

Digging a hole

BEEP The alarm clock on my cell phone went off, unleashing its dreaded tune throughout my bedroom. My eyes flew open to the date on my phone, December 8th, 2018. Following turning off my alarm, I opened my blinds. I was now exposed to the yolk colored sunlight; the sunlight that is supposed to signify a new day, new beginnings. However, to me, the sunlight meant another day of never ending struggle.

Finding the motivation to get out of bed and make myself ready for the day was like trying to find a needle in a haystack, impossible. In my brain, my thoughts were in a constant battle. It's almost like the depiction of the devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other, both of them giving advice that contradicts the other. In my head, the devil was shouting " stay in bed, you're useless, what's the point?" On the other hand, the angel was whispering " get up, you'll feel better! Just take it one day at a time."

Every morning, I wanted to succumb to the devil's advice, but, in reality, I knew I had to listen to the angel. For the past year and a half, I struggled with the burden of depression and anxiety. The effects of these mental illnesses didn't hit me all at once; instead, it was a gradual decline into a hole that I couldn't escape. It all started when I lost motivation to exercise. At the time, I believed I was just in a slight slump, and I kept telling myself that I'd find my rhythm again. I was wrong. Next, I found it hard to get out of bed in the morning. My alarm would be blaring, but I couldn't garner enough energy to simply turn it off. The last thing I noticed before I was sucked into this black hole was my evasiveness towards socialization; I became isolated, and

I found it tiring to talk to people, even my own friends and family. I was in a dark place. There was no light.

After what felt like hours of debate on whether or not to get up, I finally planted my feet on the cool, hard surface of my bedroom. The cool air of my room encapsulated my body, gooseflesh covered my skin. After I dressed and got my backpack ready, I entered the bathroom. The person in the mirror was a stranger, a person I no longer recognized. The pale, bony skin, and the valley-like eye circles made me unrecognizable to my own self. I brushed my black, knotty hair that had been shower deprived for close to five days. My eyes loomed over to the yellow bathtub. I could feel it. The warm, steamy water and the condensation forming on the mirror. I wanted it so badly, but I couldn't do it. I finished brushing my hair and then headed downstairs; each step creaked under the weight of my feet, penetrating the loud silence.

My mother and stepfather were already at work, and my sister was still asleep as her middle school started almost forty minutes after my high school started. The silence of the house was unbearable; my thoughts churned back and forth, causing my heartbeat to beat erratically. "Test, presentation, lunch, no friends." My head was filled with the impending doom on today's agenda. There is no fighting it, no silencing it; my thoughts could not be silenced. My stomach rumbled, but I couldn't bear to eat anything, even the thought of food made me feel nauseous. The pit in my stomach would have to wait. I glanced at the clock, it's 6:43; my school bus typically arrived around 6:50, so I moved towards the door to put on my heavy coat and hat. I took one quick breath and opened the door. The frigid air hit like a punch to the gut. I made it this far already, now I just have to get through school.

As we approached the school, the chatter on the bus was overwhelming. The combination

of yelling and vulgar language rattled my head like a jackhammer. Once the bus stopped in front of the entrance, my heart began to race, once again. As I exited the bus, the smell of exhaust encompassed me, and I started a slight coughing fit, attracting the attention of some students. Feeling annoyed, I made a beeline towards the entrance doors; while I walked, I saw groups of students come together, laughing and teasing one another, obviously content with each other's presence. My heart hurt.

After I reached the doors and was welcomed by the blast of heat, my heartbeat could be felt in my mouth, and my palms perspired. I did not make it to my first period history class before I made a run for the boy's restroom near the entrance to the gym. I hid in a stall, my hands shaking uncontrollably. At this moment, I no longer wanted to be on this earth. I wanted my constant worrying and sadness to leave, to stop plunging me deeper and deeper into the black hole that I had dug myself into.

The bell for the first period rang, snapping me out of my thoughts for one quick second. I already made my decision, I wasn't going to make it through the school day. I desperately needed to leave. I knew if I called my mother that she wouldn't excuse me from the school day. She was tired of me fighting to not go to school. I had no fighting chance with her. She didn't understand. On impulse, I got up from the bathroom floor, and made my way to the gray, shiny steel entrance doors. I looked around, the only people in my line of sight were the janitors near the lunchroom. And at that moment, I made my decision to leave. I had never left school unexcused before, but that was a different time. The moment I opened those doors, once again, I was met with the frigid air of December. I had no desire to call or wait on anyone for a ride, so I walked, as briskly as I could, back home.

Shivering, each gust of wind feeling like needles on my skin, I opened the door to my house. I went straight to the bathroom medicine cabinet. There, I stared, and continued to stare at the bottle of tylenol. I wanted to do it, to take the bottle of pills and never have to wake up again. I would never have to overthink or feel worthless ever again. It could all be over. But I couldn't. I could already hear the screams of my mom as she would find me on the floor, thinking to herself what she could have done to stop it. Instead, I went to my bed and closed my eyes, not forever, but I could only hope.

Looking back, I've come to realize how truly broken I was at that point in my life. From the desire to stay in bed all day, all the way to leaving school in order to suppress my anxiety; I needed serious help. As I stated earlier, I did not know, and still do not know, what caused me to fall into such a drastic state of anxiety and depression. At the time, I was so tunnel visioned by my own mental illness that the simple idea of help escaped my mind. Although, it was close to a month after the school incident when I finally told my mother how I was feeling. The raw look of devastation and sorrow on her face is one I will never forget. My mom immediately signed me up for therapy sessions nearby. The therapy sessions ultimately led to a meeting with a psychiatrist, where I was prescribed medication for my anxiety and depression. Slowly but surely, I began to see the light of day again.

At therapy, I learned skills to help suppress the barrage of intrusive thoughts, while simultaneously learning how to find meaning in activities again. To this day, I still struggle with my mental health, but learning how to control my thoughts and actions has led me to stray away from that darkness, not all the time, but far much more than in my past. For example, on days that getting out of bed feels close to impossible, I tell myself to write down in a journal three

things that I want to accomplish that day. Those goals may range from something as simple as taking a shower, all the way to finishing up a project for a specific class. Also, in moments where my anxiety seems to overtake all the cohesive thoughts in my brain, I've learned to stop, take five deep breaths, and tell myself that I am stronger than my thoughts, and that a clear mind is a healthy mind. Although depression and anxiety may feel like a never ending cycle of hopelessness, the art of learning and integrating specific skills to help suppress the overwhelming burden of mental illness has helped me significantly. Even though there are days where feelings of hopelessness and sadness arise, I have learned to never stop fighting, to keep pushing towards the light.