



琳达曾痛失儿子的抚养权，时刻提醒自己成为孩子们的榜样。

年轻妈妈吸毒 痛失儿子抚养权 惨痛代价 懊悔一生

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2003年，琳达通过朋友认识比她年轻八岁的现任丈夫，丈夫是一名灭虫公司员工，两人婚后育有7岁至14岁的两儿一女，过着简单而幸福的生活。

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Translation:

Young mother takes drugs and loses custody of son

The painful price became her regret of a lifetime

By Ng Peiyin

She was arrested by officers from the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) while taking drugs. The 24-year-old young mother brought her daughter, then one and a half years old, along to the police car for detention. She also lost the custody of her six month-old son. After her release, she did not claim back the custody as she did not want to disrupt his life – and the cost of losing her son remained a lifelong regret.

19 years later, Linda (43, cleaner) can still feel the impact of heroin and excruciating pain on her body. However, the physical pain is nothing compared to the heartache she has felt.

Raised by her mother, Linda has two brothers who would often bring home drug-addict friends. Out of curiosity, Linda, then 13, started taking drugs from marijuana to heroin and had since become addicted, neglecting her family.

Linda recalled that since 1996, she was sent to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre twice for her drug addiction, but that did not make her change. She later had two children, a boy and a girl, with her then-boyfriend.

In 1999, 24-year old Linda was caught in the act again by CNB officers. Her daughter of one and a half years was too young to be separated from her mother, so Linda had to bring her to the police car. Both were detained in the lock-up.

To make matters worse, Linda was separated from her six month-old son since that day. Working as a gardener, Linda's mother was unable to look after two grandchildren at the same time. That left Linda with no choice but to hand over her son's custody to his paternal grandparents and made them his legal guardians.

Linda was convicted and sentenced to three and a half years in prison, which was a difficult phase for her. "I was afraid of losing more than I already had. I needed to change for my children."

After regaining her freedom, Linda was initially hoping to reunite with her son but was stopped by her mother's advice. "My mother was right – I did not want to ruin the bonds built between my son and his grandparents, and I would not want him to feel hurt."

In 2003, Linda met her now-husband who is eight years younger, through mutual friends. Her husband works in pest control. The couple now have three children aged between 7 to 14 years (two boys and a girl), and lead a simple yet happy life.

Absent father fell sick and suddenly returned to live with her

Before Linda turned 40, her father only appeared in her life three times and did not take care of the family. As he aged, his physical health deteriorated and required care, hence he is now back at home to be taken care by his daughter.

In Linda's life, her absent father was never home and never supported the family financially. "From what I can remember, I only saw him three times before I turn 40: when I was 10, 21 and 27 when I got married."

Not long ago, her 76-year old father suddenly returned to Linda's life. Because of his health conditions, he required care and is currently living with her.

Linda said that she had let go of any anger and resentment held against him in the past. For now, her biggest wish is that she can live in peace and harmony with her family.

Her mother could not bear to see her in prison clothes

By Ng Peiyin

Linda's mother never visited her in prison. It was until many years later that Linda realised the reason - she could not bear to see her daughter wearing prison garb.

Linda recalled that when her mother learnt of her drug addiction, she did not say a word. Even when she was about to serve her sentence, her mother only said that she would not be visiting her in prison.

"She never visited me, only my eldest brother came once in a while. At that time, I could not understand why and just felt very hurt."

After Linda was transferred to a halfway house later, she noticed that her mother would make time to visit her regularly. Her mother was a woman of few words. She eventually became more appreciative of her mother's love when she took care of her mother during her hospitalisation for six months.

"Although she never said the words to me, I could tell from her body language that the reason she had never visited me in prison was because she could not bear to see me in prison clothes. That would have been heart-breaking for her."

1500 children of ex-offenders have received bursary awards

Children of ex-offenders who are from low income families received bursary awards as a reward for their excellent academic performance.

On 14 December 2018, 315 students received bursary awards and book grants from the Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society (ISCOS), each ranging from \$100 to \$500. Since 2011, ISCOS has given out bursary awards and book grants annually, with over 1500 children benefitting from the initiative.

Linda's three youngest children were among the bursary award recipients this round. In Linda's view, the sum of money is an affirmation of her children's efforts and a positive motivation to keep them going.

Iryqa, 20, who is currently studying fashion design at ITE College East is also one of the recipients. Although her father was an ex-offender, she had never felt that her background was different from others.

In her course of study, financial struggles have been her biggest hurdle. "School materials and assignments all need to be printed, but I don't have enough pocket money to cover the printing costs. Hence, I will work hard every year to obtain the bursary award to afford the fees."