

THE
RELUCTANT
PIMP

Rochelle Padzensky

The Reluctant Pimp
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*To my husband, Herb, my teammate,
who cheers me on and
is always there during bad times.
And to those many survivors of dark times
who teach us what grit, determination,
and perseverance can do.*

PROLOGUE

You're not born to be a pimp. You don't go to school to become a pimp. A headhunter wouldn't tell you your resume qualifies you to become a pimp. You won't find an ad in the paper that says "Help wanted: pimp." So how do you become a pimp?

I can't answer that question. I can only tell you how I, Edward Allan Anderson, became one. Life is a series of events that often shape who you become and why. This is my version of those events in my life and how they affected me.

ONE



MY MOTHER WASN'T A PROSTITUTE, and my dad wasn't a pimp. My early childhood was much the same as that of most working families. Dad went to work every day and mom was a housewife.

My earliest memories are when I was somewhere between two and three years old. We lived in an apartment in Denver, somewhere east of downtown. Our apartment had big windows. I looked down into the street from what I remember as a large living room. I loved to climb on the sofa and look out onto the street to see the grass, the trees, and the brightly colored flowers in summer.

The apartment had one bedroom with a large alcove that contained my bed, a tall brown wooden chest, and a brown wooden rocking chair. My favorite memory is of my mother sitting in that rocking chair reading to me. My mother was soft and comfy, and I remember arranging her breasts to create a comfortable pillow for me to lie against as she read to me every night.

Her favorite author was Edgar Allan Poe, which is how I got my name. She wanted to name me after him, but as she used to tell it, my father said, “No son of mine is going to be named Edgar.” So, they settled on Edward Allan.

My dad worked five days a week. I don’t know what he did back then, but I remember that on Saturdays when the weather was nice, he’d put me on his shoulders and say, “Eddie, Eddie, it’s time to wash the car.”

My dad had a secondhand 1956 Chevy Bel Air that he purchased in 1960, the year after I was born. It was turquoise and white. He had a love affair with that car and took tender care of it. We would go down in the back of the apartment building where he kept it parked. He’d give me a rag and after he’d soap up the car, he’d give me the job of washing the chrome bumper in the back.

In the trunk, he always kept a spare tire, a spare battery, a bottle of water, jumper cables, chains, and a can of gas. “Eddie,” he’d say, “you always want to be prepared. In case you’re someplace where you can’t get to a gas station and the battery dies, you run out of gas, or the radiator boils over, you’re prepared.”

Of course, I had no idea what he was talking about, but I listened and memorized what he said. When we finished washing the car, he’d take the hose and help me rinse off the bumper, and then it was my job to polish it until the sun shining on it would blind you.

When we finished, we’d go upstairs for lunch. He’d kiss my mom, sniff the air, and say, “So my darling Betty, what have you been up to while we washed the car?”

“Well, now Cliff, just what do you think I’ve been up to?”

“From the smell of things, I’d say fried chicken, potato salad, coleslaw, and maybe some cake.”

“You’re just so smart, aren’t you?” And then they’d laugh and kiss again. This happened every Saturday during the summer. Then we’d have lunch. I’d have my pbutter n’jelly samich (that’s what I used to call it) and milk, and they’d have bologna sandwiches. Then, tired out from the morning’s activities, we’d all take a nap.

When we woke up, we’d get dressed. Mom would pack a picnic basket with all the things she’d made in the morning and we’d drive over to City Park. Sometimes we’d take a ride on Miss Denver, the boat that went around the lake. If we were lucky, the fountain would be on and we’d watch and catch the spray. If I was super lucky, the captain would let me ring the bell. Sometimes Dad would rent a rowboat and we’d paddle around the lake. Sometimes we’d just feed the ducks and then find a place to put our blanket and picnic basket.

