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The Background

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The Background

Anonymous

“She never liked talking about these kinds of things, never liked talking about the struggles to friends in fear that she will cause a commotion. Her family always instilled in her that whatever happens behind closed doors shall stay locked behind that door. The door that was filled with roach-infested makeshift beds, clutters of old clothes that suffocated her rib cage but there was no denying that there was no such escape from such lifestyle. She was entrapped by them and her own mind, something she wished were easy to ignore and climb out of. But it wasn’t as simple as she had hoped it to be...”

They say that everyone has their own fault, something that makes them imperfect. My family is the definition of imperfection, you could definitely say that we are dysfunctional, but isn’t every family exactly that? Having their own quirk that may be unpleasant to some? Sometimes when I was younger, it was hard for me to relate to some of my friends, especially one of my best friends who lived on Naples street. Even that street sounds fancier than my whole existence. They lived in really old but really nice, two-bedroom house, renting out the bottom half of the house to a tech-savvy employed couple. Both of her parents are happily together, and are all perfectly healthy and happy. I envied everything she had, down to the arguments her and her family would have with one another. Whenever I slept over at her place, I never wanted to leave and I prayed to the heavens that I would have a family just like hers.

According to The National Center for Biotechnology, “In studies of community samples, children of substance abusing parents are more likely to have an alcohol and/or drug use disorder themselves by young adulthood as compared to their peers. Moreover, children of substance abusing parents are at risk for a wide variety of other negative outcomes, including emotional, social, and behavior adjustment problems as well as challenges in cognitive academic functioning.” All my life, I have been living in San Francisco, just between Tenderloin and South of Market Area. I grew up in a small studio apartment with my mom, dad, and brother. Both my parents have always struggled with an addiction while I was growing up and constantly argued with one another. My father during my adolescent years was addicted to drugs, not sure what kind it was because my mother made sure to keep that part of his life a secret for the

majority of my youth. Because of his addiction and the arguments he had with my mom, he was constantly out of the house from days at a time. My mother had her downfalls as well, the thing she clung to the most while I was growing up were cigarettes and gambling. The toxic fumes would fill our tiny apartment, suffocating both my brother and I during the process. It was pointless to try and tell both my mom and dad to quit smoking, sometimes it would result in even more arguments and a slipper to the head. Although we never went to bed without food, we did struggle many times with figuring out what to eat and paying certain bills for the house. Our meals became more and more creative as my mother's paycheck slowly but surely disappeared into the abyss. It was like a stoner satisfying their craving and waking with a terrible stomachache the next day. Money became something too scarce, something that was easily thrown to her entire addiction.

The constant arguments were no help either. It was always about the same thing; money, us moving out, and his addiction to whatever drugs he took. Sometimes the arguments became physical and sometimes it led to laughter and all tension would cease to exist. We were always on a rollercoaster, a never-ending loop of vomit, screaming, and sometimes laughter. Yet there was this one incident that will never escape my mind. I don't remember everything about it because I was asleep for half of the argument. I was awoken by the screaming and yelling from both my parents. They were speaking Tagalog, bickering about whatever there was to bicker about. I remember seeing my dad pushing my mom away from him, thinking that my mom would hit him for some reason. As they continued arguing, my dad's face began to change color, and that was when I knew something about this argument was different from the rest. Within a second, my father's hands were around my mother's neck. My brother saw this and told him to stop and pushed my dad towards the bathroom, knocking the wind right out of him. Out of every fights and arguments my parents had, this was the breaking point. My mother called the police, and my father hid every illegal thing including a butterfly knife under the bunk bed. Tears flowed down both my eyes and my brothers. Minutes later, there was a loud authoritative knock at the front door. My mom opened the door and both police officers walked into our apartment and escorted my dad out of the room. Both officers asked question after question about what happened between both my parents. When they were finally done giving their testimonies, my dad was taken to the station.

We haven't heard from my dad after that. My mom proceeded to get a restraining order on my dad. On the scheduled court date, my dad did not appear. As days went by, I longed to talk to my dad about what had happened and just have his presence around. He was hardly around during my middle school days and this incident made it even more impossible to talk and see him. It wasn't until about a year later when I had seen him. As I turned the corner of the hallway in my apartment building, I saw him laying down right beside our door. He was snoring soundly in tattered clothing and his face seemed lifeless. That image to this day still haunts me, because it was always brought up whenever I got into an argument with my mom. She made me feel as though he was a lost cause, a burden to the family name. I called my mom right away to ask her what to do and I let my dad come in to take a shower. After telling me how he had been homeless all through those months and how'd he has always been watching over my brother and I on the rooftop of our apartment building, my mother showed up from work. The moments went by in a blur and my dad was back in my life once again as if nothing ever happened in the span of those twelve months.

Growing up was always confusing in that household. I questioned my own sanity and everything in between. I didn't notice this but all the in-betweens gathered up together and punctured a hole in my existence, creating a never-ending darkness that is my depression. I mean my mom was constantly judging my appearance, telling me that I was either too skinny or too fat and that I either had to gain weight or lose the weight. She judged everything about me, pointed out all the insecurities I never really knew I had. She tormented me with the harsh words and always used her hands if I began to act out. But this was what Filipino families have done for centuries right? I remember one day our arguments went out of control, similar to the incident with my dad and her. I don't remember what happened that night, but I do remember her throwing me down to the toilet bowl, where I bumped my head on the porcelain. I screamed at the top of my lungs as I felt blood dripping down my head. I left the bathroom and started packing a small backpack filled with some of my belongings, called one of my mentors from the afterschool program I was a part of, and was taken to a safer place for me to stay. I stayed with my mentor for about a week, reflecting on what happened with me and my mother, including the toxic relationship I felt I had with her. Although she apologized a week after and I was forced to reside with her again, I felt

that she never meant any of her apologies because days like these became my normal. A hand-painted dish with the words “Life is a sea of entropy” painted by none other than myself is thrown one day, and then a few years later, I’m forced to walk blocks away from my mother to calm my little “temper-tantrum.”

Throughout the years from Elementary to this very day, I realized that I had a “disorder”. I have depression, something my mother never wanted me to admit. She was in denial. “How could someone so happy and sweet be as depressed as you’re claiming yourself to be?” I myself can’t answer that question, but my gut is telling me otherwise.

I tried blocking all these negatives out of my mind by filling it with things I loved. I got into sports at a really young age to avoid going home early, went to after school programs that talked a lot about hope, future and God. Although I became distant to the religious aspect of my life, I still hold those values true because of who welcomed me into that program and church; showing me compassion and that people are still good in the world. Yet for some reason, these constant insecurities pop in every now and again to remind me of the hopelessness I created for myself. I never know what I am doing, and I fear becoming a failure, a nobody, a nothing. I want to find the joy of little rays of light the world has to offer, but if I am constantly being dragged down with all the tragedies that surround me like violence, addiction, or feeling suffocated by my own surroundings, why is it so hard for me to escape these walls? I want to start anew, and I understand that both my parents migrated here from the Philippines, but why does it have to be so damn hard for a first generation to begin their new life in a strange unfamiliar land to their ancestors? Why must it be hard to establish oneself and find refuge in their own fears and failures? Can I blame my parents or do I blame who I have become to think about life like how I do? I do not want my past to define me, but maybe I’m letting it get the better of me as of right now.

I guess time can only tell.