

# Change Your Art Project

By Anna Von Reitz



I know a young woman who is like the archetype of the now-grown teenager gone wrong. She has made every mistake and suffered every misfortune a young person might make.

She got married young, straight out of High School, and settled down to have three children in rapid succession. The first ten years were tough, but unremarkable, except for the fact that this particular young woman never passed her driver's test and was dependent on public transit or rides from other people to get around.

Then, her husband started having seizures and injured his back during one of these mysterious episodes. He was unable to continue working, couldn't drive, and now she had to put up with both his seizures and his episodes of frustrated rage. And three small children, the youngest still wearing diapers.

One night, in a fit of pain and rage over his own condition, her husband threw her to the floor and she fractured a vertebra, so now, she was injured, too, and in constant back pain that won't let her sit or stand in any one position for long.

And, taking care of him and three small children.

She finally divorced him, but aside from the burdens of his care, her life did not improve. It got worse. With no child care available in the community or from relatives, she couldn't work away from home.

She tried a variety of jobs that offered a small income doing things like typing and medical billing from home, but her own injuries and the constant interruptions of three rambunctious children made it very difficult. And long stints sitting in a chair at a keyboard made her back injury worse.

Her doctor gave her more painkillers.

She got addicted to them and couldn't get through a day without them, even though they made her somewhat groggy. Her mistakes on the job increased and the bewildered children responded with more and more wild behavior, destroying the furniture, breaking dishes, and screaming to get attention from their Mom.

This went on for four years. The baby was still in diapers. None of the children knew how to act in public and received whatever socialization they could come by from their on-again-off-again attendance at the local public elementary school.

I became acquainted with this horribly dysfunctional situation and paid for driving lessons, so that she could finally have a car and be able to do all the things that normal parents do. She finally reached that milestone a couple years before her thirtieth birthday and life improved.

Unfortunately, the children were getting older and stronger and were just as wild as ever, and one night, the middle sister threatened the eldest with a kitchen knife in self-defense from a beating from her older sibling. Nobody was actually injured, but the die had been cast.

Child Protective Services entered into their lives and that resulted in all three kids being taken into "temporary" Foster Care.

The Mother cried disconsolate for days and days afterward and frantically did absolutely everything CPS required, all the parenting classes, all the drug tests, all the mental evaluations and on and on and on.... to no avail.

After three years of this, she had become severely depressed and in addition to the prescription painkillers, she started to drink and take other kinds of drugs.

Within a year she was selling herself to anybody who could afford a hundred dollars for a hit. She still had public housing and was still working on a plan to get her kids back, but nobody watching this drama had any illusions about that.

Her kids had been diagnosed as "Special Needs" and CPS was making nearly \$30,000 a day off of them. No way were those children ever going home again to live in poverty with a drug-addicted Mother half out of her mind with grief and loneliness.

Just wasn't going to happen.

Through one of her druggy friends, she met a drug dealer who invited her into his stable of drug prostitutes, and she began more organized turning of "tricks" -- now she had an income, of sorts, though she was still spending most of it on drugs and remained with a bad crowd.

Some of the addicts who were her friends and junior drug dealers were homeless, and they invited themselves and their pit bulls to move into her public housing apartment, where they were caught dealing drugs after kicking her out of her own place.

They stole everything they could and wrecked everything else.

Her Father gave her a twenty year-old Buick Regal and she lived in that for several months, but her pimp threw her out of his network because she was too "unreliable" and she sat on the curb in front of her borrowed car and started screaming, "Life sucks!" at the top of her lungs, and "I don't want to live anymore!" and swearing like a trucker.

She was out of painkillers and out of options. And then, she found out that she was pregnant, out of wedlock, by her former pimp.

One would think that things could not possibly get worse. In constant pain, without her kids, no job skills, nothing in the world but a borrowed car and a few clothes, and now pregnant out of wedlock by a drug dealer, you'd think she'd sunk as low as a person could go --- until the police impounded her Dad's car for expired registration, and that really did leave her with nothing at all and no one but him left in the world.

So, she hitch hiked twenty miles home to her Dad's house, and arrived in time to find a County Home Care Nurse taking him to the hospital. He had suffered a stroke and was unresponsive. So she sat on the porch of her childhood home, locked out of the house, and howled like a dog.

She had to break into her Dad's place to have shelter and the police found her there the next day, coming down from all the drugs and half out of her mind. They arrested her for housebreaking and vagrancy and hauled her to the nearest facility, where she sat and waited for what would next befall her. And her unborn baby.

The nurses encouraged her to have an abortion, for obvious reasons. She resisted. They were very convincing. She still resisted. After everything else, three hots and a cot seemed like a blessing. She didn't have to search for a toilet. She had one in her cell.

Her Dad, who had recovered consciousness, wouldn't press charges for her housebreaking and said she could go home and stay there while he was in the hospital, so she did. Another relative brought her food. She was sitting at the old kitchen table crying her eyes out over what her life had become, when the postman came with an overdue tax notice.

She called me up and screamed, "Life sucks!" as hard as she could over the phone. It was a voice so full of rage and despair and hopelessness it seemed to have acquired a body and face of its own.

Her Dad was dying, the government was about to take the house, she was pregnant out of wedlock, worn out, exhausted, her Dad's car was impounded, she had no skills, nobody on earth, had lost her kids to the Foster Care system, she was addicted to drugs but "clean" for two months ever since she found out she was pregnant, and no money at all.

But she wouldn't kill her own baby, she was still fighting for him.

"Life sucks!" she screamed at me again, from thousands of miles away.

I am sure that at that moment, it was more than true for her.

"I don't want to live!" she said vehemently, "I can't.... I can't go on like this!"

She was hyperventilating and sobbing and catching her breath and sobbing some more.

Somehow, out of eight billion people on this planet, it had come down to me to help. So I did. And things got better. The key to making things better for her and for millions of people like her, is a single truth, a secret they never teach you in school: life isn't something that happens to you.

Life isn't an object, something outside yourself that you can point at and say, "Life sucks!" and walk away from.

Life is something that you create for yourself. Your life. Your own art project. And you make it what it is, by the choices you make for yourself.

So, when you don't like your life, you have to change your choices.

Change your art project.

We [sat](#) there, connected by a telephone line, and we built a new life for her, based on the one positive choice she'd made and stuck to. Her unselfish love for her unborn child.

You start where you are and with what you've got. Find that one good, positive thing to build upon. And keep on building.

There are no guarantees, but life is, generally speaking, what we make of it, the sum total of everything we choose. We choose the colors and the shapes and ways that take us forward, the reasons that motivate us, and most of all, we choose to love.

Love is a decision. It's not something that floats in the air, or a chubby cherub with a bow and arrow. We make the choice to love ourselves and to love each other, to love the Earth and to love Creation.

It's a constant process and a constant choice set before us.

So find the love in yourself and you will find a good life, too. You can change your art project and make new choices. It's all up to you.

Nobody ever told her that. She never thought of her life as an art project that she was creating herself. She didn't know that her life was her own.

She thought it was something coming at her from the outside, something she had no control over, something that happened to her, not because of her.

Everyone can make a new life for themselves, no matter how desperate things may seem, because it's always your choice what you think, what you value, what you love, what you believe. Those are your building blocks, and your color box. And you can always make a new choice. You can decide to value something new. You can believe something else. And you can do something different.

Maybe just a small thing or two at first.

Any choice for the better will change your life as a whole for the better. Even as simple a choice as brushing your teeth every day. Or deciding to pick up garbage cluttering the street in front of your house.

When it finally came home to this young woman that she was in charge of her own life and her own experiences, it was like a 5,000 lumen light going on. She started over and erased the mistakes. She regained her health. Got job skills. Got a job. Started earning enough to live on. Moved to a new place in a new state, away from her old scumbag "friends". Her new baby was born healthy and happy and whole, with a wise and sober and dedicated Mom to hold his hand and teach him that his life is his own.

His own creation. His own song. His own picture book. His own Magnum Opus.

So if you are facing sad and desperate times, remember that same lesson. It's your story, not anyone else's. You write it every hour of every day, based on the choices you make. And you can always make new choices.

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