

Addiction: Ups, Downs and the Final Good-bye
Courtney Meeks

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Addiction: Ups, Downs and Final Good-bye
Judge Aurora Martinez Jones ID

“I am Aurora Martinez Jones, I’m the Associate Judge for Travis County Civil District Courts. I primarily hear cases involving Child Protective Services and I’m the presiding judge of the Family Drug Treatment Court. Our Family Drug Court has been around since 2008 having families involved where we are helping support parents while children remain in their care. We’ve worked very hard for this program to keep children out of foster care while we help their parents heal. Unfortunately, death is a part of what happens to people who are struggling to maintain recovery. And, we’ve had only three deaths in our program since we started. And, it’s never easy. This disease is strong and it is so hard to overcome. So, anytime we do experience a death, my court, my team, everyone involved, we take time to honor the people who weren’t quite able to beat this addiction. Working closely with people you get to know them. Every now and then you get to see their light inside when we get those moments of sobriety. And, you remember that person. But, what we definitely try not to do is blame ourselves because we know that’s an easy path to go down. But, it’s one of those stages of grief: it’s blaming yourself. And, I just work really hard to make sure we use each experience in a positive way to understand and deepen our connection to how

difficult the struggle is to be in recovery for the people that we work with. I'm Aurora Martinez Jones – presiding Judge of the Family Drug Treatment Court. And, you are listening to the Texas Standard.” (1:50)

LEAD:

The latest death Judge Aurora Martinez Jones is mourning, is the death of Courtney Meeks.

HER name may sound familiar to regular listeners because the Texas Standard's Joy Diaz began documenting HER life when SHE was pregnant and homeless in Austin.

As tough as it was to carry a pregnancy – in poor health - while camping in the woods, Meeks' biggest struggle was her addiction.

SCRIPT

Courtney Meeks was 32-years-old when she died in February.

In life, she had big brown eyes and dark brown hair

Randall Rice: “Oh, man – gosh – she was --- she was so beautiful” (:8)

She WAS. Randall Rice wasn't the only one who thought so.

But she was more than a pretty face and that's why he fell in love with her.

~~The couple soon formed a little family.~~

Courtney was studying to be a nurse.

Randall was in the police academy in Alvin, Texas.

Things weren't perfect --- Randall wasn't aware Courtney had some mental health issues --- but, THE TWO WERE in love and thought they could overcome anything.

They had a baby girl they named Kennedy.

BUT AFTER Kennedy was born ---- Randall says Courtney's personality changed.

Randall Rice: “Her postpartum was really off the charts and I knew something was wrong” (:3) I’m not sure if that was the catalyst.” (:2)

Whatever the catalyst - Courtney went from being a loving mother --- to being distant – almost like an elusive shadow.

By then, Randall was already a cop who had developed an intuition – an inner voice if you will - that told him Courtney had started using drugs.

Randall Rice: “I KNEW THAT scene. I know what an addict looks like. I know what a junkie looks like.” (:6)

Randall ALSO knew what-would-likely-happen-next if HE didn't get custody of Kennedy: foster care would likely step in and take his child.

The choices in front of him were tough.

~~∴ stay with the woman he adored at the risk of losing Kennedy—or~~

But he decided to turn his back on the woman he adored to protect his little girl.

~~He chose the latter.~~

Courtney moved to Austin AND her addiction began to weigh on her.

For a while she was still able to hold a job. BUT, she worked in hospital settings with easy access to medications --- that she combined with street drugs.

~~Finally,~~ In 2008 – it all came crashing - she lost her job -- her home --her truck.

The losses weren't only material - she missed out on every single milestone in Kennedy's life.

Randall Rice: “First day of school was really tough for Kennedy. I wish that her mom could've been there ~~to see her absolutely beautiful child, excel.~~” (:18)

In 2016 Courtney Meeks WOULD get the chance to be a mother again.

While pregnant we would meet at her camp in the woods. (Be careful --- THIS IS OUR CAMP)

She told me she was sick and that her drug use served many purposes: it dulled her mental illness AND masked her physical pain.

Courtney had MRSA --- a bacterial infection that causes lesions and is resistant to most antibiotics.

(LONG PAUSE)

In April of 2016, Courtney gave birth to baby Eve. The moment was bitter-sweet

Courtney Meeks: “She was a little premature and she's underweight and – her and I might have HIV. So, they're waiting for the test results.” (:12)

ONLY Courtney tested positive for HIV.

She ALSO tested positive for drugs.

So, newborn Eve went straight into foster care.

Courtney was able to get a spot into Judge Aurora Martinez Jones' drug court.

But just as it happened after giving birth to her first child – THIS delivery was tough and she overdosed a couple of times while in the program.

Her father – Denson Carman Fontenot – or “ Danny” – feared for HER life

Danny: “She’s not going to live to an old age.” (:1)

Danny lives in Beaumont and offered his daughter ALL he had to try and save her

Danny: “Keeping her here for a month or two while she detoxes and you come home and she’s gone.” (:7)

Without any income, Courtney would OFTEN steal to support her addiction.

Danny: “~~Oh, yeah. First time she got caught—you know?~~— after she was fixing to go to prison – that was 14 THOUSAND I whooped up on my charge card to pay the lawyer to keep her from going. I had barely got that paid off the charge card – there’s ANOTHER 12 thousand to keep her from going to prison [again].” (:19)

During this tumultuous time, DNA tests revealed Eve’s dad was a man by the name of Dustin Bowen. When HE learned, he could also enroll in drug court to get his life in order-- he signed up.

Dustin: “CPS offered me a great opportunity that I took.” (:4)

Dustin now works as a carpenter ///// [he] is drug free, no longer homeless AND – is rearing 2-year-old Eve on his own. As we talk, she watches TV nestled in the arms of her giant teddy bear.

Dustin: “THAT little girl is – God’s little gift to save my life.” (:4)

MANY PEOPLE tried to save Courtney’s life.

But she seemed to know the end was near.

In December 2018, she got her girls together and told them she had cervical cancer. 15-year-old Kennedy feared THAT Christmas might be her mom's last

Kennedy: “She always wanted me and Eve to be together – when I went to see her – me and Eve were sitting together and she was just like: I’m at my happiest point right now with you all – and that was really sweet.” (:13)

There were OTHER sweet moments in the girls' lives —~~moments where~~ in the words of Judge Martinez Jones — Courtney was able to SHINE BRIGHT.

One came when Kennedy was entering puberty.

Even though her mother was always absent, one day, as if by magic – a box with the perfect little bra -- appeared at her front door: a gift from Courtney.

(SOUNDS OF EVE)

Eve ALSO had one of those moments – she's unable to express much - although when she draws – she often draws her “mommy” **(roll her voice under)**

When she plays there's ONE gift her mother gave her - a scarf with orange and purple flowers she uses to twirl and dance while she makes up songs **(roll in sound)**

~~Through this journey,~~ Courtney Meeks enlightened my path too – she gave me permission to shine a light on her addiction because – she felt that - no matter how dim a light may be – it will always disperse darkness. I'm Joy Diaz for the Texas Standard