

Learning to Thrive

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Find Your Inner Strength (2013)

I was slumped over the passenger's seat, weaving to the car's sudden swerves and turns as if I were on some sailboat fighting a stormy sea. Nausea gripped my throat. My body was too heavy, my arms anchored to the leather seat. The car was speeding out of control. My eyelids flickered loosely over my eyes. This was anything but peaceful like I would have hoped it would have been.

"No, Haylee! Stay awake!" my roommate and best friend, Izzy, screamed over at me from the driver's seat. "Promise me you won't fall asleep!"

Drool webbed from my lips. I groaned at my friend, wishing for her to just be quiet and drive a little less like we were in a Grand Theft Auto game. I could feel Death itself slowing my heart in my ears. My body sunk into the seat like a dead weight. Izzy didn't know what to do. Her words were slurred to me, but I knew she was sobbing.

Next thing I knew, she was calling my step-mom. "Haylee took a bunch of pills," she belted out through sobs. "Um, I don't know. I think a lot." She hung up the phone and stepped harder on the gas and cried to me, "Your Dad is going to take you to the hospital."

I was now slouched over the center console. Everything was getting dark. I could see Izzy's panicked face. I could make out the tears streaming down her cheeks. She fearfully glanced down at me and sobbed, "Why would you do this to me, Haylee? *Why?*"

The last thing I remember from that car-ride was my drowsy response, "Because maybe Jameson had it right." And then I blacked out.

The doctor said I was lucky. In my head, I was anything but. My vitals were somehow strong. My heart-rate was returning back to normal. My stomach burned and ached as I slowly snapped back into reality. But I was mad. I was mad that my body somehow didn't overdose. I was mad that I was now being held captive in a hospital hallway lined with crying and groaning patients. With my dad at my side and my step-mom dotting her tearful eyes, my doctor pressed the most important question, "Did you intentionally try to overdose, Ms. Graham?"

I shook my head, denying him that I just had a headache.

My dad looked over at me. "Tell him the truth. Tell him what you told Izzy."

I rolled my eyes, feeling like everyone was being overdramatic. "That my friend had it right."

"Her friend killed himself a month ago," my dad explained in a venomous tone, as though he resented Jameson for planting the idea in my head.

The doctor nodded slowly, now understanding. His eyes burned into me as if he was reading into my soul. "You thought he was right about suicide, so you tried it yourself."

And something about his words - perhaps it was the truth in it all - made the cave of my chest deflate like a balloon. I slumped over my knees, held my face in my palms, and started sobbing so loudly that it silenced the nearby patients in their beds. Everyone watched me, slightly surprised by my sudden release of what was now my confession.

Then, between my hands, I cried, "And it wasn't the first time, either."

I soon was confined to my own hospital room. In four hours, I would be shipped to the nearest psychiatric hospital to be committed for three days.

What have I done? I thought to myself as tears poured down my cheeks. I had thought about the repercussions of dying but I hadn't thought about how it would affect other people.

For hours, I lay there silently, alone and afraid, like a child sent to their room to think over what they had done wrong. A kind nurse named Randy tended to my every need. For an hour, he even let me spill my heart out. I told him how unstable my life had been for the past 10 years. I told him how my mom used to date men who were either drug addicts or expressed anger with their fists. She and I had struggled in extreme poverty where scrounging for pennies just to have food became the norm and a good day was when we could have lukewarm water to bathe in. Then, I confessed that by age 15, I had already tried killing myself twice. Randy listened intently as I explained that for four years, self-injury was my stability and my razor-blade gave me a different kind of pain I craved. As soon as I graduated high school, I battled alcoholism, promiscuity, and for months was addicted to cocaine and crystal meth. Then, on October 25th 2012, my dear childhood friend pressed a gun to his temple and took his own life. Everything that had ever happened to me finally conjured themselves into eleven pills that I pressed back to my throat and swallowed with a bottle of Nyquil.

By the time I was done, I was out of breath from my sobs. Randy observed me quietly and after a few minutes, stated, "It sounds like you have had to learn how to survive. But that's not what life is about. Don't just survive anymore, *thrive*." His hand gently grabbed my arm. "Forget the past, forget the bad things that have happened, and learn to thrive. Promise me you'll try and do that."

With tears running down my cheeks, I grabbed Randy's hand. "I promise."

For three years, writing was my outlet from a very dark world I lived in. By 2013, I was an official author with four completed full length novels. So when I was admitted into Panorama City Psychiatric Hospital, I found my outlet and wrote a diary of my experiences. In just three very scary and revealing days, I learned more than some people learn in a lifetime. The nurses within those walls scolded me for what I had almost done, telling me to look around at true insanity and realize the graced life I did have. The friends I made there encouraged me and most of all, showed me how blessed I truly was. They asked me to live my life for them, since their mental states would never allow them to live normally like I had the chance to.

So, on my third day, I left with the motivation to create a life worth living. I had many apologies to make, bad habits to break, and several relationships to rebuild, but I restored myself, stopped using drugs, and grew into a better person. One year later, I'm still an author, selling my four novels online while also running a multi-faceted production and management company. I live in a stable home, am surrounded with wonderful friends, and I have finally tasted the happiness I've always searched for. I no longer survive. Now I live a beautiful life not just for me, but also for the friends who encouraged me during my darkest hours at that hospital. I fulfilled my promise, started over, and finally learned to thrive.