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(562)

Breaking the Cycle

When I think about my childhood, I remember having a lot of freedom and fun. I recall how I would spend all evening outside with my siblings, playing manhunt and knock, knock, ginger. As I got older, every weekend was spent chasing around boys and playing at the drop-in centre. Once I got to high school, they were spent at sports tournaments and slumber parties. The nights I did stay at home, I remembered waking up to a kitchen filled with beer cans and the occasional person sleeping on our couch. I can recall one time waking up to our TV smashed, later finding out it was the result of my dad's drug fueled rage. I wonder if I subconsciously cut out memories like these, or I was just too oblivious to notice them.

I didn't realize I was a part of a dysfunctional family until I was about 14. I woke up one evening to the sound of banging and screaming. When I went to investigate, I saw my father pushing my mother out the door. She never returned home after that evening. When I think back, I don't know how I didn't notice they were so unhappy. I don't know how I didn't notice my father was an addict and I didn't know how to deal with it once I found out.

We learn how to live life by observing those who care for us, they teach us things directly like riding a bike but much of what we learn is unintentional. The way my father reacts to sadness by drinking a six pack and listening to sad YouTube songs. The way he becomes impulsive with money when he's happy, spending a hundred dollars ordering Chinese food, and his inability to communicate feelings or regulate his emotions due to never being shown how to.

Intergenerational trauma works this way. It's a ripple effect that isn't stopped until someone decides to interrupt the flow. My father's life tragedies and experiences got the best of him, and he has never been able to heal. As a result, I felt the effects. The trauma can be seen through my anxiety, the way my heart drops the second I hear someone raise their voice. My inability to sleep without checking if the door is locked. The way my hands tremble during a fight or flight situation and the way I shut down in response to high stress. I am built from the environment I grew up in. Chaotic and unstable.

Understanding why my father is the way he is, and forgiving him for it, is where it all begins. To accept everything bad and to recognize that although hard and unfair, the things I've been through do not dictate my value. I am now equipped with extreme patience and resilience. A very accepting and forgiving personality and a calm and non-reactive approach to conflict.

As the first one in my family to graduate high school. The first to attend university and college. The first to get my license and to own a car, and the first to be part of a healthy and loving relationship, I believe in changing learned behaviour. That even when surrounded by poverty and addiction, you can change your route. And no matter the lack of influences, you will become one of your own. I believe in breaking the cycle.