

Autobiography

Hello there! My name is CaSara Danielle Vanover and I am 33 years old. I was born on February 12, 1988 in Bluefield, West Virginia to Willard and Cynthia Vanover. I was named after the song, “Lost in Emotions” by Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam. It was a song that my mother enjoyed listening to in the late 80’s. When I finally understood the story behind my name, I, of course, researched the song and its lyrics. Come to find out, the lyrics are actually “qué será qué será.” The meaning behind qué será, será (whatever will be, will be) could not be more different than my personality. I am quite anxious and have tendencies to worry a lot. Even as a young child, I can remember being very anxious and worrying most days. It was not until I obtained my degree in Social Work that I realized the extent to my personality and the person I am.

Aside from being anxious and worried, I find meaning in helping those who struggle with similar disorders which led me to me to a degree in Social Work. As a young child, I can remember assisting those in need and caring for my father who is disabled with Polio. It was because of him that I learned the importance of not judging but enhancing the lives of others. As I continued to grow – mind, body, and soul, I started to realize the hardships my family endured because of my father’s disability. Our family was limited to even our own “American Dream.” From receiving monthly food stamps to a disability check, my parents struggled to make ends meet, but they always made sure we were happy, loved, and had stability. Our family never missed a meal and we had one another to count on.

Some of my favorite memories that make my heart smile are those of my childhood. I can remember summer cookouts in the back yard, decorating the Christmas Tree, Thanksgiving dinner, my dad building me a dollhouse to play in, hide and go seek, spot light, and kickball or baseball with my siblings and cousins. Those were the times of my life and I cannot imagine a

better childhood. However, I know not all have the experience I have had which also led me to help those who struggle like my parents did, but find themselves further down on the totem pole. I want to make a difference – a difference in your life, my client's lives, and a change of growth for myself.

Life has been difficult and I often find myself hurting; but being a social worker, helps me to empathize with my clients. From experiencing poverty to witnessing substance abuse, I can relate to my clients and provide first-hand experience and knowledge to move forward and to provide a path that is worth taking. Poverty limited my family from experiencing a lavish life, but we could not have been happier with one another. Substance abuse started the fall of my happy family. My brother who battled drug addiction for years ended up passing away in September 2014. Traumatic flashbacks consumed my memory when notified of my brother's passing from the first time I had witnessed him unresponsive due to substance use. Unfortunately for me, the trauma still lingers. Sadly, my father, who I had always known as being strong, courageous, and unbreakable, shattered before my eyes as he found my brother deceased from an overdose. Our hearts have yet mended from this loss and I imagine we will always feel emptiness.

Though I try to keep his memory alive, the loss of my brother is a different grief than I have ever experienced. With his death came guilt, heartache, sadness, remorse, and a roller coaster of so many other emotions. His death also provided me with compassion for those who battle substance use disorder every day. It provided me with the strength to be a helping hand for those fighting to take back their lives. Though his death has been more heartache than not, I found that his death gave me a different outlook on life. It also caused me more anxiety, worry,

depression, and obsessive thinking, but that is a separate story in itself and will be discussed later. My brother's death followed the passing of my mother who was, truly, my best friend.

My mother passed away in November 2009 in Bowman-Gray/Wake Forest Baptist Hospital from sepsis. Words cannot describe what I felt then and now for the loss of my mother. I am often numb to her passing and find myself missing her every day. For my mother, I prayed. I prayed for healing, for her to be pain free, and to be fine. At one point in my life, I was angry with my beliefs and Christianity. However, prayer was answered, but not in the way I had hoped for. She is now healed, pain free, and living a glorious life in heaven. She no longer hurts and she has found peace. I think that the loss of a loved one or loved ones made me realize that not everyone gets to experience the love, bond, and companionship that I was able to have with my mother and brother. It is the love, bond, and companionship that leaves us hurting and grieving. It is the relationships that I had with my mother and brother that I hope to instill in the clients that I work with. It is my hope and belief that I can touch the lives of many which brings me back to fulfilling a degree in social work.

After dealing with loss, I chose to run and escape the hurt and pain that I was feeling (though in all actuality it did not help). I enlisted in the West Virginia Air National Guard in Charleston, West Virginia where I spent a six years until concluding my contract. The West Virginia Air National Guard gave me opportunity to travel (which is wear my running comes into play), an interest in service before self, and development of enjoying a career that was bigger than just myself. The interest of social work followed me into my military career as I provided services to many in need from my fellow airmen to the communities of West Virginia.

Though at times, I often feel drained and lost in the field of social work, I continue to fulfill the need to encourage, teach, and support my colleagues, clients, and peers. It is my heart

that I dedicate in my field and area of expertise. I find myself avoiding failure by not trying. This is a flaw that I wish did not exist in me. The sky would be the limit if this flaw was non-existent. However, it exists and I have to find courage and affirmation to support myself. This flaw comes from my diagnosis of anxiety, obsessive compulsive thinking disorder, and depression. If you remember, I told you I would touch base on these things later. Well, it is now later.

After experiencing loss and trauma, I find myself worrying, being anxious, obsessively thinking, and sometimes feeling depressed. Also, I should mention that there may be some genetic factors that partially constitute for my diagnoses. I have adapted to these challenges and I am now more in tuned with myself than I have ever been before. Life has challenged me from day one – from being blessed with a beautiful name to which is opposite of my personality to bearing witness to loss, mental health, poverty, disabilities, but having the opportunity to love and be loved and having parental stability, I have learned that I am who I am because of my life experiences, hardships, and battles.

Moreover, I like the empathetic person I have come to be because I am the light and wonders for those who may have lost their way. I am sometimes the smile behind one's healing and I am sometimes the voice of reasoning. Though the field of Social work challenges me day in and day out, I am grateful to have graduated from Concord University with my Bachelors of Social Work in 2018 and I am proud to be continuing my education with Concord University in the Master of Social Work Program. Life may bring many challenges, but I myself find the force, strength, and structure to keep going. I believe my message can be heard by many and in turn enhance the well-being of my clients, colleagues, and the profession. As a new step in my life, I look forward to having a seat on the NASW Board of Directors to learn and enhance my skills.