



AUGUST NEWS - STORIES OF COURAGE

At Food For All, we like to be a friend to our clients. That means supporting them in more ways than providing food – having conversations on the phone, visiting their homes for a chat, and listening to their stories.

Storytelling has been an integral part of human culture since the visual stories told by the cave dwellers. We tell stories to affirm the struggles and joys of the human condition, to strengthen the narrative about our own lives, and to bond as social beings.

Of late, we have been inviting our clients to tell their stories of courage, and we have heard many. We have been inspired by tales describing the strength it took to survive cancer twice, the grit needed to help people escape a burning building, and the fearlessness required to protect an elderly person from being bullied. But two stories stood out – those of Monica and Darrine.

I sat down with them for the telling and was stuck by how meaningful the process was. By telling their stories, they were able to lighten the load on their hearts and consolidate their experiences into life's narrative in a positive way.

Monica and Darrine expressed willingness for their stories to be shared with the hope that others can learn from their experiences and become better people. We hope you enjoy reading them here.



*Stories are a communal
currency of humanity*
Tahir Shah

DARRINE: PAIN IS THE MOTIVATION



It can take a single second for a life to be ripped apart. In Darrine's case, that second was the time it took a bullet to shatter in his body and rip through his lungs, back, and spinal cord. The bullet was shot at close range by someone demanding his money. It contained the anger of a man who wasn't given what he wanted.

It took six surgeries and two near-death moments for Darrine to survive. Now he sits in a wheelchair, paralyzed by a piece of bullet, but freed in his mind. The bullet may have broken his body, but it couldn't break his mind. As Darrine describes it, the snake became a butterfly.

But that transformation took time. When Darrine first came back to life in George Washington University Hospital and discovered what happened, he was hissing like a snake —

angry at the world and bitter with life for throwing him into hell. The health workers avoided him, recoiling from his negativity. Even before the incident, he had become numb to many feelings and situations. So at first, the shooting magnified his negativity. But he had time to think. He had time to read the Quran. He had the presence of mind to ask God to give him more guidance and greater self-control.

One day, when he woke up from yet another surgery, the sun was shining on his face like a divine presence. He felt somehow liberated by the illumination, as if flying freely like a butterfly. He gestured to the nurses to take out the incubation tube. They said it was a risk; his lungs might not have the power to breathe. But Darrine insisted. It was a struggle; he coughed up a lot of stuff, but he took one deep breath and felt free again. He knew he couldn't be mad all the time — that takes too much energy — so he was reborn into a better version of himself. Somehow, Darrine was able to hold the pain and then transform it into positive energy.

The health workers were at first baffled by this transformation, but then they celebrated it. Now, they all want to socialize with him, and they feel slighted if he doesn't greet them whenever he goes back to the hospital. Part of Darrine's desire for a new life was motivated by his twins. They were still in the womb when the bullet struck, and he wanted to do everything in his power to witness their birth. Sure enough, on April 20, 2021, Darrine was present when his twins entered the world.

Darrine is rediscovering the joy and mystery of life. At first, it was learning to do the little things again. Breathing freely. Sitting up. Holding a fork. Taking a shower. And then it was realizing that he had been given a second chance and needed to use his time well. When the medics who picked up his bloodied body came to visit him in the hospital, they were stunned. He wasn't supposed to survive. There is something special about you, they said. God has special plans for you. Those plans include coaching basketball and motivational speaking. Darrine wants people to understand that one isn't defined by the state of the body, but by the state of the soul.

No matter how tough life's circumstances may be, there's always a light somewhere. Darrine is living proof of that, floating like a butterfly when everything seemed lost.



MONICA: SAVED BY COMPASSION



After a turbulent childhood, Monica Coe's mother asked her to leave their home. With nowhere else to go, Monica ended up in Shepherd's Cove Emergency Shelter. She was angry and disoriented, leading to more troubled behavior. As a result, she was transferred to the Patricia Handy Place for Women shelter in D.C. There, she had good case managers who helped her bring more meaning into life.

Monica started loving herself more, did things that made her happy, rekindled old friendships, and made new ones. She got a job at Burlington Coat Factory because the interviewer saw her future and not her past. Monica realized that family doesn't have to be formed with blood ties; it exists in many different forms

“It is a beautiful feeling when others step in,” she said. “This human warmth saved me from the precipice. I was so depressed. The supportive people along the way gave me light.”

In 2021, she was offered a room at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA on Rhode Island Avenue and a chance to become more independent. She loved the freedom of movement, the modern rooms, and the color purple of the interior design.

Monica handled her freedom so well that she was one of three recipients of the 2023 Steinbruck Award organized by N Street Village. This award honors those who have transitioned successfully from homelessness to independence. Monica credits her transformation to an inner flame of hope inside that was kindled by faith, the support of others, and grit. “I had to find the true Monica and then never look back,” she said. “This needed courage.” Now, Monica is getting an IT certification and finishing her associate degree. She has lost 57 pounds..



“Each plant goes through different stages in different circumstances. One has to keep watering the plant and soon it will blossom. When we blossom, life happens.”
– Monica Coe.

Food for All DC
1810 16th St, NW
Washington, DC 20009
240-505-4607
<https://foodforalldc.org/>