



The View From My Window

~ a personal journey through mental health

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Chapter 2

One thing that has become abundantly clear to me throughout my journey is that things don't always go according to your plans regardless of how much effort you put in to planning it.

As I've alluded to in past entries for this series, I always was a very safe person growing up. I never really took unnecessary risks; every decision was calculated and regardless of the potential reward I didn't do much unless it was very low risk and had clear benefits for the future. I didn't party, I didn't stay out late, I didn't do any dangerous activities, I barely even broke basic rules. What I did do was try hard in school and even from a young age prepare for post-secondary school and beyond. I had it all planned out, try hard early when most people are having fun, set myself up well for life and then focus on enjoying life more when it was much safer as I would theoretically be set up very well for life. To this day I maintain it to be a solid plan, especially considering how young I was when I started it, perhaps if I had not been affected by mental illness it would've worked. Of course, that really isn't important, the point is no matter how much you do to prepare, how thought out your plan is, there is still a chance it won't go well.

Mine was going well, for years actually. By grade nine, I was doing really well. I had adjusted relatively well to high school, I made honour role, I was certain I knew what I wanted to do when I was an adult and I was certain of what school I wanted to attend. By online research I knew what prerequisites I needed for acceptance I had it all laid out and I believed I would've gotten early admission and be able to commit in grade 11. That would leave my twelfth year to just grab extra credits and not really worry about marks and be able to put myself out there and have some fun, the fun I had avoided all along. In the summer after grade nine things really started to pick up. At the advice of a friend I attended a beginner's day at the Carleton Place Canoe Club. Ironically the day I attended there was a big storm and the threat of lightning kept everyone off the water. Despite this I had an amazing time. We played soccer in the pouring rain and it was a great time of competitions, wipeouts and laughter. I was nervous before hand but afterwards I was in love with the dynamic - it was like one big family. Of course, being the safe thinker I was and am, I didn't fully commit until the following week after I got a chance to actually get on the water. I did absolutely horribly. I spent more time swimming than I did in the boat as I kept tipping out of it, and I'm not exactly a good swimmer either so it was a physically awful day. Even after this I was in love with the dynamic of family and competition and I was hooked. Within days I officially joined the high-performance, competitive program and began training full time.

At its peak that meant up to nine training sessions a week, some before school some after, and of course school as well. I was busier and had a bigger social group than ever. Everything was going according to plan. I was no longer just comfortable with fellow hockey players that I'd know for a few months and never see again, I had a social group that I was comfortable and competitive with and I was involved in all the social aspects of a group as well, not just the sport part. Of course, when you put a large group of highly competitive people in a close vicinity to each other for more time than I saw my parents some weeks, things got heated every once in a while. However, overall it was an amazing and positive experience and my plan was on pace to be even better than anticipated.

On top of being on par to go to the school I wanted as well as having more of my life planned out than people that were my senior by several years, I also had the new goal to get as good as I could at kayaking and for a while I did pretty well with it. By the sports standards I started very late so I was far behind the peers I was competing with, however through a high work ethic and dedication I was closing the gap and improving at an above average pace. Everything was truly going as good as it could and I was truly happy. During the next year in grade ten things began to fall apart. I'll talk a bit more about the details of that in my next entry but long story short, as you may have been able to predict by now, the plan didn't work out. By the end of grade 10 I had had what are now clearly seen as panic attacks. I didn't understand them at the time and my focus was getting back to normal for the upcoming canoe club season in the summer. I decided after my final exam that officially wrapped up my grade ten year to take a week off from training to reset before going back to full time training and competing, seems like another safe and smart addition to the plan, right?

Well that decision was almost three years ago, I still haven't returned to the canoe club for consistent practices, let alone full-time training and competing. Again, and I can't stress this enough, I'm not trying to tell you to not make plans, I still make plans ahead of outings and I've gotten to a point where I can do it but also accept that unpredictable things can happen. It's not an easy middle ground to find but it is important to learn that life is chaotic and full of randomness. I say this simply to help you understand you can't control everything in life. This was something that was particularly hard for me to accept and I want to be able to pass that onto you to make your time easier. Even now, knowing what I know, and being overall much smarter and mature as I mentioned I still think I had a good plan, what I'm trying to emphasize by saying this you can have the perfect plan and it still might go wrong.

The only thing you can really control is yourself and how you react to what happens around you and that's okay, not everything is meant to be plannable in life. That's part of the fun of life, some of the best things come out of nowhere and aren't plannable. I think the sooner one can accept that, the sooner they can be comfortable in situations that aren't predictable, which is a lot of life. I certainly wouldn't have learned that without the counselling I received, or at least not as quickly as I did. So, try to remember you can't control everything in life and attempting to do so is a waste of energy. Still if it helps you then it's great to plan ahead and focus on what you can control.

Also trust your counsellors, I know it can be a bit odd at first but they are trained to help, they helped me and I'm sure they will help you too.