

Life & Healing with Borderline Personality Disorder

A Long, Lonely Journey of Pain and Peace

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- A Ride With No Stops -

You grow up not realizing you soon wouldn't be able to walk consistently, until one day you collapse under your own weight. Neither you nor anyone around you can see that there's anything wrong with your legs - only that you're on the ground. You cry out in pain without the words to describe what you're even feeling, ashamed of being seen like this - and of letting down your loved ones because you suddenly can't move, unable to live up to your roles in their lives or the obligations of your day ahead. You don't understand what's become of your body and you lash out from the intensity of this realization and its emotional fallout; and in not knowing what help to ask for nor how to receive what others are offering in vain. You feel disgusted with yourself, immobile and spiraling emotionally.

You're in such intense pain that you cry, you scream, you crumple up into a ball, oscillating between panic and dissociation. You're drowning in sensation, with only brief moments of relief during which you can struggle for breath but never truly find comfort. Unsure of what even caused this immobility, you try to move a toe, an ankle, a knee - nothing budes. You desperately have to get up - this has gone on too long. You lose track of what's happening around you, of how much time has even passed.

You're so overwhelmed you feel it elsewhere in your body. You become dizzy. You vomit. You ride this mire of debilitating discomfort in waves until you're exhausted and you can't feel anything anymore. Everyone around you is exasperated and holding their breath, hoping things won't get any worse - you're unsure if they've given up on you, if they're upset, if they're angry, if you've hurt them as you've

flailed about, hardly yourself. You've been so out of it you have no idea how they're feeling. Are they even going to want to stay in your life after this? Who would want to be around this? What if this is just how things are now?

Time continues to pass and you eventually feel a twitch - you have feeling in one leg... and then the other. You weep from the experience, simultaneously in agony and relief; and, still disoriented, you limp back up to a standing position. Your legs shake, you're unsteady. Profoundly embarrassed, you seek out those around you who witnessed the ordeal to see if they're okay, and to try to get some sense as to what has been going on in the world outside yourself.

"Why haven't you been on your feet?", they silently ask you with their eyes. You read sadness and exhaustion in their expressions... or is it hurt? You're unsure. The rest of the day is spent resting. Your legs are tired from strain, and the shame that continually washes over you leaves you in a different kind of pain. And without realizing it, you harmed those around you. This had consequences, and repair has to happen - and on an empty tank. You hope to god this never happens again... and then a day later your legs give out and you buckle.

- *Lost in the Torrent* -

Day after day these bouts of immobility continue to happen and your responses to them intensify. Days turn into weeks. Weeks turn into months. And despite how tightly you held on, your obligations have slipped from in between your tired fingers and you grapple helplessly with the reality that you really have been disappointing everyone around you. You can't make it to work - your boss is furious. You can't pay your bills - your family is panicked, pleading with you to get back up. "There's nothing wrong with your legs! Please, you have to live up the life you're living!" You lie to yourself, but you know deep down that the marathons of this life can no longer be run, and you don't know what's become of you.

This othering continues and you begin to lose sight of yourself. Your identity blurs into shapes you don't recognize, and you find yourself questioning the quality of your own character as you're continually chastised by others and by you yourself. You start to question if there's a future, and if you even deserve one if there is.

Your heart has been crushed by this nightmare on loop - it's shattered into a million pieces and scattered across the crumbling plane of your psyche. The pain you feel paradoxically gives the empty space inside you form; and while it's amorphous and undefined, you know that it's slowly killing you from the inside out. And your damned legs, they still won't let you stand when you need them to.

Fear starts to overtake you as things fall apart. Your relationships struggle, and the more that they do, the more frequently these episodes recur. "You need to stop this! You need help!". You're so embarrassed you don't want anyone else to see, and so disgusted you hardly feel you deserve it. You try to hide but you can't.

You're at the end of your rope and you don't want to be alive anymore, and your health at large begins to slide out of shape. Now blinded, you're a broken mirror, crooked and half-hung on a wall that no one can bear to look at anymore.

