

I ran away from home when I was 15. My father had just died and my mother was going through a midlife, batshit crazy crisis involving a boyfriend in prison for double homicide, a man she actually forced me to develop a relationship with, going so far as to bring me to the jail to visit him. At one point the man alluded to mafia contacts he could call to "take care of me" if I were to give my mother any more trouble. Doesn't get much more charming than threatening a teenager with gang violence.

Crazy you say? Yes. And that's not even the half of it. But, being a minor, my acting out earned me the labels bipolar and obstinate-defiant. I was subjected to medication I never needed in the first place instead of anyone listening to me, let alone intervening on my behalf. I tried committing suicide 3 times before I even got to this point. Home was not good for me, to say the least.

So I left.

What followed was a three year power struggle that left me broken down and traumatized even further than I already was. The first time I was caught and sent away I was trying to cross the US-Canadian border from Alberta into Montana. The border patrol ran my name and, lo and behold, there I was in an international runaway database. Off to Montana jail I went to be held until they could make other arrangements.

At this point I was still innocent to the troubled teen industry. The escorts who met me at the Salt Lake City airport only told me an "educational consultant" with whom I had never spoken (and to this day have not exchanged a single word with) decided on a wilderness program for me near St. George, Utah. (I can't be completely certain of the name, I was only there for 4 days.) It would be like camping, they said.

I went willingly. We drove through the night, deep into the high desert to hand me over to staff from the program. My hair stood on end when we pulled over to the side of the road so the escorts could hand me off to program staff. But I ignored the sensation and got into the truck with staff to began the drive.

A half an hour of rocky dirt roads until we stopped at a clearing. The woman to my right got out of the truck and motioned to me to exit. The man driving stayed in the cab running the truck and headlights.

Something felt weird. The woman told me to go in front of the truck and stand in the headlight beams. I did. Then she told me to start taking off my clothes. I went wide-eyed with disbelief. She stepped towards me and repeated the instructions. I had no choice.

The headlights bore down on my shivering 16-year old frame as I stripped to my underwear. The woman came up to start running her hands all over my body to check for contraband. The man stayed in the truck watching. I felt sick. I felt exposed. I felt violated. I had already been searched by the Montana jail, by the airport and by the escorts. I couldn't understand why they were doing this to me, especially in this way.

At that point I decided I wanted to leave. I told them this the next morning and

they laughed at me. They told me everyone says that and no-one had ever succeeded.

I was already determined to get out of there. Then it got worse. I started my period and, instead of giving me tampons, they let me bleed all over myself. So there I was, the only girl in a group of guys, in the middle of the desert wearing blood-soaked pants. Nothing says self-esteem to a teenage girl quite like being covered in your own menstrual blood in front of an all-male group. Each morning I woke, I asked if I was leaving. They said no. So I cursed, flipped them off and started hiking. On the final day I managed to get within 4 miles of the main road. By that time I was so worn out and hysterical from lack of food and blood loss that I got off track, panicked and threatened to break a truck window just so I would get arrested and be taken to jail. Anywhere was better than there.

Instead I was tackled onto the ground and cut up by rocks as I struggled, shrieking under a grown man's weight.

But my protesting worked: they transferred me out the following day and sent me to a lockdown facility in San Marcos, Texas that was part of The Brown Schools. At first the staff thought I was mentally incompetent due to my outburst in the desert and put me on a unit with low-functioning girls. Within a week they realized I was sporting a hefty intellect and coasting through whatever process they were trying to instill so they transferred me to the smart-but-troubled unit. I kept my head low for the 4 months I was there, followed every rule they placed on me. I watched girls taken down by staff, screaming and thrashing, hauled into the solitary confinement room. One girl went down so hard that she busted her nose and began spraying blood and spit all over the ground with every mangled cry that escaped her throat. Another friend there went into hysterics and the staff placed her in five-point restraints for so long she ended up peeing herself.

