

Shanice Brown: Standing before the world

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Reporter intern brings strength, passion to exploration of technology, youth and culture

“Sitting here at this desk in the Insight News office is a surreal experience for me because I'm reminiscing on where I was and how I moved to where I am now,” said Shanice Brown, reflecting on her first day of work as a reporter intern for Insight News.

Being a teenager can be a confusing and complicated part in one's life. With hormones going wild and a young person trying to find herself, it's hard to believe that things can get more challenging than that. That is far from the truth. As a newly turned 17-year-old, this bowl of craziness is something that Brown is grateful for, she said. The simple reason why Brown gladly embraces this chaos is because this is her first year living a teenage life.

Since the age of 14 Brown has been battling multiple issues and is still currently battling some.

“I've suffered from multiple sexual abuses and sexual assaults, starting at 10. Those events warped my mind and I turned into a different person,” she said.

As the years went by, her troubles piled on. “I became sexually active, I started smoking marijuana and drinking large amounts of alcohol. By the time I was 14, I had experienced more than others my age. That was also the first time I went to chemical dependency treatment,” Brown said.

Since June 25, 2008, Brown has been in-and-out of various treatment centers and hospitals.

“I've spent one year and four months in treatment for the past two years. I've struggled to maintain my sobriety and had difficulties with creating a healthy relationship with my mother. These past two years have been amazing simply because of this week. If it wasn't for these past two years, I wouldn't be in the position I am in now,” she said

On July 14, Brown turned 17-years-old.

“It was my first teen age birthday sober and out of treatment,” she said. But for Brown the week continued to get better! “July 15 was a celebration for me. I have one year of sobriety. I never thought that I would see this day,” she said.

Brown believes that these two days are the core and shape of her life.

“If I choose to use chemicals again, all of the privileges that I am experiencing in my life right

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now will instantly crash and burn and I am not willing to lose what I have gained.”

This fall, Brown will be a senior at Robbinsdale Cooper High School.

“This is my first time in mainstream schooling. I have started the college application process and have taken the ACT. This is a big moment in my life because I'll be the first in my family to graduate high school and the first to attend college,” she said. “During my drug use, my education was no longer a priority in my life. I failed class after class, lost credits and got kicked out of schools. Now, I only need three credits to graduate. I actually have the option to graduate early or do Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO). Now, I have a strong chance of getting into college and earning scholarships. My future is beyond bright.”

That's not where things end. Brown recently had an opportunity to attend a two-week residential camp at St. Thomas University. The program, Journalism ThreeSixty, gave 13 students an opportunity to experience the life of a professional journalist. They were taken on tours through Pioneer Press, Star Tribune, KARE 11 and Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). The students were able to see the lives of reporters and join in on journalism first hand.

“My partner and I were assigned to the broadcast team and not only were we able to learn the multimedia elements of journalism, but we were able to talk to many amazing people and we received a chance to tell a truly touching video on teenagers and gun violence,” she said.

Through that program Brown developed the courage to seek writing opportunities for the first time since being sober.

“I sent an email to Insight News asking about an internship and, surprisingly, I received an email back offering a summer internship. I was in shock and immediately responded. I waited for a response and my heart stopped when I received a phone call from them. This was it. My future was knocking at the door. I went to the interview and I was completely honest about who I am and my past,” she said.

Brown said she tried to contain her joy and the urge to jump up-and-down and scream after they told her that they wanted her as their intern.

“So, here I am, living something that is literally a dream-come-true.”

Brown is reporting on broadband (internet) technology. The assignment is part of the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC) Broadband Access Project (BAP). The project seeks to expand broadband awareness, access and usage in selected poverty areas in the Twin Cities. The Broadband Awareness Project is a University of Minnesota initiative funded by a three-year \$2.9 million grant from the Department of Commerce, by the University, and by other project participants.

“My assignment is to speak to those involved in this project and those in the community about the barriers to access, about usage, and about their views of broadband and technology. My stories will explore how people of color are taking today's technology in their own hands,” Brown

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said.

Brown says what she has experienced in her past has shaped her into the young woman that stands before the world today.

“Those experiences gave me strength, hope and determination to fight for the things that matter. I once had a love of writing until I gave it all up to be drunk and high. But now, that love and skill are back in my hands and are being used in ways I only imagined as a child. I'm here to stay. I won't allow myself to be drawn back into that dark era of my life. I have an internship as a writer, I have college and my senior year around the corner and I have my strength and a year's worth of health and sobriety. I'm to far-gone to step back down!” she said.