

The Lucky One

I was lucky to have a love of reading and writing instilled in me at an early age. I cannot mention my love for the written word, without mentioning my parents. On the other hand, I can't mention my parents without feeling guilty or anxious. So why, you may ask, do I mention them here on this platform? *My first real college assignment*. At the beginning of quarantine, I started writing a memoir. Digging skeletons out of my closet and confessing my sins to the page, has been insightful, but very painful. So again, I mention my parents.

Our story begins in December of 1986 in Salt Lake City, when two avid book readers were celebrating their only child's fifth birthday. For many years prior they had struggled with addiction and fertility. So, their child was truly a blessing, and this evening was special to them. It was their last time coming together this way as a family, as a loving married couple. One last 'good-bye' wouldn't hurt before signing the divorce papers.... Nine months later they welcomed me into the world.

My childhood seemed typical for any Nintendo wielding 90's kid from Montana. My mom wanted us to grow up with all the classic children's books. It's impossible to say if I related more to the wit of Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein, the heart of Roald Dahl, the magic of C.S. Lewis, the mystery of R.L. Stein, or the *many* friends that Judy Blume and Beverly Cleary introduced me to. As soon as I could read on my own, all my thoughts were stimulated with new imagery and ideas. I could hang on a word or get lost in the illustrated pages at my own pace. My heart was becoming full of romantic notions and grand gestures and it suddenly felt like I could see the world more clearly. As if I was a fully actualized adult and not some pudgy, bullied tomboy. As I explored these new thoughts, I was discovering stories as if they already existed in my

head. As if someone much wiser than I had left them there and it was my job to get them out.

So... I *wrote*.

I didn't care if I was any good, until I wrote 'The Lost Puppy' in third grade. I had worked on it for days, carefully illustrating every page. I was confident when I handed it in, and I remember the immediate reaction my teacher had; being moved by the touching story of a pair of lonely grandparents adopting an unloved puppy. I got an A+ *and* a scratch-and-sniff sticker! I was thrilled! My mom was so proud of me, she took it to work and brought it on vacation to show it to our extended family. I felt as if I finally had a strength that others didn't. I was to be an artist, I was to be a storyteller, I was to be heard. These stories in my head were escape from reality, and I was *Houdini*. I had this magic power to see and manipulate a world that my peers and bullies couldn't even fathom. Yet, as kids you really can't escape anything. I had my books, my toys, it was the era of premium 90's MTV Broadcasting; and I was soaking it up. It didn't seem like anything bad could really happen to me, in my own comfortable world of imagination and creature comforts. I felt safe, but it would take nothing, and yet everything, to have my world come crashing down around me.

It didn't happen quickly. The ends of things usually happen that way, so slowly you don't even realize it's over. But my childhood ended so prematurely; I wonder if it ever had the chance to evolve into something else. It was around this time in my life where I began journaling religiously, clinging to the idea that I was full of purely original thoughts and feelings that no prepubescent tween could have ever thought or felt before. Reading the entries now, is a painful reminder of rage and hurt. On one side, in pink gel pen, a list of all the cute boys at school, and on the other, the scratches of a brace-faced demon. I was mad at everything, so I

don't realize why I was so surprised and hurt when it all changed. Over a couple of years, my academic achievements were going unnoticed, my art was going unseen, and I felt isolated. During the summer of eighth grade, I went to go spend some time with my father who was out of state. I didn't know that I wasn't to be coming home and by the next school year, I was living with my grandmother back in Utah. I was told Mom would come live with us but without going into detail, she was never really *there* again.

Because of my grandma's age, I had no discipline whatsoever. I took advantage of her, and it is one of my biggest regrets. I was acting out, and after falling into the wrong crowd, I was the victim of a sexual assault at 15. What self-worth I had left, was gone, and by the beginning of my junior year, I started what was to be a very long battle of addiction. I burned bridges with my Mormon family, and was asked to leave her house halfway through my senior year. I was able to rent out my first place, but it only led to an increase of terrible choices. I surprised even myself by graduating in time to walk with my class in 2005. Throughout it all I coped, barely, with my journal as my therapist, and my anger as my muse.

After high school, I found myself working at a bar on an Indian reservation outside of Glacier National Park, a relatively blurry period in my life. I *do* remember one night; I was writing on the porch of my cabin by the dying light of an old lantern. I wrote until my eyes hurt so much that I could barely keep them open. I stood up for cigarette and walked out on to the dirt road. Only to find the vast sky illuminated by bright green aurora borealis. I felt overwhelmed with gratitude, that I was where I was meant to be, that I was supposed to be there in that moment, experiencing *that exact moment* as an artist. That's how the roller coaster of depression works though, these huge grateful moments of beauty and life, followed

by vast moments of emptiness and darkness. The higher up I felt, the harder I would fall. I could never stay prolific for more than a few months at a time. Even when I did create anything, it didn't really have any profound impact on me anymore. I really had stopped caring about my body, my mind, my future. I was working hard and playing harder. Writing was just a thing I did to vent. Reading? Who had time for that?

My grandmother passed away in 2011. I didn't have a place to call home anymore, no neutral place to meet my family, no more place to feel wanted. Bygones were bygones at grandma's house, a place where you felt loved no matter what. I had buried not just my grandmother, but the one person who always said yes, in a world full of nos. Without her, what kind of relationship was I supposed to have with my family? Instead of healing evident wounds, I decided I needed an outlet. I needed a new project. One of my friends and I began writing children's book together, and suddenly an old familiar feeling rushed over me. Before long, I was thousands of words deep into a YA novel. Though, I am working on it to this day, as I mentioned this is not the writing experience that I identify with most.

When the #metoo movement gained popularity in 2017, I felt a deep unity to other victims... but not for long. As I read on, the truth began staring me in the face. I am a victim *and* an abuser. I hated myself for not realizing it before. How was this possible? I am self-aware, I am considerate, I try to be good. But how much clarity do I really have? I'm nice, sure, but I had been drunk for the better part of a decade. *I am an addict*. That was the revelation I needed. If I could forgive myself, why not my parents, or my bullies, or my rapists?

My mom came to live with me at the end of 2019, the first time we had lived together in 18 years. I was admittedly going crazy after quarantine started and that's when the memoir

began, psychoanalyzing three decades of my own story. Writing a clear narrative to the scribbled ramblings of a drunken fool. I felt purposeful. And over scrabble and cribbage, my mom and I were bonding. She was able to see the woman I had become and the mother I am becoming. She asked about my writing project, and I could see the guilt on her face when reading just the prologue alone. *Just the first page? Is my writing hurting her?* I began doubting myself, not because of her, but because despite my traumas, *I know how blessed I am*. Is it even okay for me to complain about myself in today's turbulent society? How fortunate I am to be privileged enough, or perhaps selfish enough, to be complaining about my own problems.

I recognize that *I am the lucky one*.

People always say they are afraid of becoming their parents, but I am already them. Their lives, even before me, are parallel to mine in so many ways. But what happens next in my story, is a choice that only I can make. So now, I make new choices every day. I am choosing to be in school, choosing to be a present mom, choosing to work on my art and my music. I choose to be happy. I am determined to make the most of this college experience, English 101 included. I am hoping to learn how to be analytical of myself without tail spinning into self-doubt. I hope to take advantage of writing alongside my peers, who perhaps are not my usual intended audience, and to learn from our differences. I hope to write with alertness, intent, and above all purpose and passion. *I hope to open a door to a new world*.