

Matt Duhamel: Thanks for listening to the show today. My name is Matt Duhamel, your host of Solitary Nation. Today's discussion is about children who have had a parent in prison. More specifically, with a sex offense. Believe it or not there are two point five million adults in state and federal prison. One million are parents of minors. And on average two point seven million kids in the US have a parent in prison at any given time. According to the Pew of Charitable Trust with census figures showing that there are 75 million children in the US that comes out to 1 and 28 children. That's the equivalent of one child in each classroom who has had a parent in prison.

These statistics are startling, they are depressing, and they need to change. Today on the show, we have a very brave teenager. Her name is Chloe. She is 15 years old and she is one of those two point seven million children in the US. To go along with the prison sentence of her father. Now the family is dealing with the effects of him being placed on the sex offender registry.

Chloe thanks for taking the time out of your evening and being on the show tonight.

Chloe: Yeah, no problem.

Matt Duhamel: Well, Chloe, you have been affected by a parent in prison which was your father. Since then he's been released which is awesome news.

Chloe: Yeah.

Matt Duhamel: Yeah. We all agree on that one. I guess the first question I'd like to ask you Chloe is kind of go through that day. I know a lot of this may be difficult to talk about and that's why I really appreciate you coming on and your story can help a lot of other children and teens that have been affected by parental incarceration. When did your dad ... when was your dad arrested? How old were you?

Chloe: I was 10 so it was five years ago.

Matt Duhamel: Five years ago. Kind of take me back through that day a little bit.

Chloe: Well, he had been in jail a couple of times before that. But we kind of bailed him out and so the last time it happened I remember my mom was getting really upset with my dad and they were having a fight. And so when that normally happened, we'd take ... me and my older brother, we would take my little sister and go to a bedroom at night. Shut the door so we wouldn't have to hear it. And we walked out there because I'm crying because I don't like. Nobody does. And there's police officers there and it's just all kind of what's going on and so my mom just took me and my siblings in the car and we drive back by our house minutes later and I can see him getting into the police car and it's really

emotional because that's my dad and they're arresting him and I don't know why.

And it's really upsetting but that's really what I remember from that.

Matt Duhamel: How do you look back on that day as a defining moment in your life?

Chloe: Honestly, when it first happened, I was ashamed to go to school because people puts those things in the newspapers and it was really upsetting and it was honestly embarrassing. But like now I just look back and I'm like that kind of affected my life. But I don't know, I think it's like helped me because I don't judge other people. If they had told me that their dad was in prison, if my dad hadn't gone to prison, I would have been, oh that's really weird. I don't know.

Matt Duhamel: Scary or something like that?

Chloe: Yeah, yeah, I'd probably judge them but now I just I don't judge people.

Matt Duhamel: It's affected your life and you've walked in those shoes. So when someone else talks about it, you can relate and you have empathy and compassion for that person. Your dad ... how long was your dad incarcerated for?

Chloe: For quite a while, for five years, I might have been I'd say nine. It was really close around my birthday, I'm pretty sure. So-

Matt Duhamel: Happy birthday, no I don't think so.

Chloe: No.

Matt Duhamel: So it's my understanding that this was a sex offense and so that brings a lot of ... unfortunately a lot of shame sometimes to the family and to the child affected. Is that something that you've faced when he was incarcerated and now?

Chloe: Yeah, I still ... one of my friends, she goes, "Well, I know what your dad did," and she said, "and you're okay with that." And it just blew my mind. I was like I didn't know people could be so rude and open and just said what they felt. And it really was kind of hard because it was someone I really trusted-

Matt Duhamel: I understand-

Chloe: It's not a good thing.

Matt Duhamel: No, I understand, how ... did you lose friends over your dad's arrest and incarceration?

Chloe: Yes, since I go to a smaller school every body knew. And some of the parents would just look at me different or look at my family weird. I'm involved in sports so when I'll go to sport events I wasn't ... parents would go up and high five other kids, I was the kid that no parent really went up to.

Matt Duhamel: Do you think they acted that way because your dad was arrested and went to jail or was it because of the sex offense?

Chloe: I think they judged it because it was a sex offense.

Matt Duhamel: Yeah. So how did that make you feel when you, you know you lost some friends and people were kind of looking at you strange?

Chloe: It just really hurt. I just remember that period of just kind of it really hurt and I would go home and be like why would this happen to me, I haven't done anything wrong. It's just like I remember just crying a lot because I wasn't the one who did anything wrong and somehow it felt like I was getting punished.

Matt Duhamel: Yeah. Yeah, unfortunately that happens a lot. I think it's just because people don't know how to react or something. That's unfortunate. If you could choose one word or several words to describe your dad's incarceration and arrest, what would it be?

