

Case Study #1: Lillian

Lillian grew up in a household with five kids and was a middle child. This was a good compromise of sorts. She wasn't the oldest who often bore the wrath of an angry father and ended up helping an overwhelmed mother. And she wasn't the youngest who still had the longest time to go before being old enough to move out of the house. It tugged at her heart to watch her youngest siblings crying, but there were days when she was grateful for the cover that it provided.

School was a safe place for the most part. The rules were clear and she knew what was expected of her. She did the work that she could but struggled with math and spelling. Extra help may have gotten her over the hurdle, but she would have had to ask for it and that was not comfortable. Adults were people whom you dealt with when you had to, but you didn't go looking for interactions. A smile curled up the side of her face when the new history teacher looked her way. He seemed young and a little more like the kids—not entirely put together most days.

“Hey girl!” she heard from across the cafeteria. Was Jackson really calling out to her? That boy was hard to say no to and indeed, he was calling out to her. The next few weeks were a blur. Walking home with a boy on her shoulder felt special. Sending him on his way a block before home seemed a necessity. He wasn't a secret but there was no reason to draw her father's attention to herself. Life was a lot easier when you could slip in the door and make it upstairs without being noticed. But that Jackson was a sweet talker. It felt so good to be the object of his affections, so saying no just didn't seem like an option and that is how Lillian found herself pregnant and on the street at 16. “Not staying in this house, pregnant and all!” her father yelled as he ordered her out. She didn't want to stay anyway so she gathered a bag with a few things and ran off.

It wasn't easy being on the street. Living under a bridge near the town center, Lillian fell in with others who had landed on hard times. There was no time for schoolwork, looking out for herself and trying to get a decent meal at least once a day took priority. She knew she shouldn't do drugs, but some days she just needed to check out and it was the easiest way. Lillian missed home and her siblings, especially the little ones. It was hard to think about the future at all except that her stomach kept growing.

It was then that the welfare worker came around and told her that she would try to get her a bed in a local facility. That was how she ended up with a roof over her head when the baby came. But she had to stay clean. The rules were clear. When her little Luna arrived, she was overjoyed and overwhelmed. She made a vow to enter the job training program that she was offered and to turn her life around. And she tried. When she got the flu and the baby got sick, it was just more than she could do. She stopped showing up to classes and got a stern warning. She didn't tell them what was hard, she apologized and felt bad about herself. The worse she felt about keeping up, the more she spiraled and eventually she sought out the solace of her old friends from under the bridge. They just got her. Their company was a warm embrace, but when she didn't make it back on time to get her baby from day care and it was clear that she had broken the rule about drugs, the center drew a hardline. They called Child Protective Services and they kicked her out.

Lillian felt broken. She went back to the bridge, but the pull of knowing that Luna was out there tugged at her heart. She stopped doing drugs and crashed with a high school friend whose parents offered her a job in their bakery, but only temporarily unless things went really, really well. She reminded herself that

even though her bosses were like parents, they weren't her parents and she really needed this second chance...

Consider Lillian's story in light of the session on Amygdala Hijack. Reflect on the questions below:

1. Think about Lillian's past. What are some sources of trauma that might serve as triggers for her?
2. What other emotional challenges either exist now for Lillian or exist as ghosts from her past?
3. Consider what kinds of communication skills Lillian might need as she learns how to work in the bakery. What aspects of those skills might she excel at? What might be really hard for her?
4. If you could have a conversation with Lillian, what might you wish to say to her?
5. What might you want her to understand about Amygdala Hijack?
6. If you could help Lillian become a "fast fish learner" what are some of the things that you hope she would do in support of her own learning and work performance?

Note: All cases are fictional and any similarities to persons living or otherwise is coincidental.