I was fine being forced to walk in a straight line with my hands behind my back. I dealt with the forced confessions in group therapy. But the day I nearly died because they wouldn't give me medical attention was the darkest day I had there. I've suffered from asthma as long as I can remember. Hospitals, nebulizers, prednisone and inhalers were par for the course in my childhood. One night I started getting a little sick and requested inhalers. The nurse gave them to me and checked me after. Since I was breathing OK then she decided I was faking. The next day my breathing was even tighter. I dropped a communication request card out of my cell and into the hall. I told them I was having an attack and needed my meds. The nurse was on another unit, they said, so I would have to just wait. In reality, they never called the nurse. It would be another half an hour until anyone attended to me and only because I was limp and unresponsive on the floor. I dropped the card out again and again and again and again. Staff shouted down the hall to stop. My cellmate watched as I paced around the room wheezing and trying to stay calm. My skin started buzzing and going numb from lack of oxygen. I could barely feel the tears start rolling down my face. I was suffocating. Walking became difficult. The last thing I remember as I lost consciousness was sliding

down against the wall and hearing my cell mate's voice far, far, far, far in the distance (in reality she was right next to me) screaming "HELP! Her lips are blue! Help! Someone help!"

I blacked out.

The next thing I felt was a sharp poke and hands on my body. An oxygen mask went on my face and radio squawks of "CODE BLUE! CODE BLUE!" echoing somewhere. My vision slowly emerged from the darkness. I was on the floor of my cell. They'd revived me with a shot of epinephrine and were trying to feed me prednisone. They pulled the oxygen mask from my face and popped the pill in my mouth. After a breathing treatment I was fully conscious again and wholly pissed off.

Staff apologized to me for the incident but I don't think I really accepted it. Instead I just nodded and kept on being a good girl on the unit.

After four months, an incredibly short time for that program, they transferred me to a secured halfway house. I had to sign a contract that I would not run away. I gave the place an honest chance until the first time they gave me some arbitrary punishment for the sake of breaking me down. My mother already told me she didn't want me at home and I sure as hell wasn't going to stay there. So I took off. The next night I dressed in black, packed a bag, dropped out a second story window, ran through floodlights and sharp Texas brush to get to the highway. I held my breath as I stuck out my thumb at the first approaching set of headlights thinking Please don't be staff, please don't be staff.

It wasn't staff. I was free again.

My freedom lasted for another eight months. Then one stupid, careless mistake landed me in the worst program I endured in all my time as a "troubled teen." While my peers busied themselves with junior prom and the blissfully petty concerns of high school life I was planting roots in Portland, Oregon. Since my daring escape that spring I had crisscrossed the country up and down, back and forth before finding a small home among other wayward street kids in the Pacific Northwest.

I was happy. I had kicked a meth habit on my own and managed to find space to sleep in a small studio apartment with my girlfriend. Even though I rarely had money and my girlfriend and I sometimes had to steal the occasional bit of food from our neighbors (I'm sure they knew) I had a place in the world. Most importantly, my life was my own.

Eking out a living underage on the streets means one of three things: turning tricks, slinging drugs or good old fashioned thievery. My girlfriend dabbled in casual prostitution while I sold the odd bag of weed or hit of acid. I wanted something else. I knew it was a dead end and a friend told me he could get me a job working at a pizza place.

The only thing keeping me back was my social security number, a requisite for any legit job. Few people under the age of 18 know that number by heart. Shortly before my 17th birthday I began a campaign to get my social security number from

my mother. I called at odd hours from payphones hoping she would suffer a moment of sleepy weakness and give me my information so I could live my life. No dice. The familiar power play raged between us until, that fateful night, I called her from the LGBTQ youth drop-in center landline.

When the cops came an hour later I was lining up a billiards shot. They said my name. I was so shocked I gasped. The jig was up. One of my friends grabbed me and tried to hide me in the back room but the cops insisted I come with them. My crime? Underage runaway.

