

Against All Odds

by Marie Casias

Crystal Janvier

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With an unimaginable set of challenges to face at a very young age, Crystal Janvier's story is nothing short of incredible. As a new mom at the young age of 18, Crystal balanced parenting with working two jobs and attending school full-time at the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT). While it's safe to say that most new parents find the task to be a struggle at times, Crystal's circumstances were so extenuating that some might fight them near impossible. For instance, her search for a daycare that would accept newborns took months before she finally secured one, only to have to transport her child there by bus every day for a year, as she did not own a car. Her second year into SIIT, she transferred to the University of Saskatchewan, but the challenges typical of parenting became downright daunting as Crystal tried to stay afloat in her myriad of commitments, and she finally made the tough decision to drop out of school to focus on making enough money to support her daughter. Crystal continued as a working mom and as the main breadwinner until her break came in 2002 when she landed a receptionist job with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) in Saskatoon, Canada.

Crystal rose in the ranks at FSIN, absorbing everything she could learn from a series of terrific mentors. With her own personal history of gambling addiction and depression, she was incredibly fortunate to fall under the care of Gambling Addictions Specialist Dianne McKay of the White Raven Healing Centre. Crystal also cites FSIN Executive Director Kyle Prettyshield as a key contributor to her personal and career growth, as he encouraged her to participate in a gambling prevention program where she learned about the culture of gambling from a mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual standpoint. Gambling possessed a social responsibility aspect which she dived into while noting the cultural component inherent in First Nations people, and their need for support. She learned about the origin of gambling as it pertained to her own people, and of her origins as a Saulteaux Indian woman.

Developing a lifestyle grounded in self-acceptance, Crystal continued to seek growth in healthy forms like exercise and career training programs. Today and 15 years later, Crystal continues to enjoy career success at FSIN as a researcher and analyst, developing programs designed to aid First Nations people suffering from gambling addictions. Now raising her second child on her own after having successfully raised her first, she re-enrolled at both of her former schools in September of 2016, taking night classes at the University of Saskatchewan and completing a workforce development program at SIIT through which she will gain her certification in addiction counseling. Crystal continues to work toward her goal of attaining a psychology degree so that she can directly help patients suffering from addiction, and given her history of defying the odds, there is no doubt that she will achieve it. Her history of battling addiction allows her a unique perspective that aids her in her line of work now and in the future, giving her that personal edge.

A recent and proud first-time home owner, Crystal hopes to be an illustration to her children on the true definition of success. "Being a home owner is my way of doing well for myself and for my family," she says. "Hopefully, my children will one day see how important it is to sort out their priorities in life, to keep moving forward, and to never give up on their dreams." Perseverance has been the name of her game, and whenever presented with enormous challenges, Crystal has mastered the skill of rising above them and finding the life lessons they offered, all the while keeping in mind what's truly important: family, hard work, and belief in herself.