

A Story of Recovery

from Addiction and Birth Trauma

by Elizabeth Fallon

In October 2010 when I made the decision to go back to rehab, for the second time, all I wanted was for the ever-increasing pain, drama, missed opportunities, consequences, disappointment, and broken relationships to stop. I just wanted a “normal” life. I wanted to feel things again and feel like I belonged...somewhere and be someone people could be proud of again or want to be around again. Little did I know that my decision in 2010 would save me a decade later after experiencing the birth trauma with my son only three weeks before COVID lockdown.



My son was born February 26, 2020 and was almost immediately taken to a NICU in a different hospital, without me. I was told I couldn't go with him. I was still paralyzed from the medication for my unplanned c-section so I couldn't move or do anything to be with my newborn child. I didn't know when or if I'd see him again. I have felt helpless and trapped before, when I couldn't stop drinking no matter how much I wanted to or how hard I tried, but this...this was a whole new level of anger, fear, terror, helpless, hopeless and confined. At that moment, I broke inside, I fractured, I was not the same.

The feelings that were brought to the surface were overwhelming. When I first got sober, I was convinced that the childhood I had was normal and healthy. I did not realize I had suppressed so many negative memories and experiences. The trauma I experienced when my son was born re-ignited all of that inside me and caused me to mentally and physically experience every other traumatic event that caused deep pain and altered the direction and course of my life. I started to experience severe postpartum anxiety, which was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. I realized that I didn't have the awareness or tools I needed to deal with it all. I felt stuck and completely alone.

Thankfully, because of the tools I learned on my recovery journey, I knew that I needed to ask for help immediately before things got much worse. I did more targeted therapy, attended support groups at First Connections for other moms with PPA/PPD and I got very honest with my friends and parents. It was of course uncomfortable asking for help, again, and stepping out of my comfort zone but it was necessary and I knew I couldn't fix me alone. If it was not for the people around me who understood and took the time to understand and support me, I don't know how I would've made it.

Being a new parent is hard enough, experiencing birth trauma is all too common and then throw in a pandemic and social isolation with no outside help, it was the perfect storm of emotions, fear, loneliness and complete exhaustion of mind, body and spirit. The experience of trying to recover from a traumatic birth in a pandemic has made me reflect on the choice I made a long time ago to get healthy. The path to healing and recovery ebbs and flows but I know from



experience consistent action on my part always makes a difference, no matter how small. I still have anxiety. I still get overwhelmed with taking care of my son and myself. But the work that I have done in recovery and healing from past trauma has taught me to trust myself. I can walk through fear knowing deep down that I will be OK. I no longer feel the pressure to prove myself to anyone and I am not controlled by my fears and emotions anymore. I can feel my feelings without needing to escape and I can have real connections in my relationships with healthy boundaries to protect my mental health.



Life is hard and life is beautiful - and it's okay to live in both the beauty and adversity concurrently. Once I began the healing and recovery process, I started to see life from a new perspective which allows me to have gratitude for the good things and to celebrate the moments of happiness in each day. If I remain open to seeing it. The beauty at the end of all the pain and hard work is beyond anything I could have ever imagined for myself. Honestly, I thought I would never make it to my 30th birthday much less become a mother. I just had to have some faith that there was more out there for me if I kept momentum forward in the next right action. I keep it simple and consistent and that formula still works for me.

*Elizabeth has shared this story of recovery from addiction and birth trauma in recognition of National Recovery Month. She is an alum of First Connections' **Emotional Wellbeing After Baby**, a free support group for parents struggling with feelings of anxiety, depression, or isolation during the first year of parenthood. To learn more, contact HO'Brien@JRI.org or LMatthews@JRI.org or visit www.FirstConnections.org. This story is shared with permission 8.22.22.*

Here are some resources on both topics:

[Birth Trauma](#) - This UK-based organization explains birth trauma and offers suggestions for getting support.

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#) - Local resources and local meetings.

[The Herren Project](#) - A Rhode Island based agency that provides addiction treatment.