The jail made three attempts to put me on a plane to Utah, all of which I thwarted. Round 1: Induce asthma attack. Round 2: Make scene while handcuffed in front of the gate. Round 3: Flat out refuse to get on the plane.

I knew I was going somewhere awful. In my time at San Marcos I heard just how bad it could get. Anything on a ranch was a danger zone, just one step above international reform camps. I knew about beatings, sexual assault, physical torture, isolation, and the occasional deaths. I was prepared to make transporting me there as difficult as possible.

The escorts came, a Mormon husband and wife team in a rental car. I hated them immediately. I sat in the back watching my whole world disappear into the rearview mirror. I would never read my journals again, my clothes would be donated or sold and by the time I returned a year later most of my friends would be dead.

A period of my life wiped off the planet in one fell swoop.

I taunted the escorts. I asked where the other wives were and told them I was a practicing Satanist. The man's face flushed red and he called me names before informing me 90% of the world was Christian. I laughed and asked if he'd ever heard of India. Or the Middle East. Or China. Or Northern Africa. I found some perverse delight in intellectually dominating this backwoods middle aged man. After he snapped and yelled at me I slumped into the backseat with my feet against the window.

I began tapping with my tiptoes and asked, "What if I broke this?"

"Is that your plan?"

I shrugged. "Maybe."

The car swerved to the side of the road, locks went up and into the back burst a husky escort, his frame rushing towards me. Behind my head his wife clicked the door lock down.

I landed one backhand across his face as he came at me but it was too much to fend off. He landed on top with a thud, using his forearm to choke me into submission. Tears welled from my eyes. I tried to scream but all that came out were mangled rasps. The more I thrashed against him the harder he weighed on me.

I finally went limp. He pinned me there for a moment longer before getting off of me and back into the driver's seat.

"Not such a smartass now, are ya?"

I touched my tender throat and wiped the tears off my face. No words came out for

him. I simply sat in shock for a little while. But I am nothing if not determined and soon came up with another monkey wrench.

I had to pee and, no, it couldn't wait. They were rightfully suspicious of me but their aversion to a urine stained rental car proved stronger than their misgivings. When we pulled into the rest area both escorts turned to me and said I had to follow everything they told me to do.

They never told me I couldn't mouth the words "HELP ME" to a stranger as we walked back to the car. Our little group looked suspicious to say the least: a tiny teenager sporting a buzzed head with two long locks in front being flanked on either side by a redneck couple in Wranglers.

As soon as he asked what was going on, the female escort tightened her grip on my arm and started dragging me towards the car.

I wasn't going without a fight. I began screaming: "THEY'RE TAKING ME AGAINST MY WILL! HELP ME! SOMEONE HELP ME!" Everyone in the rest area snapped to attention as I was shoved into the backseat still screaming. I pounded and tried to get out but to no avail.

No-one listens to a teenager. The people in the rest area talked to the escort, accepted whatever he said and let us go. And even though someone called the cops, the officer who pulled us over also let them continue on their way with me despite that fact the escort had no card identifying himself as a legal child kidnapper.

I began to give up hope. No-one would help me. I had no rights.

By the time we reached Idaho I felt defeated. I lay in the backseat while they had a tire replaced, facedown, arms folded across my chest, barefoot (they took my shoes), softly sobbing and saying goodbye to myself while Rolling Stone's "Ruby Tuesday" crooned from the radio. Apparently I looked like I was tied up and we had another visit from the police. Of course, nothing happened.

Despite my protests, despite my struggle, we pulled up to Sorenson's Ranch School late that night.

My first glimpse of Sorenson's Ranch School remains burned into my memory to this day. While the other cabins and buildings hid under cover of a mountainous rural winter darkness, the main lodge sat illuminated under the sickly amber glow of high pressure sodium lights, speckles of snow softly interrupting its view.

