is perhaps best performed by a male and may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. Everything in this story is 100% true; therefore, put yourself in Billy's shoes. Play your moments, and don't be afraid of pausing for dramatic effect. Pretend like many of these 'family secrets' have never been shared with anyone before; therefore, imagine the hesitancy of sharing such intimate details with total strangers. There are a few moments of humor. Play these moments, too. There is power in just simply talking, sharing, and building a real rapport with the audience. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in the manuscript. This is a powerful story of redemption, love, and learning to forgive the unforgivable.

Before I begin, there are a few things I think you should know. First, this story—it's not really for *you*. It's for me. It's an apology letter to myself for all the regret and guilt I've been carrying around these past few years.

Isn't it funny how we all cope with different things in different ways? Think about it. Some people? They drink. Other people? They—*I don't know*—shoot up heroine. Me? I draw puppies.



Growing up, I suppose we pretty much looked like your normal, all-American family; but you know what they say, right? Looks? Looks can be deceiving. My brother, Danny, and I lived with our biological parents until I was around eight. Danny was two years older than I was, and we were just your typical all-American boys growing up and living with a more-or-less absent father and a mom who was doing her best (but failing miserably) just to stay sober. Where was our dad? Working. Dad was almost *always* working. Trust me. When your mother has an appetite for drugs—and when I say my mom had an appetite for drugs—I mean she was *starving* for them. She couldn't get enough. So, while Dad worked as many hours overtime as humanly possible to *pay* for Mom's drugs, Danny and I were left alone to feed ourselves.

Don't get me wrong. Occasionally we got the obligatory *Happy Meal* from McDonald's, but for the most part—my brother and I were hungry. We were hungry for the love and affection of a *mother*, who sadly, was too stoned to

know we were even there most of the time.



Dad, realizing me and my brother needed to escape the realities of our daily nightmare, sat us down at the kitchen table on one of his rare night's off and taught us how to draw. Dad? He didn't have any formal training, but he did have talent. He told us he would draw each of us our favorite animal, so I said, "A bear!" Danny chose a puppy—so I immediately withdrew my request for a bear and told Dad I wanted him to draw me a puppy, too! (Hey, what little brother doesn't look up to and idolize his older brother by copying everything he does and says, right?) So, Dad drew us *two* puppies. Mine was smaller, of course, and more adorable, because—let's face it—*I* was smaller and more adorable. And that day, what my dad didn't *know*—was that he had just given Danny and me one of the greatest gifts ever. He gave us a gift that didn't cost him a penny. He gave us a way to *cope*.



This introduction into the magical world of *drawing* gave me and my brother hours upon hours of escape! Sure, we doodled around by drawing lots of different animals, but we both became obsessed with drawing puppies. Don't get me wrong. We had no intentions of drawing *101 Dalmatians* or anything like that. In fact, we finally began to work together as a team and morphed our *two* puppies into *one* puppy—THE puppy—that we unanimously decided to name—"Puppy!" I know. Original, right? So, Puppy was born, and Puppy was, in a way, like the third brother we never knew we wanted...or needed.



Now, remember, Danny and I were *young*, so writing *novels* never even occurred to us, but Puppy *did* become the quintessential hero in dozens upon dozens of original comic books we would create. Each story would feature Puppy in a brand-new, insanely fun, wild adventure! Other characters in our comic books would often be inspired by various stuffed animals Dad would bring home to us, but make no mistake. Puppy? Puppy was always the star of each and every one of our stories!



Over time, Mom's drug addiction got worse. Money was tight, and it seems like we were constantly moving. Sometimes, we'd even stay in cheap, drug-infested motels for days at a time with either very little or nothing to eat at all. Remember, it was more important to feed Mom's drug addictions, I suppose, than two growing boys. So, for a while, Danny and I put both our pencils and

Puppy away. We pretended Puppy had run away and found a new home: a home filled with love and lots and lots of friends.

I was happy for Puppy. I really was. I just wish Puppy had taken me and Danny with him.



I know it sounds like everything in my childhood was always doom and gloom—but there were a few days of happiness. I remember one Halloween in particular. Now, our neighborhood was rough. Too rough, Dad said. So, we didn't get to go out and trick-or-treat like normal kids, because it was just too dangerous. Instead, Dad had us put on our 'ninja' costumes, which were really old bathrobes tied with rope sashes, and he gave each of us a plastic bag. Then, while Mom was passed out in the bedroom, Dad ran from room-to-room, pretending to be different neighbors who generously doled out candy to us each and every time. That night, Dad and Danny and me laughed and laughed until the wee hours of the morning. To this day, that Halloween forever stands out in my memory—because it was the first time that I can ever recall really having fun...and truly feeling loved.



Remember, Danny and I were living most children's worst nightmares. And even the word 'nightmare' might give most of you a false sense of the reality in which we were *really* living. Like one night—Mom was just waking up after being in a stupor for most of the afternoon. She was ready for her next dose of 'self-medication,' and she and Dad started fighting. It was a pretty safe bet that if Mom was awake and Dad was home—they were fighting about something. Well, this one night, Mom grabbed a butter knife and lunged the knife into Dad's back. It was like time just—stopped. There was so much chaos and confusion going on, but I distinctly remember Mom retreating back into the bedroom and Dad staggering into the bathroom. Danny and I didn't know what to do. We were terrified. Dad had obviously leaned against the bathroom door, because when Danny and I went in to check on him—the entire door was smeared with pools of dark, red blood. The knife was now lying in the bathtub. Dad was sitting on the toilet, and he was crying. We were all crying. And I'll never forget what he told us. He said, "Tell your mom I'm sorry."

At that moment, I *hated* my mother. How could she be such a monster? Mom owed *Dad* an apology. Not the other way around.



I was seven when things hit rock bottom. One day, Mom—with Danny and me in tow—was heading to a friend's house to pick up her new drug of choice: