

*"I'm standing there stuck with  
twenty dollars and a promise  
that you'll be back."*

## Shontae

**I** was an active, creative child who knew what I wanted and grew up to be a drag queen and I worked at it. I have always desired men, so I went for them. Other than that, I learned the rest along the way. Every now and then there are regrets. Yeah, there's a few, but my regrets don't come until after my early years. My early years, those are the ones I wish I could go back to. You know, those were the safe years. Especially if I could go back to before my sister Melody died, you know. Those were the real secure days, totally.

I know my parents loved me even during the hard times. Most definitely. Mommy always wanted us to learn to try to accept things as they are and not try to change them, be at peace with yourself. You know, that's what Mommy used to say all the time. Start with you, you know . . . start with yourself and . . .

I think my parents wanted me to be happy when I grew up. As for a profession, they wanted whatever I wanted. Mommy would even get in arguments with other people. Like, "You don't live . . . you just raise your children and do the best you can. You let them live their lives. All you can try to do is to be happy. Because the rest of this world is gonna try to sock it to you." That's what Mommy used to always try to tell us, "Just try to be happy, as long as it's not hurting nobody." But for my mother it was always about love. Mommy was one of the best women

in the world. I wish I had a chance to be a little better. I wish I hadn't said and did some of the things I put her through.

I would like being like my father too. He never minded nobody else's business. I would stay to myself like he does. I wouldn't involve myself in nothing that didn't concern me. And he always tried to say the best thing he possibly could about anybody. If he ain't have nothing nice to say about you at all, he ain't gonna talk about you. I'm just like that because I ain't gonna sit around and talk about nobody that I can't stand.

My parents got along beautifully. They were supportive of each other and very affectionate. They were never afraid to show their love for each other. The more people around, the more they showed off. Mommy was always pulling at Daddy. She would always be grabbing him and then they would start. Or there might be something on television or something or we might be playing records or something and they would start maybe like showing us an old dance or something. And you know as soon as one of them would try something everybody would fall out laughing. They had a happy marriage. Mommy was more quick-tempered than Daddy, but she was the power behind the throne. He was the power, don't get me wrong now. He called the shots. But she ran everything.

I never knew my real parents. But my adoptive parents used to tell me the story. How I found out about it was when I went to school and a teacher called me by a different name and I couldn't understand that. We were in kindergarten and I really panicked. When I came home, I explained it all to my mother. She tried to explain it to me by showing me this birth certificate that I was this person. I didn't understand what adoption meant. Now I understand what adoption is, but then I didn't know.

But my adoption was never legal. Mommy knew my mother and from what I hear I would be better off with Mommy. I'm saying it wasn't like I was given away to strangers. See, Mommy had been known for having foster children. Matter of fact they were known for taking care of adopted children. Plus Mommy ran a day care center, that's how she made her money. There was always a bunch of cousins. We always called each other cousins and brothers and sisters and stuff.

So Mommy and my mother made some kind of a deal. I think my mother was supposed to come back and get me, but Mommy said that if she was to have me, start raising me, that she didn't want her to change her mind to come back and get me. I think she had a certain period or so, and when she did come back, what she seen she felt that it was better off if I stayed there. They didn't try to make her sound like a terrible person, but they also spoke well for themselves.

I know very little about my real parents. I'm supposed to have had a uncle. Now this is how I knew that the teacher was calling me by a wrong name. He had sons too. This boy Kevin Housemeyer used to always call me his cousin. See, my real name is Marion Housemeyer, okay. But the adoption was never legal, so my name was never changed. I was raised under Ralph Daniels. See, I couldn't understand, me having this uncle on the other block. I just figured that in that community everybody called everybody aunts and uncles. So when I did like get interested in my own family, it was like too late to go back, like even try to find the Housemeyers because they were gone. I had already blossom to the person that I was . . . that I liked myself, being myself.

My mother died a year ago, in '90. She was seventy-one years old. My father was much older than my mother. He was almost like eighty-two when he died. My father just died. These were the parents that raised me from the time I was three months old. Mommy was from Seneca County and her father, they're all from New York to New Jersey. And my father, he was from a place called Columbia. I don't know if it was Georgia or South Carolina. Must've been like a little township called Columbia or something like that.

They had other adopted children too. Well, they were relations too. Some of them were cousins. I think me and Jane like were really only the real outsiders. I was a very special child to my mother because she always wanted her own little boy, which I think that's what soften me up so much. We were like very spoiled, very sheltered. Plus she was a much older woman. She was like forty-eight years old when she got me. And she was more like a grandmother than a mother in her affections. Mommy was very overprotective. She was sweet as pie, you know. Anything you want, if she could give it to you, you got, you know. By

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her being little settled then and able to afford adopted children, we grew up pretty much, you know, not middle class, but I mean we didn't hurt for anything. At least in my younger ages. As you got older we started having more responsibilities.

Things started coming down on me kind of hard because I was a little different. I didn't care for basketball and rope climbing. I didn't like getting dirty. Plus we stayed in church a lot, and we had enough people in our family, which were mainly girls anyway. So what went on a lot of times was a lot of bickering, a lot of chitchat, a lot of chatter, a lot of cooking, a lot of home basting. So there wasn't a lot of sport, active sports family, where there was a lot of male dominance. Even when I was put in those type of situations I would find myself uncomfortable and request my mother that I not return.

But nothing really happen before the age of nine, because I really had a cherished little childhood. I didn't have a disturbed childhood. It was no family beatings, no mother and father romping and raving and fighting. They barely cursed. They were church-going little people. Everything was really family. It was Christmas eve, big Easter celebrations. There were always family picnics and gathering for the summertime. We were always closely knit. Like we used to have family reunions at Uncle Buster's, that was my mother's youngest brother. He was like the well-to-doer in the family. He drove one of those trucks. He had a big family too. Anyway, he made a lot of money. So every summer that's where family reunion would be held, because Uncle Buster had a nice, real big home in Franklin, in Seneca County. My mother was crazy about all that. We used to go there a lot.

I didn't get along with Uncle Buster at all. He was the one that told my mother I was gonna grow up and be a little sissy and sent my mother home crying one time. I was about five when that happened. Because his son had one of those bicycles I used to ride all the time and he had took the training wheels off it. So Tommy knew how to ride his bike, but I didn't know how to ride his bike without the training wheels. So Tommy was holding me on the bike while we riding. We were just kids. So when he let me go, like his father lets him go—you know he's imitating his father—and I only went like twelve inches away from Tommy and fell and I skinned my knee and I cried. And Uncle Buster

held this against me because I cried. And then because I cried, then my mother came running to me, you know with all this extra attention and stuff. "You gonna make him a little faggot," you know. Now I can remember that back at five years old. That made a real impression, especially to see my mother crying too from him saying something so mean.

So there wasn't too much going on before the age of nine. My first turning point I think it was my cousin. Aunt Jackie lived up Eighteenth and York. Mommy raised her too. This is how much older my mother is. My older cousin, Derrick, was like a teenager, but he was a real big guy, so he looked even older. I went up to Eighteenth Street to spend the weekend with Aunt Jackie, and she had to go to choir rehearsal or something. Left me down the house with Derrick. Derrick wanted me to mess around with him. I didn't understand really what he was really talking about, but I knew that it was something different, that it was something dirty.

I was about ten or eleven, and Derrick gave me fifty cents for me to follow his lead, to do just what he wanted me to do. It was a lot of touching and feeling and rubbing. I doubt very seriously if he really knew too much about what he was doing. This happened, but see there was no real penetration.

He had like a deck of cards, right. And when you flipped them over there were pictures of people doing things. These were nude pictures, but it was a deck of cards. So first we played cards and we only played a game or something like "War." So as we played "War," each time like he would win or something, he make a suggestion about something.

I don't remember exactly everything. I can still see the pictures with the cards. Somehow another we ended up nude. I think like every time he won at "War," or something—I think that when I first heard about that's how you play strip poker, that's when I first heard that phrase—then we ended up nude, and it was getting close to the time for my mother . . . and then like I was ready to put my clothes right back on because all of a sudden I got frightened. And I didn't want to play this game no more, and that when he bribe me with the money. Only thing I can remember is that we just got in the bed together. I don't actually remember no real penetration. There was only sex foreplay.



Then Aunt Jackie move down in Georgetown. That's when . . . it was maybe a year later when we were down there then and Derrick did want to penetrate me. I was scared, but I had been penetrated before from a boy up the street named Frankie Bailey. I was about eleven, 'cause by thirteen I was . . . in junior high. I was quite active then. I made him give me a dollar. So every Sunday, Aunt Jackie would be going to church and I would be all dressed leaving like I was going to church. Instead of going to church, I would head around Aunt Jackie's house with Derrick. And then as each weekend went by, maybe a month or so, then I would start asking like for fifty cents more. Till I got about thirteen years old I start wanting five dollars. But I realized that you could get money for doing it, right, and Derrick was like a steady trick then. I realized I could get easy money for doing it. It became more . . . it became more . . . more of a regular. I mean an expectation. I could do so and so and so. Everybody didn't have money and stuff all the time. So when I end up having extra little cash nobody really questioned it because they figured that Mommy always gave it to me, you know.

I don't know what to really call me and Derrick because I got to the point where I would say I was using Derrick. First of all, being . . . keeping it quiet, you know because he was so much older. He already knew better. Really with Derrick it probably would have been that one little affair. He was bisexual and he liked sex. And then knowing he was getting it on a regular basis, every Sunday, you know, like he was expecting it himself too. It was mostly with Denny and Frankie and them. Boys that I really liked that I had little encounters with, like under the schoolyards or in one of the school bathrooms. And then we could do this while we're here and then the rejection I would get afterwards, like when we were amongst our friends, you know, in public. Then label our ass with, "Here come the sissies!" But yet just two hours ago, you know, you were all over me. You know, dealing with the mental effects of that.

So up until the time I was ten I was pure as the driven snow. I wanted to discover myself, but I was afraid of myself. Because I wasn't into women. I didn't sit around and talk about girls and stuff like boys do, you know. I knew there was a lot of difference to me anyway. A lot of things that were supposed to be—I suppose what society would call