Lots of kids were always around, and we’d run and play until we got tired, and the grown-ups had our dinner ready. After we ate, we kids would run around and play some more. Our parents would settle down and listen to the band concert. When the band played a march, the kids would march around and play parade. On the way home, I’d lie down in the back seat and immediately fall asleep. Saturdays were my favorite days, but sometimes we also did special things on Sundays, like driving Dad’s car into the mountains. During our drive, we’d stop in little towns and look around and drink cherry cider from one of the roadside stands.

That time in my life will always stand out in my mind as some of the happiest days I lived as a child. Dad and Mom were

happy and the three of us had lots of fun together. But then life began to change.

One day my dad walked in, ran over to my mom, and said, “Oh, Betty, I’ve lost my job. Business has been bad lately, but I didn’t know it was that bad. Bud had to lay off three of us. What’ll we do, Betts, what’ll we do?”

My mom put her arms around my dad and said, “Oh, Cliff, I’m so sorry. It’ll be alright, honey, you’ll find another job.”

I had no idea what losing a job meant. Sometimes I’d lose a toy that I might find later. Or sometimes I’d lose something and never find it. It didn’t seem to be any great problem, though. So maybe my dad would find his job.

Every day, my dad would read the paper and go out looking for a job. Every evening, he’d come home dejected. “Nothing yet,” he’d say to my mom, and she would smile back at him. Soon, he began to work at odd jobs—a day here, a day there.

One night as I lay in bed, I heard my parents talking. I crept out of bed so I could hear what they were saying. “We’re at the end of our rope, honey. We have no more savings. I don’t know what we’re going to do,” I heard my dad say to my mom. His voice sounded funny, and it scared me a little.

“I’ll get a job,” my mom said. “I’ll go looking tomorrow. Shh, it’s settled.” She put her fingers over my dad’s lips. Mom seemed to make my dad feel better—listening to her, I didn’t feel so scared either.

The next morning, my mom looked at the ads as she drank her coffee. “Now, Eddie, you be a good boy for your dad. I’ll be home later.”

She arrived home late in the afternoon. Excitedly she announced, “Okay, boys, you’re looking at a working woman!”

“You got a job, honey? Wow!” my dad shouted. “Details, where, what, when?”

“Now, don’t get upset, Cliff. I got a job as a waitress at Rocky’s Diner on Colfax. I know it’s not the greatest, but it’s a beginning. I’ll work different shifts every month. To start, I’ll work breakfast. I’ll start at five in the morning and finish at about one in the afternoon. When you get a job, I’m sure Mrs. Wilson next door will watch Eddie until one of us gets home.” She took a breath and looked at my dad.

“Well, honey, I hope it won’t be for too long. I should be able to find something soon.”

Our life then settled into a new routine. I’d stay home with my dad unless he found day work, and then I’d stay with Mrs. Wilson until one of my parents came home.

We didn’t go to the park and we didn’t go to the mountains anymore, but we still washed the car on Saturdays when the weather was nice. And my dad still instructed me on being prepared for an emergency.

TWO



I REMEMBER MY FIFTH BIRTHDAY. Mom brought home a small chocolate cake from the diner. Mom and Dad sang happy birthday to me, and I got a new book, *The Little Engine That Could*. The next month, I started school.

Dad still hadn't found a job, so he took me to school each day. I'll never forget that first day. I'd never seen so many kids in my life. We didn't have many kids around the apartment building where we lived, so I never really had any regular friends. The only kids I'd ever played with were the ones at the park.

At first, I wasn't sure about having to go to school each day. There were so many things I'd never done before. Some of what we did was fun, like painting. Initially, I was uncertain about what I was doing, since I'd never had any paints, but I soon found out how much fun it was to create my own paintings.

Other activities I didn't like so much, especially when they were things I already knew how to do, like recite the alphabet and my numbers. My mom had taught me letters and numbers, and we read together each evening, so I didn't like that we had to work on them at school too. I did like snack time, which was graham crackers and milk, but the rest period we had to take afterward annoyed me. I didn't understand why I needed to rest when I wasn't tired.

