



The View From My Window

~ a personal journey through mental health

by *Jackson Fisher*

Chapter 4

As we left off, I had just missed an exam, attended one of my final practices and had an internal realization that I had a serious problem. Surely this would lead towards seeking treatment, right?

Well, not exactly. After the week off I tried to get to practice and had several attempts end in tears, frustration and staying home. Finally, I was talked into going to see my family doctor. By pure coincidence my previous family doctor, who I had seen a few times only for very serious physical issues, was retired so my first appointment looking for help with mental health issues was also my first time meeting a new doctor. Being who I am, meeting someone new was hard enough, so to meet someone new and open up about things I wasn't comfortable with and didn't understand was almost impossible. It was a struggle just to attend the appointment. That day I sat in a chair, avoiding eye contact with her while tears fell down my face, as my mom had to explain what had happened to me and the thoughts that I had tried to explain to my mom in days past. On her advice I began journaling. For the next week, I wrote down thoughts I had during moments of anxiety and panic and brought the journal back to her the following week. This allowed her to understand much better what I was feeling/experiencing. She kept the journal over the weekend and I met with her the following week for a follow up.

It was such an odd experience to essentially give what was basically a diary to a stranger for them to read. I was scared about what would happen, I didn't know why but I was worried. When I saw her the following week, she explained to me how sorry she was for what I was going through and how much it hurt her to read about it. With that I was much more trusting and comfortable with her. She explained the technicalities behind what I was going through and helped me look at treatments and got me on waiting lists for specialists. We talked about medications but I declined them. Unfortunately, I still thought I didn't need that because I still, to a degree, thought I was strong enough to fight alone.

Realistically speaking, that decision likely set me back at least a few months, I believe everything happens for a reason so I wouldn't change it but it probably was the wrong choice. I'm not saying you have to use medications; each person is unique and you have to do what you're comfortable with but I will say medication has helped me in an immeasurable way and I think it can do a lot of good for people in similar situations. Anyways, I declined medication but did see an emergency specialist at CHEO while on waiting lists. Through that, I got some basic tools to try and be mindful and continued to try and make practices. I attended two practices in the two weeks I saw the emergency specialist which were the final two I've made to date. Not long after that I caved and began medications as I saw a psychiatrist. Unfortunately, the meds weren't fast working and I felt like they weren't worth it. My family doctor urged me to trust the system and give them one month. I agreed and for much of the next month the only thing that kept me going was the fact that I had promised to give them a chance. Thankfully by the end of the month I was feeling slightly better and began seeing my social worker at Open Doors.

The summer was ending and although I had missed an entire season and had several professionals suggest I give up on the Canoe Club, I insisted on still focusing on it. I continued to try and fail but I was learning how to accept little victories, then came the beginning of my grade eleven year. I tried to attend it as if nothing traumatic had happened over the past few months. During the first three weeks of the year, I made maybe a quarter of my classes. At that point I had to accept what I felt was another defeat as my parents, my doctor and me officially filled out the required stuff to acknowledge that I needed an IEP (Individualized Education Program) and I transitioned to an online student. Over the next few weeks, I adapted to my new learning style, got caught up in my online classes and with my social worker, conceived the perfect plan to get me back to school. I was going to go sit in the resource room for twenty minutes a day, then forty the next week and keep building up and be ready for normal school for semester two. On the first day of putting that plan into action not only could I not get out the door, I couldn't even dress in my uniform.

That started a humbling streak of many, many failed plans to get back, each supposed to be easier than the last. Eventually, my goals were worked down to just putting on my uniform, or just getting out of my house. Then it was just walking halfway to school, then past the school but not on the property. It was incredibly slow build up. Your process won't be easy either; it will include failures, and it will take time but you will get better. You need to trust those who are here to help you. Believe me, I know how hard it is to accept help and to trust doctors but they will be able to help. They will help you, but you are still in control, this is your story and they are just side characters. You still get to make the choices. I declined, among other things, medication (briefly) and giving up the Canoe Club as well as negotiating the details of each plan we made and only doing what I felt was best. The professionals will give you the information and opinions you need to make choices but it is still your choice.

I can't stress how important it is that you're considering help. It might not seem like it but this is a big step. By no means do you have to do it but I personally recommend journaling - just once or twice a day write down your thoughts, or just when you're feeling bad. It's a great way to communicate to professionals what you're going through and can help you understand yourself better. For the first time ever, I have gone back and begun reading my old journals from the beginning of my process. It feels weird, I know I wrote it, I know I lived it but at the same time it just feels like a distant memory or a nightmare. Honestly, it's given me a source of pride, remembering just how far I have come. I want to share a few quotes for context.

On July 11th 2016 after failing to attend a practice I wrote, "Even when I feel fine I still don't [feel good] because in the back of my mind I worry about when the next one [panic attack] will hit."

On July 25th 2016 after a particularly tough few days including a family member's funeral I wrote, "I either lose or get ready for the next fight. There is no winning"

On September 2nd 2016 during one of my worst streaks I wrote, "I'm not saying I wish I had cancer I'm just saying I'd rather have it to this [anxiety/panic disorder] at least that way I would understand what is happening and what/when to expect."

These three quotes are from early in my process. Unfortunately, there are a lot more I could use, and a lot that are quite a bit more depressing. I just want to share these to give true context to what I went through. I honestly thought these thoughts and worse and with professional help I am so much better than I was. I promise the professionals can help you to and you will make it to a better life.