Defeated and numb I followed my new captors inside and up to the stairs where they made me trade the clothes on my back (the last of my belongings) for wrangler jeans and a baggy green shirt: my uniform for the next eight months. My protests were greeted with the threat of a death-row style orange jumpsuit and a week of solitary confinement. I acquiesced.

For the first couple of weeks my shoes were taken from me and I couldn't go anywhere without someone watching me. Sometimes this was staff and other times I was given a PPMer, an acronym for Positive Peer Model. Basically, another student. My first PPMer was a girl who had been on the ranch for over a year. We sat in the lodge by a large bay window so she could watch her other charge: a 13 year old girl

from Brazil sitting outside in the snow dressed only in an orange jumpsuit and flip-flops with a sleeping bag wrapped around her for warmth. I learned that someone had brought back drugs from a home visit and the staff were keeping her out there to force a confession.

A tall lanky old cowboy strode towards where she sat. He bent over and began yelling at her. She cowered and tugged the sleeping bag tighter around her shoulders. Then, he grabbed the back of her head and shoved her into the snow before walking away.

I later learned that man was the town's Sheriff in addition to his employment at Sorenson's Ranch School.

I realized then how utterly powerless we were. They even took the last scrap I had of myself, my rather unorthodox haircut, buzzed short all over except for long, front bangs. (Many years later I discovered Shane Sorenson, the man with whom I pleaded to keep my haircut, was under a court order not to work with minors.) I stood in front of a bathroom mirror and sobbed at my image: drab, ill-fitting clothes and short, uneven hair framing a desperate and sad face. There was barely anything of me left.

Before you think to yourself that a haircut and change of clothes is no big deal, consider how much of our identities are tied into these seemingly superficial things. An editorial in *COLORS* magazine said it succinctly:

"If hair is language, capable of expressing everything from political rebellion to religious devotion to a choice of poor hairstylists, then having no hair (or having no control over it) is a kind of speechlessness. During World War II, the Nazis reduced their prisoners to silence. Today armies subordinate new recruits with a hair clipper; Iranian clerics control female sexuality by enforcing the veil; Japanese schools instill discipline with the marugari, an impersonal buzz cut; and police mark criminals by shaving their heads (in a local twist on this ancient punishment, Malaysian police single out illegal aliens by razing their eyebrows, making it impossible for them to find work in the country)."

And that was the point of controlling our appearance: taking control of our minds and who we were. This was one of many tactics to break us down.

At this point I was a veteran of the troubled teen industry. I had little less than a year until my 18th birthday, that magical date that would finally grant me my rights. My plan was to keep busy and stay out of trouble. After the first month I figured out which guys were smuggling drugs in through their contacts in the next town. I knew which students were chronically in solitary confinement. I knew that I had to make up drug issues for the "therapy group" (led not by a therapist but by staff) and spent each session talking about how much I loved meth, a destructive drug I came to despise after quitting on my own the year before. I knew one of their stated goals for me was to go to college, my only way out before I turned 18, so I spent all my time buried in books to get a high school diploma at my own pace. But the one thing they wanted to hear from me was that I was there because I was a bad kid. I knew they were wrong and tried to tell my mother what was going on

there. Unfortunately, all phone calls were monitored by counselors and I was silenced after trying to tell her about the isolation cabin and the punishments that went on there. My counselor cut me off by hanging up my phone. "You're getting too excited," she said. "You can't talk to your mother like that."

They wanted me to admit I was wrong and that my mother was right. That was the only thing I denied them.

That is, until D arrived on the scene.

D was a tiny, sprite-like 13 year old girl. She arrived a month after me sporting the same haircut as I had. I went out of my way to warn her about the impending cut and we came to find out we had friends in common in the outside world. This thread of commonality proved to be a bond I couldn't resist. We hugged each other and played with each other's hair, willing it to grow as fast as possible. We swapped stories and laughed. We found some sense of unity in a world filled with arbitrary punishments, isolation and powerlessness.

