

## "Men don't cry. I cried."



Kayla's red Homecoming dress was beautiful. Her shoes matched perfectly, as did the earrings. Makeup was expertly applied after the trip to the salon earlier that afternoon.

Yet, the outfit was missing one important piece.

The necklace.

Ron placed the necklace around his daughter's neck - she was now ready for the dance!

His journey to share this day with Kayla was not easy, in fact, improbable at certain points.

Ron has spent over half of his life in prison. Decades of substance abuse, associations with the wrong people, criminal activity and "faking the moves" that resulted in periods of incarceration and separation from his daughter.

"I was an addict," Ron stated. His first experience with cocaine left him thinking this was the "greatest thing ever." The delusions and paranoia came into play as his use continued. Drugs caused him "live in misery" and when he felt pain or sorrow, the substances had a numbing effect.

"It is not an enjoyable moment getting high," he stated. "In the moment, you think it is, but it is not."

"No feelings, no morals. I had to steal and rob," was how Ron described his life. "I was out of control and really didn't care."

Ron's last incarceration was at Osborn Correctional in Somers, Connecticut during which time Kayla entered DCF care. Placements for adolescents are difficult to come by and she moved between both kinship and regular foster homes. "The fear of her being bounced around and me being helpless in jail motivated me," Ron stated.

Ron was fortunate to be accepted into the New Horizons Program, taking part in a unique 6-month in-patient rehabilitation style program housed in the prison followed by one year of aftercare.

"Like a street program" is how Ron describes inmates receiving individual and group counseling and support from peer mentors. The inmates are expected to show sustained progress and engage in both written and verbal activities toward their recovery. "You cannot go there if you



are going to fake the moves," Ron stated. If an individual demonstrates negative behaviors, you are expected to "pull people up."

## **Addiction Recovery**

"My motivation was me not being able to rescue my child," Ron stated. "I faked the moves too many times in my life. This time, I did it for me."

Upon completion of New Horizons and serving his sentence, Ron was paroled to a halfway house and continually tested negative for substances. He began working closely with DCF, taking part in visitation programs through the newly established Quality Parenting Center along with the Therapeutic Family Time program through Boys and Girls

Village.

The goal was reunification with Kayla who continually expressed her desires to live with her father.

The DCF Ron experienced is "much different" than the one he remembers of years past. He credits social worker, Shawna Jacobs, with "always being straight with me." Today's DCF he says is "more organized" and less of a bureaucratic Agency which had previously been hard to navigate.

"It way different than the past. It is more than just taking kids out of their home and into other homes," Ron stated.

"Transformed" is a word he now associates with DCF.

Kayla continually expressed that she wanted to come home and live with her father.

Ron has sat in a lot of courtrooms in his lifetime. On a particular day in July 2023, the legal system felt different when a Judge in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters revoked Kayla's commitment and Ron was reinstated as her guardian.

Kayla was coming home.

How did it feel when he heard the Judge's words? "Great, I actually cried when the Judge said it," Ron articulated.

"Men don't cry. I cried."



By his side was his fiancé, Jen, who remains one of his biggest supporters. "This really turned out great," she stated. "I love Kayla. She is daddy's little girl. She smiles and Ronny lights up."

"It feels safe here."

"I have truly enjoyed working with Ron, he never wavered in his commitment to have Kayla return to his care, his motivation and determination was really inspiring. During the court hearing when commitment was revoked, watching his reaction brought tears to my eyes. It was a true testament to all his hard work to ensure Kayla no longer was in foster care," stated Shawna. "During home visits Kayla always reports how happy and safe she is, she loves spending time with her dad and stepmother. She is truly thriving in his care! I'm really grateful to be a part of their journey."

Ron remains a protective father, knowing all too well the risks teenagers face. "I let her know the choices in life and the consequences," he stated.

"I worry because she's a teenager."

Kayla's adjustment home has gone well. She has an interest in early education and can work at a daycare right in her high school. Kayla is involved in the Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC), does well in school and is making friends.

"There's no sheltering her from life," Ron stated. What he wants for his daughter is quite simple. "Do what's she's supposed to do," he stated.

Ron's days are filled with his responsibilities working for a property management company and has opened his own business as well. He is learning about buying and flipping houses given the vast network of lawyers, accountants, and real estate agents he knows.



"I've done a lot this year to move ahead."

Ron has a message for others, especially fathers, who are struggling and involved with DCF. "You're not going to get clean until you are ready to get clean. Don't do it for anyone else and not because your child was taken."

He also speaks clearly about moving on from the past. "You can only move forward. You will never move forward if you focus on the past," he stated.

Congratulations to you Ron, for all your successes and thank you for sharing your story with us.