Max & Tyra

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Illustrated by Emma Fisher
I will *always* remember that day. The ambulance sirens blared as they took my Mum away.
My sister, Tyra, and I were sitting on the front steps when Nan came rushing up the driveway with tears running down her face.

‘Never again’, she said.

‘I will never let this happen to you kids again’.

And that’s when it all started.
Or, should I say, that’s when it all ended.

At that moment it felt like our normal family fell apart. We moved in to Nan’s house and that is where we are now, 47 Elm Tree Grove.

We’ve been here for about a year.
It is only now I realise that there’s no such thing as a ‘normal’ family, anyway.
We always knew that Mum had a problem with drugs.

I guess we just didn’t know how bad it was going to get.
Sometimes things were great and we thought she was getting better.
Mum got up in the morning, helped us make breakfast and took us to school.
But other times I knew she wasn’t going so well and things got pretty crazy.
I used to feel like I always had to look after Tyra and I wished I could be just like some of the other kids at school without that sort of responsibility.
Either way, it never really worked for long and we always ended up back at Nan’s.

Sometimes Mum went in to hospital for a while to try and come off the drugs.

Other times she tried to do it by herself at home.
Seeing what drugs did to Mum taught me one thing for sure. I will never let that happen to me or Tyra, if I can help it.

For ages I blamed myself for what happened to Mum. I thought, ‘If only I had taken better care of her or behaved a bit better, maybe things would be different’.
But now I know that what happened to Mum wasn’t my fault. There was nothing we could have done. Mum was the only one who could change things.
Tyra is going OK but she’s had some trouble with her schoolwork. Sometimes she finds it really hard to concentrate, especially with reading and maths.
She gets some extra help in class and tutoring after school.
Tyra’s found it pretty tough with friends at school sometimes, too.
But now she’s started going to a group with other girls from families just like ours.

They talk about these kinds of problems and think of ways to deal with them. Tyra loves going to the group. She’s made some good friends there, and it’s helped her with the other girls at school, too.
I hate talking about how I feel, but I know now that if I don’t it can get me in to trouble. I can get really angry and lose my temper.
Tyra and I’ve both found that it’s good to talk about how we’re feeling with someone we trust.
Sometimes I talk to Mr K, who was my teacher the year that we moved to Nan’s. He knows where I’m coming from and he’s a great [listener].
I really miss Mum. I think about her every day, and sometimes at night I’ve heard Tyra crying.
When we’re sad, Nan makes us a hot chocolate and we talk about the **good times** we had together. We remember the fun things we did with Mum or the silly things she said.
Nan says that when Mum was young she was good at sport like me. She shows us the **scrapbook** that she kept about Mum with her certificates and ribbons that she won.
Mum also really loved making things, just like Tyra does. Nan’s kept some of the beautiful jewellery that Mum made when she was younger.
Living with Nan is pretty good.

We’re safe here and we know that Nan really cares about us.

She doesn’t always understand some of the things that we’re into and she’s hopeless on the computer. But she gets up every morning to help us with breakfast and to make sure we have lunch for school.
It’s nice to know that there’s someone else looking out for Tyra, too.
Although we’ve both found it hard, things are getting easier every day. The kids at school don’t seem to ask that many questions any more. They have accepted that we live with our Nan and that is just the way it is.
Things are looking pretty good for me and Tyra. Tyra got her highest mark on a maths test last week, and she’s been put up another level in reading. I just got into an awesome soccer training squad.
Nan is really proud of us.
I think we are going to be OK.
The Mirabel Foundation assists children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental illicit drug use and are now in the care of extended family (kinship care). Mirabel believes that every child deserves a childhood and its mission is to break the destructive cycle of addiction and disadvantage.
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