Chloe: It would have to be some horrible word because it was honestly the worst time of my life. When we would go visit him, the guards would be awful to us. And sometimes we would wait an hour before we could go in and see him. It was so unbelievably hard.

Matt Duhamel: Can you give me an example of how they mistreated you, the guards?

Chloe: Well, one time we went in and they told me that my leggings ... I can't wear leggings, and I'm a kid, I'm really upset because this lady gets to go in and she's wearing a tight skirt and I'm just in leggings and it was really unfair. And then they would pat you down, it made me really uncomfortable. They would laugh at us or give us weird looks.

Matt Duhamel: What are some of the things that you guys talked about when you visited your dad?

Chloe: Since I'm still really big into sports, I would tell him my basketball games or things he really couldn't be there to see. So if I was on honor role I would tell him about that or we'd play a card game or just tell funny stories. And truly all we could do to just kind of keep up.

Matt Duhamel: Sure.

Chloe: Yeah.

Matt Duhamel: So you visited him, what else did yo do? Did you have phone calls at all?

Chloe: We got one hour I think per week on the phone. If that's correct, I don't know. Which and it still charged us for that hour. I really didn't like those phone calls because about at an hour it would click off, you couldn't have maybe two extra seconds to say goodbye. It was off. And I remember talking to him one time and all of a sudden it was off. It was really upsetting because I was telling about my day and then all of a sudden I can't talk to him anymore.

Matt Duhamel: Yeah, so no closure or anything. That must be frustrating.

Chloe: Yeah it was.

Matt Duhamel: Did it affect your sleep, did it affect your day-to-day life at all?

Chloe: I would be distracted, I couldn't really focus on my tests, and at night I would just I got really bad anxiety from it. So I started not being able to sleep at night and that was really tough because just felt like nobody was there. I was not focusing on school and my homework. So I was doing kind of poor in school.

Matt Duhamel: It's common actually to suffer from anxiety what I've read and some statistics that I've read. Children of the incarcerated parents do suffer a lot from anxiety and I of course probably from the fear and the inability to get him out or help him. Were you ever really angry at your dad for doing what he did?

Chloe: Yeah, I would say I was for a while actually. Because when I was younger, I didn't get the full story and I was really upset with him. I was like, "Why would you do that, you're supposed to be here protecting us and helping us." Now we're left all alone to struggle and try to pick up the pieces. Like what are we supposed to do now?

Matt Duhamel: So you felt I guess kind of ... you felt abandoned?

Chloe: Yeah.

Matt Duhamel: Was there or I should say, is there a positive outcome from this, for you personally from everything that's happened?

Chloe: Well, honestly, out of all this it's kind of pushed me to be more open to people and just go up to them and talk to people I normally wouldn't talk to because nobody else really knew what was going on in my life. And I felt alone in what I was going through but now I know that I'm not alone. There are so many other people that I could've talked to or reached out to. Now, I'm just so much more outgoing and positive.

Matt Duhamel: I met your mother and you at the International Family Prisoners Conference a couple years ago which was great.

Chloe: I really liked how we would go to rooms I guess, we would just talk. That was my favorite part because I saw all these other people who had either experienced what I was going ... like what I went through or were going through the same thing.

Matt Duhamel: How did that make you feel knowing that there were people and kids just like you?

Chloe: Yeah, it made me so much happier because I'm like I'm not the only person that has gone through this.

Matt Duhamel: Let's get to the day when your dad was released. First of all, when was that?

Chloe: It was on August 23rd.

Matt Duhamel: How were you feeling the night before?

Chloe: I actually cried the night before because I was so happy but I couldn't be there to give him a hug or be like you're finally out, like we can see each other more now. And but I was also kind of sad because I'm like, well, it's been this way ... I was accustomed to going and always getting to see him every week for four hours and then I was told that I wasn't going to be able to see him for six months, no contact at all.

Matt Duhamel: Oh boy, since your dad has a sex offense, there are some restrictions. So it's not just him coming out of the prison gates and you running into his arms. We would love to have that happen, of course. We see that in movies and unfortunately it didn't happen in your situation. But how long has it been since he's been released?

Chloe: It's been a little over a year, a year and four or five months.

Matt Duhamel: Okay, great, great news. So you're able to see your dad now?

Chloe: Yeah, they told us six months but it ended up being a year. So we got to see him on Thanksgiving.

Matt Duhamel: So let me get this straight. You didn't see your dad at all, face-to-face, for a year after he was released?

Chloe: Yeah, that's right.

Matt Duhamel: Oh, man. That must have been very difficult.

Chloe: It was really frustrating because I was told I would see him and they kept telling us, "No, no, you're not going to be able to see him."

Matt Duhamel: Was that the counselors telling you that or the probation officer?

Chloe: It was ... I think it was both because he has to go to a group, like a class every week.

Matt Duhamel: So you're seeing him now which is great, tell me a little bit about the first time that you saw him after he was released?

