

In February, 2000, I bought a computer.

I didn't want a computer. I didn't need a computer. I wanted a free copy of my credit report so I went into my local Radio Shack and filled out a credit application.

My credit was destroyed - mostly by bad choices the biggest being my marriage and eventual divorce. I'd decided it was time to check and see if all my payments and negotiating tactics with my creditors had paid off.

Imagine my shock when Mr. RadioShack Sales Guy said I was approved and started filling up my new credit card with a Compaq computer. At the time it was top of the line. It had the fastest processor. It had a whopping 9GB hard drive and a modem. Really, none of that mattered at the time. All that mattered was that it had Freecell.

I logged on to the internet a few times. I got a Yahoo! identity and made some exploratory forays into post divorce internet dating. After first dates with a Vietnam Vet (I was three when that conflict ended), a radio personality (who loved the sound of his own voice to the point of idiocy), a couple of married men (who only called when out walking the dog or taking out the trash), and a man who had more Barbies than I did, I gave up on the internet.

Whoa! Gave up? How could you have given up if I'm reading this now? You've got your own fricken website, you might say. Well, something happened.

That something was a dear, close friend was killed. Before your heart breaks for me, check out the title of my website. Bobbie Caffey was shot and killed by his childhood friend for flushing drugs down a disgusting toilet in a New York City tenement. I was shocked. I couldn't believe that they would kill my favorite character off my second favorite show. Yes, second. I had a thing for Josh and Donna and all that political intrigue. I even had an email subscription to the Washington Post (muck raking bastards).

After a week of disbelief, my worst fears were confirmed by Enya and Kim Zambrano's scream of "he's gone, mom, Bobbie's gone." I couldn't believe it.

Still, this didn't spawn my internet addiction. I wasn't a fangirl in the classic sense yet. I never missed an episode of my second favorite show, but I had no idea what fandom was. As 2000 became 2001, my focus shifted from Washington drama to New York cops and firemen.

I began to wonder if my show would be cancelled. Every time Third Watch would be preempted, I wondered if it would come back. It was a constant fear.

Then like everyone else in this country, we found out what fear really was. September Eleventh. I could go off on a long tangent about how this affected me. I'm not a New

Yorker so really anything I have to say would be insignificant because I wasn't there. I was only present via the pictures I saw on television.

As the weeks past, what I saw on television gave me a new respect for the actors of this show and the crew. Instead of the riot and fire that NBC had been touting for months (yes, back in the day, NBC actually promoted the show), they showed "In Their Own Words," a two hour documentary with the New York City real life heroes. It was a very thin line between being respectful and exploitation. Not only did they walk that line and stay on the right side of it, the writers, cast and crew returned to story telling the next week with an episode that even now brings back the emotion of those days. It told the story of the last moments of innocence for this country in an amazing and poignant way.

Still, while I loved the show and had an enormous respect for the actors and crews who persevered, I wasn't the fangirl you see before you today. I started taping every episode and watching them over and over while my computer sat silently in the corner only being used to type letters to the judge presiding over my battles with my ex about child support.

I loved the sexual tension between Bosco and Yokas. Kim's struggle with depression and an irresponsible ex-husband was therapeutic for me. Yokas's battle with cancer (I had a scare, but was blessed with a healthy outcome) and her search for Harry Potter Legos let me know that I wasn't alone in my battles.

Plus, dude, have you seen Jason Wiles shirtless? I was divorced, not dead.

Then on January 7, 2002, the episode "Sex, Lies, & Videotape" aired. Bosco was shot and I nearly had a panic attack. Before the commercial was over, I was frantically searching with this new thing called Google to make sure what happened to my Bobbie wasn't going to happen to my Bosco. I ended up at NBC's website and it pointed me to 3rdWatchDotNet. By the time I got there though, Faith was ripping off Bosco's vest on my screen and he was looking up at her with pain in his eyes. My love and Faith's would live to say "bite me" again and I couldn't have been happier.

But now there was a whole new world open to me. I'd found fandom. There were others out there who drooled over men in uniform. They discussed things like "why did the writers play 'Midnight Confession' when Bosco was getting ready to go to the opera with Nicole?" and "was that really Bobby Cannavale's bare butt?" I had found a new home full of accepting people who shared an obsession of firetrucks and handcuffs.

Up to this point, I was a shy, sad, lonely single mother of two. My greatest ambition was to live from day to day and make sure my kids had what they wanted and needed. I went to work, I came home. I made nutritious dinners (burnt) and cleaned my house. I hid inside my house and kept to myself.

Then the writers gave me something in common with Bosco too. I have PTSD. And suddenly, so did Bosco. Bosco wasn't some overly emotional female which is what I felt like I was whenever panic would overcome me. Now, not only did I have a character that

was easy on the eyes, I had a deeper connection. And not only that, as the weeks progressed and episodes showed him healing, I felt like I could heal too.

I know it sounds weird and slightly creepy, but up to this point all the counseling and anti-anxiety medication hadn't had the effect of one actor falling apart and crying on the shoulder of another actor. Bosco didn't have to hold it all together all alone and neither did I, I realized.