Our friendship proved to be fodder for our downfall. Two months after my arrival I was summoned to the attic office in the main lodge. I ran into D on the way over, both of us completely bewildered as to what was happening. The only time you were called into that office was when you had broken one of their hundreds of rules. We hadn't done drugs, had sex, masturbated, snuck a phone call, plotted an escape, tattooed ourselves, been chewing gum, stealing or anything that could be considered a violation. Confusion mixed with mild terror settled in as we sat down in front of one of the head staff members.

He sat in front of a wall of monitors feeding images from each stall of the solitary confinement building. The screens inhabitants sat with their backs to the cameras, still and stiff in grayscale. On the floor at his feet was a small garbage bin. He spat pistachio shells, a contraband item to students, into the container and spoke slowly. "Do you know what this is about?" My heart beat against my ribcage. I had no idea. There were few things more terrifying there than not having an answer to a question like that. We shook our heads no.

Another shell hit the garbage, bounced off the rim and onto the floor. "I get to eat these because I have privileges. You know how you get privileges? You follow the rules. I've been hearing from staff that you two have been breaking some rules." Speechless, we looked at each other and then blankly back at him. He continued: "People are saying they've seen you two touching each other. Seems you two have been having unnatural sexual relations."

I found my voice. "What? No, we haven't done anything like that. I swear we haven't done anything wrong!" D nodded in agreement.

He put the pistachios aside and leaned back in his chair. "Well, I'm inclined to believe the staff here. I think you two will just have to go into solitary until you learn to tell the truth."

My heart plummeted into my gut. I tried to protest but I knew it was useless. He radioed to the staff monitoring the isolation cabin and told them to expect us. Aside from my arrival, I had only been threatened with solitary confinement one other

occasion. My friend, who was openly lesbian, was slow dancing with D at a (rare) social event in the lodge when they were separated by staff. When they told me I became incensed and demanded to staff they be allowed to dance together since the straight girls were doing the same thing. We were quickly whisked to the upstairs attic office and shown three orange jumpsuits with our names on them if we pushed the issue, good for one week in the cabin for solitary confinement. The isolation cabin sat to the left of the main lodge, tucked in among the cabins on the boy's side. A long rectangular building with about eight to ten stalls along the back wall, a tiny bathroom on the far left, and a door on each end of the wall opposite the stalls, each of which was monitored by a small video camera mounted on the ceiling. In addition to the cameras, a staff member sat at a desk across from the stalls and made sure that students sat upright on the tiny prison cot in each stall facing the blank back wall. Our hands were to remain on our knees, our backs upright and our mouths silent.

We stayed like this for 12-15 hours each day before being allowed to sleep fitfully under bright lights on the hard lockboxes in the main lodge. D and I were allowed to remain in our uniforms instead of the bright orange death-row jumpsuits because we weren't officially being punished. Each morning, we were individually taken to the office again and asked to confess to sexual activities that never happened.

When we refused we were sent back to solitary.

Every chance I got, I whispered to D to stay strong, to not give in, to find strength in united defiance. But she was only 13 and not yet hardened by these places. After three days of forced silence and immobility she broke down and gave a false confession.

I spent my last day in solitary betrayed and frightened. I didn't know what D told them and needed to make sure our stories matched. If I couldn't give a similar account I feared I'd remain in there indefinitely.

As I wracked my brain for a solution, a girl in a neighboring stall had a defiant meltdown. She'd grown tired and started leaning against a wall. The staff in charge yelled at her to sit up straight and when she refused, more staff members came in and forced her to "hold the wall" a physically taxing punishment where you leaned forward against a wall and held yourself at a 45 degree angle. Because the girl was already tired her arms gave way after several minutes and she slid to the ground. Staff shouted at her to get up and she refused. I heard them tackle her with a thud and the screams grew louder, mixed with tears and sobbing.