Chloe: It was ... we just kind of like we hugged for a long time. We just had a big family hug and there were quite a bit of tears, happy ones though. And it was it just kind of felt like the world didn't like nothing else mattered. I didn't care that my hair was messy, I didn't care about any of that. I'm getting to see my dad.

Matt Duhamel: Sure, you didn't have your nails done or anything. You're just like, I wanna hug my dad right now.

Chloe: Yeah.

Matt Duhamel: You saw him in prison but you hadn't seen him for a year. So that's I mean to be free and to be able to hug your dad without any guards saying, "Back off, back off." You know that must have been amazing.

Chloe: Oh yeah.

Matt Duhamel: How was your dad doing today with everything? Is he doing well?

Chloe: Yeah, he actually, he got a job and it's ... since he's a Christian, he got a job and his manager's a Christian and I don't know something about the job is just really nice for him. And it just fits him so well. And it keeps him busy.

Matt Duhamel: So how is your relationship with your dad today?

Chloe: It's a little bit ... I mean it's not what it used to be because I don't know we just had some much lost time. He's still considers me a younger kid and I consider myself a little bit older than that. But we just like to laugh and we like to mess with each other and joke around.

Matt Duhamel: Well, that is tough when he had missed a good chunk of your growing up years and unfortunately I think you know that I was incarcerated myself and I have a daughter who is 20, is she 20 or 21, oh my gosh, I feel, I can't even remember. I think she's ... I hope she's not listening, I think she's 20 but we have a good relationship but yeah, it's when I talk to my own daughter and see her when I

can, I kind of see her as a young child too. Because it happened when she was 8 years old, when I was arrested.

And so it's hard on the father side too seeing their child as almost an adult. In your case, you're 15 so it'll take time. And you know and I'm glad that you guys are rebuilding your relationship and you kept in touch when he was incarcerated. What advice would you give children and other teens that have a parent in prison? It doesn't matter what the offense is, let's just say the parent is in prison, the father's in prison or mother, what advice would you give them?

Chloe: I would tell them to just keep your head up and doesn't matter what other people say about you, you're going to get through it. And there's always someone out there that can talk to you or you can talk to whether it be a counselor at school or a sibling or close trusted friend but maybe even a teacher just talk to someone because it really does help.

Matt Duhamel: We've all seen the media reports on registered sex offenders or what I would prefer saying registered citizens. The negative media about people on the list, the registry. How does that make you feel when you hear those things?

Chloe: It's understandable but I view it as really unnecessary because they're human beings to. They've done something wrong but it's not like you haven't messed up yourself. Everyone is messed up and he just had a greater consequence. People just have more consequences and because maybe what they did was more severe.

Matt Duhamel: Sure, you're a very strong person to get through all this and to help your mom and your brother and sister, very admirable. How do you think he's feeling today knowing that everything's over except for having to register which is a big deal?

Chloe: I say he's happy to be out but he's ... I know he's still bombed out, he's still missing a lot of my life and he tells me all the time he's so sorry that he had to miss out on that. And if he could go back he would do things so much differently. And it was ... all of it was really hard.

Matt Duhamel: Would it be fair to say that you forgive your dad completely?

Chloe: I don't know about completely, but I'm really working on it. It's just really hard to forgive him sometimes because I'm still kind of upset but I know I need to forgive him because it was ... like I said everyone messes up but I wouldn't say I completely forgive him.

Matt Duhamel: Yeah, I guess you could say you can try to forgive him. Of course, you're not going to forget what happened and you don't have to agree with what happened but some form of forgiveness is wonderful and of course that's on

your own time. You don't want to force it or anything like that. What do you see happening in the next year or two with you and your dad and your relationship?

Chloe: I see us probably, hopefully being able to see him more. And I hope I just get a lot closer to him like I used to be. Because I really want that back.

Matt Duhamel: Well, Chloe, thank you so much for coming on Solitary Nation. I have never talked to a teenager who has been affected by parental incarceration, so I really appreciate your time and you're just brave. And I want you to know that and I'm sure this conversation hopefully will reach out to children and teens that have ... are in the same situation and hopefully it'll help them out.

Chloe: All right, thank you.

Matt Duhamel: If you're dealing with your dad or mom's incarceration and you're looking for some answers, some help, you can see the website on the screen. If you're listening to the podcast, you'd want to go sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration. And in my conversation with Chloe, we had mentioned that we had both went to the International Family Prisoners Conference. Great conference and that is a wonderful resource. You can check out their website prisonersfamilyconference.org. Thanks again to Chloe for coming on the show and being brave and telling her story and helping other children who have been affected by incarceration. Thanks for listening. My name is Matt Duhamel, your host for Solitary Nation, join me next time when we have another story about Americas broken criminal justice system.