How does this connect to my fangirlness? Well, with that tiny breakthrough, I stopped lurking on that fan board and started making the first real friends I've ever had. I started reading fan fiction. I liked that these people were taking the characters that I loved and having them do things that wouldn't be big ratings boosters on television, but would still be fun or interesting. They were exploring the thoughts and feelings of the characters reacting to the actions on the screen. It made me think about what was happening and why and what could happen as a result.

It was freeing. It was wonderful.

It was once again not certain there would be another season. With my new found fandom brothers and sisters, we held our breath between the cliffhanger ending until NBC announced renewal for a fourth season. My lifeline was safe and we all waited to see if Fred's heart attack was fatal (rats! it wasn't) and if Sully and Ty would survive the riots that a blackout had caused in the city (they did, but barely).

Bosco and Yokas started out the new season with a blow out and we were all riveted. Bosco proves he's more than the immature hot head that Faith has to baby sit. Sully was married and still riding with Ty. Storm clouds were brewing and we fans couldn't have been happier. Sergeant Cruz replaced Sergeant Reyes. Mmmmm Crispy Bosco.

Season four was a roller coaster and most of us loved every second. The season ended with three shots and screaming fans. We saw a napkin falling, then a fade to black. Once again there was no guarantee we would get to see who shot who. We were teased that someone in that room would die. Fanfiction writers' imaginations went into overdrive.

I'd never written anything beyond a letter, but someone asked me what I thought would happen.

So, I got out a piece of paper and started writing.

A few weeks earlier, I had started a new treatment for my PTSD. I wasn't dragged down by depression and panic attacks for the first time in years. I had these anonymous web friends that I wouldn't have to face and be embarrassed in front of on a daily basis. It was like a flood gate had been opened in my brain. I had all these ideas and they were all flowing out onto the paper in front of me.

I was going to night school to work on an accounting degree so that I could make more money to support myself and my kids, but suddenly instead of debits and credits, my school notebooks were filled with Bosco and Faith and Sully and Ty. Carlos and Kim were getting through their grief over Alex's brutal death together.

My favorite part was where I had Carlos punch Jimmy out. Good times.

The story and the writing were terrible. So where a couple of other stories I started. Still, I wrote on. I started buying writing books. I would spend my lunch hours and when my kids were gone writing. I lost forty five pounds in three months. I was still terrified and still hid in my house, but I had an outlet and I had friends.

Then I sent a story to one of those friends and asked her how to get to be a better writer. What was amazing was that I listened and made changes. I went back and read the old story and immediately cringed. I was a badfic writer.

But like I said, I had friends and they helped me.

It was the summer of 2003 and I was turning thirty-two. With my successes in writing and my weight loss, I was gaining confidence. My new friends were talking about going to New York and seeing Anthony Ruivivar's play "Safe" off-Broadway and I thought they were nuts.

New York was dangerous! Haven't they been to the movies? I love plays and I would like to drool over Jason Wiles, Coby Bell, and Anthony in person, but damn, it's New York City!

They would all go and return with glowing tales of how great the play was and how nice the guys were. They'd talk about how Coby was exhausted with his work schedule and his newborn twins. They'd talk about how sweet Jason was and how he hugged and took the time to pose for pictures for hours after each show. They'd talk about what a great sense of humor Anthony had and how cool his wife, Yvonne was and did you know she played a bunch of bit parts on Third Watch from time to time?

I pined to go. I ached. I was happy for the lucky few, but just a tad jealous. You see, I wouldn't get to go to New York. It was dangerous and even though I was in my thirties, my parents didn't even "allow" me to drive in certain places after dark. I loved my parents and didn't like to worry them so I couldn't go to New York. Plus my ex-husband couldn't be trusted to consistently pay his child support. The month of June 2003 saw only one check from him and we were just barely scraping by.

Then my grandmother ended up in the hospital with pneumonia over the Fourth of July weekend. I couldn't go with Grandma sick. Could I? I went to see her one Saturday the kids were with their dad and grandma told me to go. She didn't need me hanging around to see if she'd die. She needed me to go live. That day when I got home from seeing her,

there were three child support checks in my mailbox. Evidently, the post office had been delivering them to a house across the highway.

So, swallowing a Xanax, I logged on to Travelocity.

I didn't tell anyone I was going until three days before my plane was scheduled to leave. My stomach started fluttering the minute I finished entering my debit card information. My parents surprised me by saying that it sounded like fun and that I should have a good time. My boss told me that he'd have bail money ready just in case and to call him if I needed any help in the big city. Smart ass.

So early in the morning on Saturday, July 12, 2003, I drove myself to the airport. I'd only been on an airplane for two other trips. The first trip was to Disney with my future ex-husband and the second trip to Disney with my parents and my kids eight months after my divorce was final.

To say I was nervous would be like saying Robin Williams was kind of funny.

