

I can't be a mum, I'm only 11!

How could I walk back into a house so full of sadness?

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Get me out of here!" I screamed. My twin brother, Tim*, and I had just arrived at our new foster home and I was highly distressed.

Our foster mum, Jenny*, a young woman with two daughters of her own, could see I was upset. "It's okay," she began, trying to soothe me.

But her words only made me more afraid.

"Leave my sister alone!" Tim yelled, stepping closer to protect me.

Over time, the two of us grew more comfortable with Jenny, even though she could never

take the place of our mother, Alison.

Weeks earlier, I'd watched my father kill her in our own home after they had an argument.

The fragments of that cold winter morning still haunted me no matter how hard I tried to push it out of my mind.

Dad was convicted of manslaughter and sent to prison. It meant that at seven years old, Tim and I had been taken away from our other brothers, who were placed in different foster homes. It was a comfort to be with Tim, but my heart ached for Mum and my siblings.

After a year with Jenny,

Tim and I were moved to another foster home.

After that we were always changing homes and schools, and we moved countless times.

When I walked through the school gates thinking about Mum, it made me cry. My tears drew the attention of bullies, who bashed me.

Going home was no better. After Jenny, all the other foster parents were mean.

"What's in the box?" I asked one foster mum when a parcel arrived for her.

As punishment for daring to speak, she made me write *I am a nosey bitch* 1000 times, then stuck the pages to the walls of the living room. My shame and stupidity was on display for everyone to see.

I was never treated the same as the foster parents' real children.

"You don't deserve beautiful things," one of the parents said, while showering their own child with gifts.

I thought back to my mum and how she would make us all laugh.

Mum would have never belittled anyone like these people did.

Between school and the



Me at five years old



I was moved to countless foster homes

I became a target for bullies

Tim tried to comfort me, but I still ached for Melissa.

After just three years in prison, my father was released and applied for custody of his children. Tim and I had to make a decision: stay in foster care, or return to the man who'd killed our mum.

Neither option was appealing, but the idea of being with my other brothers outweighed my fear of seeing Dad.

Walking back into our old house was

terrifying. I could still hear Mum's screams. Neighbours called it 'the haunted house'.

My father never spoke about what he'd done. He didn't speak to me much at all apart from encouraging me to drink the alcohol he lived on.

Soon, I was turning to booze and drugs in the hope of numbing the pain.

I had recurring nightmares that the wallpaper in my room was trying to suffocate me. The symbolism seemed obvious: home had always been my prison.

When I was 17, my

depended on me now. It didn't matter that I had to wake up in the early hours to feed her; she was someone who loved and needed me.

"You're my sunshine," I would tell her. As the months passed, Melissa became the most important thing in my life, but when I came home from school one day, she was gone.

Running to my foster mum, I asked where she was. "She's gone," the woman said dismissively. "You won't see her again."

With those cruel words, I felt my world contract. Collapsing on the bed, I started to cry.

foster homes, I felt like I spent my life being bullied.

When I arrived at the next foster home, the mum walked into my room holding a baby.

"This is Melissa*," the woman said. "She's your baby now. Look after her."

I could barely understand what was going on. How could an 11-year-old raise a baby! But it was my responsibility to feed, bathe and look out for Melissa. When I looked at her beaming smile, I remembered how happy I'd been when I was younger.

Holding Melissa in my arms, I felt a love for this child who

"She's your baby now. Look after her"



Me and Mum



Me and Michael performing

father died. Suddenly, I was free. No-one could control me ever again. It was time to start a new life.

I became a manager of a textile company, got married and gave birth to two beautiful children, David* and Sally*.

I made a promise that I would never let anyone bully my kids like I'd been bullied.

My marriage ended and I met a man called Michael online. He worked as a comedian on cruise ships. He made me laugh and my kids loved him.

I had always been shy but as our relationship blossomed, Michael coaxed me out of my shell and we began performing together as the Dream Guards.

We've been busy touring

primary schools doing an anti-bullying show for kids, inspiring them to believe in themselves, build resilience and give them the tools to stand up to bullies in a positive way.

I had butterflies in my stomach when I stepped on stage for the first time. But they quickly disappeared when I looked down and saw the eyes of hundreds of children light up as they watched me and Michael perform.

After hearing my story, many wanted to give me a hug. Feeling their arms around me made me remember how much I wanted someone to hold me when I was their age.

I'm sure Mum would be proud that I'm making kids smile, just like she made me smile.

*For more information, go to www.dreamguards.com.au



Michael helped me come out of my shell

WE PAY MORE!
up to \$2000
for YOUR story
See page 73 for details.

AS TOLD TO MITCHELL JORDAN *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED PICTURES: DREAM GUARDS WWW.DREAMGUARDS.COM.AU