Every day at school, we participated in outdoor games. Sometimes we played kickball. Not having played with many kids before, I didn't understand what it meant to be a team player. Whenever the ball came to me, it seemed like someone was always yelling at me to pass it. I especially hated when one of the teachers yelled at me to "pass the ball, pass the ball."

This is pretty much how my first year of school went. Eventually, I got used to what we did at school, even though I still felt like I'd rather be at home. The one other big change that happened during the year, though, related to my dad. He started to act differently and his breath smelled funny most of the time, especially when I got home from school. I would soon learn what that meant.

The summer after kindergarten passed, and I spent most of the time learning how to read with the help of Dad and Mrs. Wilson. The odd jobs Dad did seemed to be getting fewer, and I noticed that he always had a cold drink in his hand. I also noticed that Mom and Dad were fighting more often.

Unfortunately, we had no family and no one to help us. My mom had been abandoned as an infant at St. Anne's Orphanage in North Denver, and she was brought up by the nuns

there. I wasn't sure what happened to Dad's family, but I did know that his parents were dead. If Dad had any other family, he didn't have relationships with them.

Mom and Dad used to hold each other and me and say, "Remember, all we have is each other." Mom would then say, "We should be grateful; it's more than a lot of people have."

It made me feel warm and happy when we hugged like this. I knew that no matter what happened, Mom and Dad loved me.

I started first grade a lot more in tune with school. My teacher, who I thought was the oldest person I'd ever seen, was Mrs. Cox. She wore her hair in a tight bun on the back of her head, and she must have had a million wrinkles. She was a good teacher, though, and I began to get the hang of things and even got to know a couple of kids in the class.

One night after Halloween, I was sound asleep in my bed when Mom came and quietly woke me up. "Shh," she said. "Be very quiet, don't say a word, and get dressed."

When I looked around, I saw that our apartment was basically empty. *Where could all our things have gone?* I wondered.

Mom carried me out to the car while Dad quickly packed up my mattress and took apart my bed. This was my first experience with moving in the middle of the night. Little did I know then that I would become a master in the art of moving from one place to another, like a ghost breezing through a room; now you feel him, now you don't.

I fell asleep in the car in the front seat between my mom and dad. The back seat, the trunk, and the top of the car were bulging with all our possessions. When I woke up, we were at our new apartment. It was much smaller than our old one. My bed had to

be set up in a corner of the living room because the bedroom was so small there was only room for my parents' furniture.

The next morning, Mom took me to register in the new school I would be attending. My stomach clenched and I wanted to cry. I didn't know anyone, and the teacher didn't seem as nice as Mrs. Cox.

I got confused all over again—just like when I first started school. With Mrs. Cox, we had been learning addition, but in this class, they had already moved on to subtraction. I felt totally lost and stupid. They were also reading from a different book, and everything else they did seemed to be different too. I wanted to crawl into a hole and just stay there. I didn't want to go to school anymore. I hated school, and I hated our life. All I wanted was to go back to our old apartment so I could be in Mrs. Cox's class again.

As the year progressed, things at home got steadily worse. Dad's odd jobs were almost nonexistent, and he seemed to always have a cold drink in his hand. He and Mom had begun to argue loudly at all times of the day and night, and I'd heard Mom say that she hated that Dad was drinking alcohol and getting drunk all the time. I figured out that being drunk had to do with why Dad didn't act or sound much like Dad anymore. Mom also seemed tired and cross all the time.

Then a bad thing happened. One evening when Mom came home from work, Dad came out of the bedroom with a shopping bag full of his clothes.

"I'm leaving, Betts. It's no good anymore. You'll be better off without me. Best I leave now before things get even worse."

Mom began to cry, but she didn't say anything. I think she knew it would be futile.

My dad turned to me and said, “Don’t forget, Eddie, take good care of the car and always be prepared.” Then he left, without saying goodbye, without a kiss or a hug or anything. He just left.

Mom and I hugged each other and cried until we had no more tears.