I got to the airport the post 9/11 recommended two hours before my flight. It's was four thirty in the morning and evidently, I was the only person who did what was recommended. I sat in the terminal with just the ground staff trying to paint my fingernails with shaking hands.

I was the first person they put on the plane that day. The ground staff were also trained in mind reading and decided before families with children are loaded, they should load persons most likely to bolt screaming from the airport.

Once I was in New York City though, I was transformed. I bought an "I Heart NY" tee shirt for ten times what they go for in Battery Park and bounded out of the airport with tourist map and cell phone in hand. I called my parents to tell them that I was still alive so they could better estimate a time of death and started out on my adventure in the Big City.

So what you say. Well, if it weren't for a television show, I would still be hiding in my house fearing life. I would be four hundred pounds and miserable. If not for a television show, I would still be alone.

People I didn't know picked me up and took me to dinner for my birthday. I was recognized by strangers in the theater and given cards. I sat in a darkened room with actors I had adored for years. I met them and found they were good people just as overwhelmed by me making the effort to come see them as I was to be standing beside them. I met other fanfic writers that I admired.

I fell in love with a city and became transformed by its energy.

Because of a television show.

Now my show is coming to an end. It's coming to an end, but its effect on me is lasting. I'm a writer now. I still do taxes and go to my job everyday, but I'm not living day to day. I have more than just existing for my kids now.

I haven't been published yet except for my website and the fan sites I'm a member of, but I now have a confidence I've never had before. I know that I will be published because I am capable.

While Third Watch isn't completely responsible for this transformation, it played a big part. It introduced me to people and places that have made me stronger.

I'll miss it.

I'll miss new adventures.

What I'm taking with me is the memories and the strength they gave me. I'm taking these friendships I've made with people I would never have met had it not been for this show.

I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the people who made the show and for the fans I met. I have no idea how to thank people who've made such a big difference in my life.

Thank you to the people who read my reviews and my stories. Your glowing words of encouragement and praise helped me get through many hard times.

Thank you to Bethany, Mona, Leigh, Deb, Annette, Neko, Lynne, Amanda, Fyre, Mimsy, and the many others who I only knew by screen names who supported me.

Thank you to Ed Bernero, while I never got to meet him personally, for making a great show and answering questions he didn't have to and giving us hope for new seasons when it looked bleak.

Thank you to Jason Wiles for making me a hero in my own home. He signed an NYPD tee shirt for both my kids as Bosco. They cleaned their room, took out the trash, and brought me Diet Coke without being asked for months because of those shirts.

Thank you to Anthony Ruivivar for writing a great play and playing a wonderful character. The play helped me break out of my shell and the character lifted my spirits when I didn't think it was possible.

Thank you to Yvonne Jung for talking to me after "Safe" one hot night in July. Not that I'm thinking that she remembers me, I'm still not entirely certain she didn't base her Levine on that conversation. If you're reading this, remember always sing for yourself first and don't care about what who's listening might think. My Aretha is getting meaner by the day.

Thank you Coby Bell for being so playful and fun. Even when he was exhausted he still made time for his fans. And I'll never forget the childlike look of pride during the softball game when he held the ball he'd caught up for us to cheer for him.

Thank you Joe Lisi for being the perfect father figure in Swersky. Swersky was the lynch pin that held the family together.

Thank you to John Michael Bolger for filling the same function as Swersky in the firehouse. After all this time, I still miss Lt. Johnson. The firehouse was never the same after he was gone.

Thank you Skipp Sudduth for not only Sully's classic wit and your amazing gift for sarcastic delivery, but for the music.

Thank you Eddie Cibrian for introducing me to this wonderful show. If Matt hadn't left Young & the Restless, I would never have fallen in love with Bosco and his prank war with Jimmy.

Thank you Michael Beach for Doc. Poor Doc. Playing straight man to Anthony as Carlos must have been a daily test of Michael's ability to keep a straight face.

Thank you Tia Texada for playing the most hated character on Third Watch. Cruz was so complex and well developed because of Tia's amazing acting. I never see an episode with Cruz that doesn't amaze me with the depth of emotion Tia poured into her. Yes, I killed Cruz in fan fic a few times, but it was just a pumpkin, a bucket of water, and a couple accidental falls. If you want to blame anyone for that, blame Bob the Tomato. I love the character and the wonderful actor who plays her.

Thank you to Molly Price for Faith Yokas. While I'm not too happy with the character as season six draws to a close, there were five seasons of Faith that show a strong female lead balancing a family and a career.

Thank you Nia Long for playing my favorite character I love to hate. I've had fun watching Sasha grow these last two seasons. It's a shame she won't have the opportunity to win me over.

Thank you to the gel hunky fire dudes. We haven't seen you much recently and you have been and will be sorely missed.

Thank you to Josh Stewart, Cara Buono, and Manny Perez for making this last season full of love and heartbreak. I think I'll mourn these new characters the most because we never got to get to know them. So much potential wasted by an ungrateful network.

Thank you Third Watch for the laughter, the tears, and the new family I would have never had without you.