- Fill Me With You -

A pain too big to fit inside you has lead to utter dysfunction. Substances help you cope with your broken form, and chasing impulse is your only escape. You're a mess on the ground looking for a fix, and any respite will do. In need of something to fill the chasm where your heart used to be, you intoxicate it with half-formed desires. You can't see the emptiness for what it is, or listen to what it's telling you, and so you drudge on, taking on more and more risk while not knowing how to stop the harm to yourself and everyone around you in doing so.

Hollow and deeply isolated, you seek out others you haven't yet failed... who don't know how damaged your spirit and sense of self are at this point. And for a brief

moment you find solidarity... you're not the only one who's taken on injury in life. Before you realize, you've become fixated on their wounds and you help their scars heal. You tend to their feelings in ways you can't with your own under the pain and oppression of your circumstances, and you watch them try to stand on your behalf. And yet, your maladaptations tangle and collide violently as waves to a rocky shore, your head still underwater from your own unresolved inner chaos.

You enmesh yourself further, forcing them into your own chest cavity. But like puzzle pieces from a different box, they don't fit. And, terrified of yourself, you fear they'll leave as the foundation of your bond crumbles... and they do. You're alone again.

- *At Least Seeing the Fog* -

You don't know how you're still alive... surely this much pain would kill a person. Somehow you struggle on. You wonder how many years this has shaved off your life force for putting your body and your soul through this much sorrow. You wouldn't wish this hell upon your worst enemy.

Tossed like a coin, your intense shame glints in the sunlight and lands on its other side one day. A hard talk with a loved one at the end of their rope with you. They've found someone you can talk to and you choose to accept - a dialectical behavioral therapist who might be able to help. Shame's function, for once, helps you instead of hurts. You're in immense pain, but this is at least a path forward... it's better than continuing on how things are.

You've learned over all of these years to steel yourself against your feelings. You've automatically overcontrolled them to keep them away, to stop yourself from drowning. And all the pain that's built up over all this time is truly crushing at this point. Looking this in the eye isn't going to come in a day.

You were given a cane, and through sheer force of will and with the right push from a loved one, you hobble up into a stance of some dignity for the first time, even if you can't feel it in the moment.

You begin your years-long journey of learning to live with yourself again.

- *The Skeleton of a Burnt-Down House* -

Twice a week you make your way to this new wiseman in your life, who somehow understands your experiences. It feels like you're talking to god.

The house your spirit had inhabited is only cinders and ash now since this affliction took hold of your life, years ago at this point. This person wipes the soot off your face and unlocks a part of your soul. Tears flood in, and the pain behind the emptiness shows itself for the first time.

You realize within this crumbled frame that under the floorboards were years of wounds. You were abandoned by your parents, by your siblings. By your friends and mentors. By your colleagues and equals. You're terrified of it happening again; and so painful were those betrayals that you hid the feelings behind a false wall in this home and obscured the shackles that bound you to it until now. Your wrists are chafed, bones broken and skin bleeding.

Each session you leave exhausted... you spend months sitting with their aftermath without hope in your heart. He tells you that you have to let go of holding this house up and let it fall. He promises he'll help clear the rubble and teach you how to pour the foundation for a new one.

You leave the job you worked at for over a decade that you can no longer sustain. You remove toxic people from your life. You try to control your substance use - although this one will take a long time.

The fog is still heavy, but you're at least seeing there is - or at least was - a house here, and that you've been in its ruins all this time.

- *Sundown Phoenix* -

You're slowly learning how to live after a life of ignoring yourself, but you frankly have no idea what you're doing. You stumble on but forward in life; and at least you're in a quieter place. You're finding sustainability. You're not stuck anymore: you're changing, and healing, and being accountable - and you never stray from these things. Your body is in a constant state of alarm and shock from these years of struggle though, and you slowly realize that you need to rebalance your brain chemistry and teach your body it's finally safe. You're humbled by the fact that this may take a lifetime; but you recognize that you spent your childhood in neglect and abuse, and your adulthood falling apart from repeated abandonments.

You'll spend the next five years shuffling a cocktail of chemicals through your body's systems, trying to soothe a nervous system that's only known fear and pain. You'll eventually find your way.

It'll also take you years of learning how to calm your body down when you collapse... TIPP skills: tricks for this breathing, hurting form of flesh and blood you inhabit that's forgotten how to live with itself.