I remained still and upright in the seated position on the other side of that wall the whole time, only wincing slightly at her snot-drenched shrieking.

By a stupid stroke of luck the next day, staff was shorthanded and took us into solitary confinement an hour late. I saw D come into the lodge for breakfast as we were about to be led out and in one quick hushed moment, we stared in different directions pretending not to see each other while conversing under our breaths. She repeated everything she'd confessed to and said she was sorry. I only felt relief knowing I could be released from solitary that day.

I went into the attic office for the fourth time that week, shoulders slumped and weary. Lies tumbled from my lips. I stared at the floor while I told a middle aged man how I had fingered my friend in the bathroom, kissed her many times and had sex with her in a cabin. Disgust welled inside of me like a broken sewer pipe, flooding my veins with self-loathing for having to say those things to him.

"Doesn't it feel good to finally tell the truth?," he asked.

I wanted to vomit.

He sent me back to solitary to wait for my counselor to pay me a visit. She and I hadn't spoken since I refused to grant my mother attorney privileges over my educational trust fund, a trust set up in my father's will meant to support me through higher education. I was livid that they would use my money to keep me locked up. They were determined and figured out how to access my funds despite my protests. I remember walking past the open door of an office where my therapist (who only met with me on four occasions over eight months), my counselor and another staff member counted out stacks of cash on a table. As I stared, my therapist looked up and said, "I'm not talking to you, little missy, since you won't sign those papers." I walked away flushed with anger.

But now I couldn't muster anger. They'd broken me. My counselor came into the stall and sat down on the bed. She told me she was glad I had confessed and it represented progress. Then she repeated the question posed so many times to me already: "Do you understand why you're here?"

I said the answer I knew they wanted. "I need to learn to listen to what my mother says." I began crying and continued with a nugget of truth: "I just want to be good." She hugged me and told me they'd let me out that day.

After my release I was demoted to Level One. Upon arrival, everyone was a Level Two but common knowledge held that part of the program was demotion to the lowest level before being allowed to gain more privileges. Each level granted more freedom and was one step closer to being released. The day I was sent to solitary I was living in one of the Level Two cabins but would now be demoted to the filthy and overcrowded Level One lodge, where I contracted a horrible fungal infection on my feet from the dirty showers.

Of course, I was made to sleep in the main lodge for a week while staff debated whether or not I was a danger to the other girls. They said they were concerned I would sexually assault them. My self-esteem sank into oblivion.

But I persevered. I endured the physical punishments doled out to Level Ones, thankful for the winter that prevented too many long desert hikes. Every Friday night we did The Workout, a several hour test of physical endurance. It started with laps around the gym, counting off each one in unison. For every late person, we got five more laps. Every time they caught us cheating by skipping numbers, we had to start over. After running there were burpees, push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, sprints, duck-walks, crab-walks, kangaroo-walks, and wall-sits. After all that we were given 5 minutes to eat an apple, have a glass of water or go to the bathroom. I use 'or' because there was never enough time to do them all. You could only finish

one before repeating The Workout over again. Then we went to bed to sleep a bit before doing another workout at 5am both Saturday and Sunday mornings. The Workouts usually took three hours, though any defiance or lagging by one person would earn punishment for the whole group. I was told of one workout that lasted for over 7 hours.

During the rest of the week, we went on hikes or did forced labor on the ranch. If someone was still being defiant they had to shovel piles of horse manure (wearing their own shoes of course) or made to dig 2'x 6' x 6' hole in the ground or fill another hole up. Before I had arrived, kids were made to both dig and fill the hole but a complaint to a child protection agency put a stop to that.

I kept to the rules and focused on getting out through college admissions. I turned a blind eye to the physical hold downs and punishments meted out to the lower levels and put all of my energy into getting myself out. I ascended quickly through the program and after four more months I had earned my high school diploma, taken the SATs and been accepted to every college where I applied.

