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Fear

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“Fear is the quintessential human emotion. Some people live lives devoid of joy, happiness, and pleasure, but no one escapes the experience of fear and fear's companion, pain. We are born in fear and pain. Our lives are profoundly shaped by them, as well as our efforts to avoid them.”

Ever think of the many people who walk and live in fear everyday? Throughout their daily lives most people don't even think about overcoming their fears, instead they endure experiences primarily trying to avoid the very things that frighten them. I know, because I was one of those people.

For me, fear was addictive. A drug almost. It was the thing that I clung too. Fear was my kryptonite. It gave me comfort in the still of the night. No matter what was going on, I could always count on fear to be there. It was the one thing that had never failed me. The comfort I found in fear was almost comparable to that of an ice cold drink on scorching hot day. Refreshing to the body, yet chilling to the spine. As I try to recall the genesis of my relationship to fear, I can only think of one thing.

* * *

"A child's innocence! A child's innocence!" is all I remember my aunt saying while she sobbed. For the life of me, I could not understand what that statement meant. We waited and waited at the police station, and then finally we went inside a dimly lit empty room. Surrounded by walls of concrete that seemed to be closing in on me, I could barely breathe. With every inhale the room seemed to get smaller and smaller. The police officers began to ask my mother and sister specific questions, and it was then that I knew I would never see my father again. Within an instant, my whole life had changed.

Every single day I feared for my life. One might say I wasn't really living at all. Walks to school were prolonged and dreadful. While other students perceived walking to school as a privilege and an indication of independence and freedom, I regarded it as a hindrance and an opportunity to get kidnapped or raped. I had this unshakable feeling I had a large target on my back that let everyone know I was scared. I couldn't walk to school, or anywhere for that matter, without suspecting that I would be harmed. I couldn't hug a person without questioning their motives. I couldn't shake the idea that some way, somehow, someone would hurt me. And as always, in every instance, fear was there. I was ashamed to tell anyone about my private life, and although I wore a smile on my face, it didn't detract from the pain and fear I felt inside. I didn't trust anyone. Not only was my sister's innocence stolen, but also my innocence.

Children possess an esoteric quality of blamelessness and ignorance that we call "innocence." It's an unexplainable function of the imagination. To be innocent is to be uncorrupted by evil, malice, or wrongdoing. My imagination was

tainted and my ability to live as a child was, in a sense, stolen. Though I didn't do anything wrong, my father's immoral actions corrupted my thoughts and ultimately robbed me of my childhood innocence and introduced me to my best friend, fear.

A week after our visit to the police station we moved to a new home and I changed schools. Due to financial struggles, I didn't have the luxury of participating in the same activities as my friends. I couldn't be on sports teams or go to school dances because my mom couldn't afford it. I didn't see my mom very often because she had to take on two jobs to make up for my father's lost income. For years, I blamed myself for my father's actions, and for years I didn't understand how one person's behavior could cause an entire family to shatter.

Though I lived a double life—a young girl who seemed happy but in reality was so scarred—I never lost my desire to learn and my love for school. I think my keenness toward education and my inclination for a successful academic career stemmed from me believing that my education was all I had to lean on. At a very young age my father instilled in me that education was the key to success. He would always say that “the one thing in life NO ONE can ever take from me is my knowledge,” and I believed him. My father was extremely hard on me as a child, and although he's no longer in my life, it is clear to me that his methods of reinforcement have had a large impact on my life and still affect me to this day.

* * *

It wasn't until my time studying abroad in the Dominican Republic at the end of my freshman year of college that I would break my addiction and finally free myself from my toxic relationship with fear. One of the main components of my addiction to fear was my continuous involvement with it, despite the adverse consequences that crippled my ability to fully live life. With addiction there are “split-selves.” Because I was addicted to fear, I was split between not living and living. But while I was in the Dominican Republic, I had a few encounters that were crucial to the start of a new beginning. A life where I can finally live. A life without my enticing friend, fear.

“Education equals freedom,” said the guide in the museum. And there it was, laid out plainly for me. My whole life I had this undying desire to learn and this constant love for education. Since elementary school, I excelled in my studies. Receiving A's on my report cards wasn't a surprise. It was normal and even kind of expected of me. I realized there in the Centro Leon, that my appetite for education was my ticket to liberation. Everything came full circle. I no longer needed fear. The more I learned in the Dominican Republic, the freer I felt. Subconsciously, I had taken steps that aided my emancipation from my relation and bind to fear. As I continued to gain more knowledge, I found that I was

enabled. Nelson Mandela said it best, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” I now firmly recognize the importance of education, and I will use it to continue to change not only my world, but the world around me. I will be relentless in getting my education, and I will remain eager to learn because so long as I learn, I am free. Education is life, and *truly* living your life is freedom.