This monster inside you - the one that strangles you with shame and emptiness until you're blacked out and bleeding from your nose - is Borderline Personality Disorder. Rooted in abandonment fears, it transformed how you perceive yourself and reality. An old self died by its hand, and you were reborn as something new in its place. It's not your fault and it never has been.

You can't accept this now, or that you're disabled from it, and you insist that you can walk. You try to stand and you fall. Accepting all this means you have to confront it, and so you put it off until you realize you aren't moving forward again.

Time continues on.

- *Nature's Machinations* -

Like the emptiness that you often feel, you also discover that shame and other feelings can mask intense feelings underneath them. You learn to identify what they are, and you begin work sifting through the debris of what once housed your life and identity.

You confront the unspeakable horrors from those who abused you, and are knocked breathless from the twisted blows of those who left you fully for the first time. You truly grieve.

You sit beside your inner wounded child, and younger selves, who carry these wounds so deeply. The ones who see and feel in simple terms. The ones that idealize and devalue. Those who can only feel in black and white because of their skewered hearts. The sides that hurt and need care the most. You learn to help them grieve and to give them what they need.

A combination of medications and these repeated confrontations - and lots of time passing - helps your wounds heal. The scars are deep and marred, but they are only proof of what you've survived.

- *Lock and Key* -

You're afflicted by terrible nightmares and still struggle to walk. Your body is panicked beyond reason all the time. Although so much progress has been made, medications aren't helping and something clearly is still amiss.

Your wiseman hands you a tapestry and a quill, and tells you to dab it in ink. You begin to construct within your subconscious, through his guidance, a series of emotional containments for your worst wounds. They leave you in tatters, as he pulls them through your chest and out before your eyes... and then stores them somewhere small and understandable, with all the context and meaning they need alongside them.

You start to find a deeper peace. Your worst nightmares have finally been put to rest for good.

- Etchings in the Dust of an Old Life -

It's been nearly half a decade now, and you're piecing yourself together. Within the frame of the broken mirror of yourself, you've refit each piece of glass that you could find and understand. Some are missing. Some are in a different shape. But you are more than just the fractured sum of your parts now. This mirror is hung on a wall solidly placed into the foundation of a new home.

You've come to accept your limitations, and while you will run no more marathons, there is value and meaning in a quiet, slow life.

Connections within yourself and with others build healthily, and you begin to feel uncomplicated joy for perhaps the first time in your entire life.

All of the ruptures have been mended now, both between those you love and between you and yourself. You can finally move forward.

- Still Dim but Brightening -

The most important pieces of the new home of your spirit are in place. Although you move through it with a lighter air, you sometimes stumble and fall.

You understand what it means and you catch yourself with your palms on the floor. That old wiseman of yours describes you as being in post-recovery now.

Your body's nervous and emotional defense systems still misfire when emotions hit you, and that second, discrete part of you shows up and pushes you over. You yourself are holistic and of a wise mind, can honor your feelings and those of others, and can move dialectically through life. You will always carry beside yourself though that other you - the one who feels in black and white.

Like a flare-up that causes your legs to buckle, they'll show up and steal your ability to walk away for a while. You don't make things worse, you practice your skills, and you debrief your loved ones and validate their experiences when you're feeling better. Your feelings are largely felt when you need for them to be, and you're able to move through them instead of around them. You see when things fit the facts and when they don't, and you act or don't act accordingly.

- *A Jewel as the Earth Turns* -

You've accepted, without judgment, that you have an emotional sickness and a mind that betrays you sometimes. You still fear abandonment and are afflicted with BPD's other traits, but you know its shape and what it can - and can't - do to you. Like a chronic physical pain, it debilitates you with its strength; but as with any flare-up, you see a larger truth surrounding it that tells you it will subside. You know its nature, and it's no longer riled up into a hurricane from the now-quieted winds of your past.

This disability has decided your form for you, but you can see how the facets of your unique shape now glisten in the sunrise. To your great surprise you are humble, and kind, and wise, and good.

Through pain and healing has the world somehow brought about beauty in you - and it's yours to keep. You've accepted your destiny, and take a firm step into a more joyful and peaceful future.