

Kimiko Robinson



A survivor who emerged from chaos and addiction to self-determination, joy and serenity

Kimiko Robinson is an elegant portrait of serenity, faith and discipline. Her steadfast pride and commitment to her work at the Greenville Mental Health Center's Snack Shack is obvious. But her transformation from chaos to control took many years.

During her teen and early adult years, life for Kimiko while growing up in southern California was far from serene. *"My mother focused on my younger sister's issues and I was a shy person- afraid to speak my mind about what was going on inside me. One moment I would be up...extremely energetic and in the blink of an eye I'd be going way down to sad and depressed. I'd make plans to do a cookout. Then when it came time to do it, I would back out, too overwhelmed. I was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, but at the time, I didn't know what was wrong with me."*

At seventeen when I got out into the world, all I wanted was to be in the crowd." So, she got into a crowd of older girls, and spent her time partying. In spite of attempts by her mother to provide guidance and direction, her partying and curiosity inspired her to try crack cocaine, a habit she held on to for seven years and a habit which led to her life of addiction, theft, abuse and prison. The crack and drugs introduced her to ten years of violent physical and emotional abuse by a "boyfriend" who used her addictions to control her. Homeless and living in a van, *"I missed my 20's and 30's"*, she says.

Kimiko's mother gave up trying to convince her to change her friends and her habits. She finally became so frustrated and disappointed with Kimiko's drug use that she terminated her relationship with her. Kimiko ultimately went to live with her grandmother who was used to the drug culture - as her own sons were on drugs. Kimiko had what she wanted, no supervision, no parent hassling her, and the freedom to do as she pleased.

Kimiko wasn't in the mood to listen to her mother anyway. She wanted to go her own way into a life of shoplifting, or "boosting", which became her real job every day for years. Her days were spent stealing from all types of stores. She looked like a respectable shopper, so stealing was easy and successful. During the nights, on street corners, she'd pop open the trunk of her car and either sell the goods she stole, or be carried off to in jail for selling stolen property. *"I lived a double life."* Kimiko said her mom didn't know about the stealing - just the drugs.

In 2010, at the age of 32, Kimiko was sentenced to a 16-month prison term. After three months, while still incarcerated, *"I opened my Bible and started reading Psalms."* Kimiko was offered

the opportunity to participate in a 16 month transitional program for women. She accepted. But at the last minute before entering the program's van, she changed her mind and abruptly left - knowing she faced a 16-month prison term if she was caught. Kimiko figured that her Bible study had changed her. She didn't need anything else.

Eventually, she knew she had to confront the 16 month sentence still hanging over her head. And, in Kimiko's words, she was "*tired of being tired.*" She went to her pastor, told her mother, and got a sponsor for her drug addictions. Kimiko was clean and sober when she turned herself in at the Compton (CA) County Courthouse two years later. A judge saw promise in Kimiko and offered her an opportunity to participate in a 16 month alternative to incarceration - a mental health and drug abuse treatment program at the Women's Reintegration Services Center in Los Angeles.

"When I was court ordered to attend the Women's Reintegration Center, I went to all the classes. I listened to the teachers talk about grief and loss, coping, anger management, Narcotics Anonymous and AA, but they never drug tested us. We went on outings on the weekends to find healthy and free things to do. The women would cook out; sit in a yard and talk. We had a normal life and I felt that I was able to give back to the group." Kimiko didn't miss a day of the program and successfully graduated from the program 16 months later...but not drug or alcohol free. At the Reintegration Center, Kimiko was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, which caused her unusual shifts in mood, energy and her ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. The diagnosis gave Kimiko a better understanding of the underlying cause of her behaviors.

While she was still at the Reintegration Center and leaving a liquor store, Kimiko met Eric Robinson. For five years he had the patience to encourage Kimiko to embrace a healthy alcohol-free life style. He saw her potential for healing and recovery and convinced her to stop drinking and drugging. They eventually married and moved to Greenville where she is receiving help at the Greenville Mental Health Center from Dr. Renu Bhatia and Angela Deese.

At the Center, Kimiko took the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) classes and was interviewed and hired for a sales position with the Center's newly established Snack Shack. *"Taking the cart around and interacting with clients and staff, and knowing I can help someone who can't help themselves makes me feel happy and valued. It is therapy for me. I plan on being here at the Snack Shack and helping it grow."* Kimiko regrets not being able to show her mother, who died in 2012, her healthy transformation. Kimiko's journey of healing and recovery are the joyful by-products of her faith, her desire to help others, and her commitment to her own mental health wellness. Valuable lessons we can all learn from an experienced traveler!

(Note: The Greenville Mental Health Center received written permission from Kimiko Robinson to write and publish this article on this website.)