Abandoned. By my dad. At six years old. It still hurts.



AFTER DAD LEFT, THINGS GOT even worse over the next few years. Mom and I moved several times in the middle of the night because we couldn’t pay our rent. Each time, we left more of our possessions behind. Anger was building up inside me. How could my dad have done this to Mom and me?

By the time I was thirteen, we made our last stop. The Stout Street Arms on 22nd and Stout Street. To me, it couldn’t get any worse than this. It was a small three-story building, and we had a one-room apartment on the second floor, 2B. The bathroom was down the hall and shared by all the tenants on the floor.

As we moved our few remaining possessions into our apartment, my nostrils were overcome by the stench of cabbage cooking, stale cigarette smoke, rotting garbage, and the smells of something even more gross than rotting garbage. The dim bulb in the ceiling made it difficult to see where we were going. It was, however, light enough to see the paint peeling from the walls and the dirt that clung to the carpet.

Our apartment had one small closet; a few open shelves for kitchen cabinets; a small, filthy sink; a small apartment-sized stove, and a refrigerator. The kitchen floor consisted of rotting

linoleum in a pattern that was no longer discernible because of the embedded dirt.

“I see we have serious scrubbing to do,” my mother observed.

I remained silent, revolted by the smells and the filth. Quietly, we began the task of first cleaning the apartment and then unpacking our few remaining possessions.

“I know you’re angry, Eddie, at how things are going. Bad things happen to everyone. We just have to keep going, and things will get better, I promise. And just because things are bad doesn’t mean you can do bad things. Don’t forget, we still have each other. That’s the most important thing. Do you understand me?”

Keeping my head down, I said, “Yeah, Ma. I understand.”
Yeah, sure, things are going to get better. When cows fly.

The bathroom down the hall was truly disgusting. Mom cautioned me about using the toilet and forbade me to use the bathtub. “We’ll just have to wash up the best we can in the sink. Try to use the bathroom at school as much as possible and avoid using this one.”

The next morning, I reconnoitered the neighborhood. How can I best describe it? Gray. Gray concrete sidewalk. Brown. No grass. Just dirt, gray-brown dirt with lots of broken glass from empty whiskey bottles. Even the weeds were brown, choked of all color for lack of water. The air smelled of alcohol, decay, and poverty. The entire landscape and the people in it looked as if all life had been sucked out. What remained was an empty husk.

Mom registered me in a new school, and once again, the curriculum was different from the last school I’d attended. I felt

lost, confused, and furious with my lot in life. How could this be my life?

When I needed new clothes for school, we shopped at Goodwill. No matter what, though, Mom made sure I always had new underwear and socks.

“Clean underwear is a must, Eddie. Never be without clean underwear and socks. You have to keep your feet in good shape because they take you where you need to go.”

Then she’d scour the racks and bins to find the best shirts and pants. I never did have a regular pair of shoes, only tennis shoes. Mom did her best to find a pair that was not too worn. Same with a winter jacket—she looked for ones that would last through the school year. “It’s important to stay warm in winter, especially since you walk most of the time.”

Of course, she never bought anything for herself. There was never enough money. Her clothes were so worn they were almost rags, not that it mattered that much since she usually wore uniforms.

We subsisted, not existed. A couple of nights a week, Mom would boil water and we’d wash the best we could from a large pot. We barely had enough to eat.

I hated everyone, and I was sure they hated me. That year, I barely got passing grades in my classes, except for reading.

The only good thing in my life was that Mom took me to the library at least once a week. I had become an avid reader; it became my only escape.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROCHELLE PADZENSKY worked in several areas of the financial field, where she had considerable public contact. She soon realized that everyone had a story and every story had a life-changing moment. Fictionalizing and telling these stories has become her passion.

Rochelle has lived in Denver most of her life. Married with two children and four grandchildren, she is now retired. She enjoys writing and is a member of Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers. She loves to travel, cook, and spend time with her friends while enjoying all Colorado has to offer.