I was so good that they allowed me to go on campus tours with my mom that June. I behaved. I didn't run away, even when I had the chance. And that kind of behavior from a girl who had run away by jumping out of a second story window the year before. I was too numb and broken and scared at that point to do anything on my own.

When I got back from college visits they kept me for another month. I lived in a private trailer with other high-level girls off campus and spent my time filling in for staff and supervising lower level students. When staff wasn't looking I tried to treat the other kids with kindness, telling them they could cry or scream or jump around but to do it quickly because I'd have to take them back outside to sit on the fence. I spent my last month in relative freedom there. My housemates and I even rented an R-rated movie from the town general store: The Matrix.

It blew our caged little minds. We watched it three times, back to back to back. The idea that what we were experiencing wasn't real but a computer simulation was an intoxicating one. We laughed hysterically at the thought that we had really been free this whole time. We held it with us like a warm secret. We also returned the movie as early as possible the next day for fear of reprisals.

And just like that, I was released in August. I spent three weeks living with my mother. The outside world frightened me. For the first time in my life I was having nightmares and anxiety attacks. When I spoke, I did so looking at the ground and covering my mouth with my hand. A once ballsy young lady, I had become sad and hesitant. Months of punishments, walking single-file in public with my hands behind my back, forced to avoid eye contact with outsiders and the constant fear of physical assault for the catch-all "defiance" violation had left me broken. I cried for no reason. People terrified me.

By the time I went to college and found out most of my friends in Portland had died from drug overdoses I was in a pit of loneliness. Everything I had before they took me to Sorenson's Ranch School was gone: my friends, my enemies, my clothes, my

journals, my art, my entire life wiped out in one night. I thought often of suicide. I tried talking to a therapist on campus but found the very act of therapy to trigger me. I wanted to drop out of college, wracked with guilt over my friend's deaths. And there was no-one to talk to. I tried, but the story is so intense that most people look at me in a shock that I can't handle. They don't know what to say and the conversation inevitable stalls into an itchy silence.

I did my best to move on and forget. By strokes of luck I found circles of loving people who accepted me for all of my weird quirks and occasional emotional outbursts. Eventually I found a therapist that I could talk to and I went on to get a Master's Degree in a field I found mentally engaging. In short, lots of love and acceptance combined with two years of weekly therapy sessions healed me over time.

This August marks the ten year anniversary since my release. I've tried many times to write about what I went through but was never able to get past the first few sentences. When I read Xandir's post a few weeks ago I felt physically ill and spent a week uncontrollably sobbing on my couch. Then I pulled out my laptop and began to write my story.

The Happy Ending

My life is awesome right now. I have amazing friends who support and love me. I have nothing but opportunities in front of me right now and the future looks bright, though uncertain. Most importantly, I'm free. I can go where I want when I want with whomever I want. This is all I ever really wanted in the first place and now I have it.

Above all else, getting through all that turmoil showed me the extent of my unwavering resilience.

ETA:

1. Yes, I am real. No, I am not a middle aged man pretending I was at any point a young queer girl. (Though that seems to be going around.) You can read lots about me here: www.thesexademic.com
2. If you think I'm embellishing or giving some dramatic flair for the sake of storytelling, have a look at this [Wiki entry](#) on a website for survivors with plenty of links to other testimony or perhaps [this little comment](#) left on their blog by a student pleading with parents not to send their kids there.
3. To Sorenson's Ranch School: In the past you've successfully [shut down a MySpace group of survivors](#) as well as [took down a survivor website aimed at exposing you..](#) Know that if you try to come after me and take down my story I have a team of lawyers ready to protect me. You can't claim defamation against truth. Also, thanks for taking all my money and leaving me with PTSD. I find you absolutely vile.
4. If you don't know what to say after reading all this but want to say something, sometimes a simple *hug* is the best thing to say.
5. If you want to help, go [here](#) and see how you can lend your skills.

