

I sat in the cheap cushioned swivel chair. My psychology professor five feet in front of me gave a soft, warm, inviting smile. My palms were sweating as I twiddled my thumbs together. Earlier that day, I asked him if we could speak after my last class of the day. Now I sit here fidgeting anxiously in his office, wondering how to start the conversation. The office was chilly and a little too quiet. Yet I felt comforted by his inviting smile. "Well Taylor, it seems you are having doubts about your major?" I nodded my head in agreement. My mouth felt dry; my throat felt scratchy. "Yes, I am concerned. I look back and see how much therapy has helped me and I want to help others in the same way." I smacked my chapped lips together trying to form the next words. Sometimes, when I feel an overwhelming number of emotions, it feels as if there is a golf ball stuck in my throat, cutting off my oxygen so my breathing is shallow as it blocks all the words from coming out. Forcibly swallowing that golf ball down I continued, "I feel if I can't handle my own emotions, traumas, and problems why should I be the one telling other people how to cope with theirs." My psychology professor nodded his head with a soft smile. A smile that said, 'I know something you don't.' I sat spinning side to side in the office chair while the professor talked. The professor spoke of his own experiences and the people he used to work with. I felt comfort talking to this man who has had 72 years on this planet with a handful of those years working with people like me. My professor described his experiences working at a psychiatric unit, working with alcoholics, and even his daughter's experience working in telehealth. "I have worked with people who have Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, and people with abuse trauma." I nodded, listening closely. "What I found is that trauma affects people in many different ways but still loosely the same."

"...like I have found that most women who are victims of sexual assault lose value over their body and their selves as people. Losing their confidence, they try to hide from the world." The topic came out of nowhere. Of course, he did not know. He could not know. My body went frigid; I was frozen in time. I could still hear the professor's voice and see his mouth moving but the words were incomprehensible. One moment, I was a 19-year-old college student having a conversation with her Psychology Professor, then the next I was a newly ruined 14-year-old little girl sitting on the cold bathroom floor having a panic attack. That little girl did not know what a panic attack felt like. All she knew was that her chest was burning and in pain as if a car wreck had just occurred in her ribcage. Her tears made violent, unforgiving seas on the cold tile white floor. She dared not move as if she would move then time would continue. She would not and could not continue in the situation she was in. A wildfire of pain spread across her body as she gripped onto the porcelain sink pulling herself to her feet. She came to see her reflection in the water-stained mirror. Feeling the bile come up her throat, she threw open the medicine cabinet and reached for her way out.

"Most just want to take a shower after. To wash it all off." My professor's words sunk into my head almost narrating the flashbacks. The girl was no longer on the bathroom floor but the white bland bathroom of the psychiatric unit. She shrugged,

letting her pajamas fall to the ground not moving her feet an inch. Her back was to the metal mirror. Her mind screamed, "do not turn around! It is not yours." Tears fell to the rough misplaced tiles on the floor. The day she arrived she was taken to this bathroom. She undressed and stood shaking as the nurses observed her body. Noting every scar, dimple, and bruise. Her body was not hers anymore. She resented it, was disgusted by it. No number of showers could fix that. During those three weeks in the psychiatric unit, that little girl showered only three times. The day she arrived, the third day of the second week, and the last day she was there. The first shower after returning to her home was the hardest. Thirty minutes. Thirty minutes she sat on the bathroom floor crying, fully dressed. The running water hitting the acrylic tub mocked her. She could not find the strength to bare her skin; her clothes protected her flesh from being visible to anyone. Even herself.

"Sadly, most victims do not reach out for help." Another sentence from my professor's mouth made its way into my nightmarish flashbacks. The little girl was now in a colorful office with a window overlooking the busy streets of Farmington. Her mother's voice squealed at the therapist in front of them, "She needs to be fixed. It was her own doing, and she needs to own up to her-" The little girl tuned out the stabs from her own mother's knife. Ignoring the slices and cuts she continued looking out the window. Every little car that zoomed by had one or more people. Each person in the car had a life. Each one of their lives had more people. Each one of those people had lives which had more people.

"Taylor." I was a 19-year-old college student again. My professor was now looking at me with furrowed brows. "I can see I hit a sensitive topic. I am sorry." I brought my hand up to my cheek realizing it was wet. I had been crying while the VHS player in my head was on rewind. "No, please do not apologize. I have grown from it." The words fell out of my mouth as if they were prerecorded. Honestly that phrase had been said many times before that. I have spent five years in therapy trying to grow from it. Five years trying to cope with loud noises, suggestive phrases, and even the sight of my own body.

"Taylor, you are a victim but also a survivor. You as a therapist would understand what your patients have been through. Sometimes we as humans just need someone to understand. You know that as well as I do." With that the light at the end of the tunnel peaked through. I remember wanting nothing more than someone who understood me and the way I felt. I want to be that someone for others. I can be that someone for others. With life comes pain and with pain comes experience. I do not think of what happened to me as a tragedy but an opportunity. An opportunity to use the understanding of my pain and hurt to help others.