

untitled

by Ashlyn Merritts

People say when we fail, we learn from our mistakes and do better the next time. Learning to be resilient is simply the effect of touching a hot stove. But what if my failure was the inability to throw myself into the path of a semi racing by so fast that my truck shook? What if the big lesson I learned was that mental hospitals aren't the frightening depiction of crazy people ramming their head into a mirror for some kind of twisted fun, that instead they're a place of healing? What if my version of resilience meant rebuilding everything I was ready to tear down?

Each day was more or less the same. My anxiety medication ceased to work and exercise raised instead of lowered the endless stream of fear. Food didn't appeal to me, and even if it had, my stomach was so broken I could barely get anything besides protein shakes down. The voice in my head I had trusted since birth flooded my thoughts with dark ideas of giving up. My family watched as I wasted away a little more each day, frustrated they couldn't do anything to help me. My usual smiles faded into grimaces. When I was awake, all I craved was sleep. I prayed to wake up one day feeling better, but this monster would reach me, sooner or later, no matter how tight I pulled the covers over my head.

So I tried to end my life. I couldn't take the pain anymore, and the doctors couldn't figure out what ailed me. I parked my truck on the side of the expressway and shut the door with trembling hands, tears falling down my cheeks, my stomach more furious than ever. I stared into the glowing white eyes peeking out from beneath a semi's hood—and my feet wouldn't move. There were cars behind the semi, which would slam on its brakes to avoid me leaping in front of it.. Those cars would smash into

the back of the trailer. I couldn't do it. Even this, my brain roared, you can't do right. I refused to hurt anyone else, painfully aware of how much I was about to harm my own family and friends. I walked around the front of the truck and slid in through the passenger side door, ringing an old friend as I shuddered, my nose a snotty mess. Thank God, she picked up, guiding me to a little Marathon gas station. Ever my knight in shining armor, she held me in her arms as I sobbed. My phone rang, my father seemingly knowing the atrocity I had just tried to commit. I picked up, my voice raw from crying, explaining everything. Willingly, I spent the next two weeks in a mental hospital, where constant assessments were made, and where my future began to become less of a black hole and more of a possibility.

Writing about it ignites a fear in me so visceral, the most raucous rock music can't drown it out. But that's resilience. It was taking the class I adored, even when I wasn't sure I could handle it. It was telling my parents when the ideas came back instead of concealing them. It was finding a God I believed had abandoned me. It was getting to spend another Christmas with them, and seeing the look on my mom's face when she saw her gift. It's counting the days because I wanted to make it to number two, and passing day one-hundred. It's learning to trust myself again, and reaching out when I can't. It's good days and bad days and undefined days. Resilience is building the future I had almost surrendered.

The darkest day of my life became the most educational, teaching me everything I truly am. Today, I look forward to a glowing future, full of happiness as a copy editor, an author, a wife with pride in who she loves, a daughter, and a sister. My family is a gift. My life is a gift. Each time I log into Kalamazoo Valley Community College's website,

tears fill my eyes. I can't believe I've made it this far, and by no means is every day a cakewalk. I still struggle, and I have to remind myself I am not at my worst. I am lucky, I am hopeful, and I plan to keep kicking for all the years to come.