

SHOWCASING MY CONFIDENCE – BUT AT WHAT EXPENSE?

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“Autocratic? Why on earth did you use that word for?” – This really captures what my mind was like this evening. Well, it captures what my mind is like *most of the time*. Tonight, I was engaged in a frequent back and fourth between *me* and my mind†. Reminding it that I’m not in danger, I am safe & that it needs to just settle down and not worry about the other people in the room. I was, at times, inundated with all these extraneous comments. See, the thing is – **if you were me** I can assure you that you would know exactly how frustrating it can be to have this **constant back and fourth** between my mind. But not only that – my participation in class was being criticized by (let’s call him x!) – he would **frequently chip in** and make all these annoying, and simply irrelevant comments – time and time again. I remember asking the teacher, Isobel a question to the effect of: “have you noticed a tendency for migrants to make friends with other migrants?” – her answer was illuminating. Isobel said that most of the migrants cannot speak very good English – nor can they speak *other* migrant’s languages. Duh Jake! But her answer was what I expected: they make friends quite easily amongst migrants of their nationality. Which is great to hear!

But what I guess will be most interesting to note here, is that I felt like I was drawing excessive amounts of attention to myself. Well, x thought so at least. I tried to remind x that it is OK, I am only engaging in my learning – and participating as a student to the best of my ability. One thing I have truly learnt about myself over 2 years or so – is I really am making the absolute most of my opportunities. I am living with incredible passion, dedication and optimism. The way I participate in my community, at uni, and volunteering – anywhere! It is impossible for anyone to see my life, the way I see it everyday. I think I

said to someone recently: you know yourself better than anyone else. *You and only you*, know when you are progressing in this world – going from strength to strength. It is *you and only you* who feels inspired and motivated. And most importantly – it is me and only me who knows what I want to do in my life, and achieve what I want to achieve. The way I felt in the class was interesting, drawing a lot of attention to myself through speaking to the teacher frequently – asking questions more than most other people in the room. But you know what? I am different – I know I stick out, and I stick out because I open my mouth and give other people the opportunity to appraise me. And their appraisals don't entirely affect me. If they think I am a confident person, I will be humbled by that compliment obviously. But what I would like to explore is at what expense? Let me tell you that it pushes my anxiety – it tests it that is for sure. X does not like it and as sure as the sun rises – he will let me know about it. I remember when our class decided to take a break, I went to the bathroom and I was reflecting on how I felt. I knew within myself that I was making myself fairly anxious (I was). I really did my best to *suppress* my anxiety, and I think I did fairly well in that regard. Because my anxiety didn't overwhelm me – I could've broken down and cried (hypothetically speaking of course). This anxious period didn't really last all that long, it really settled down when another guy from the class approached me and started talking to me. Then, I *really* knew that the anxiety rushed out of my body. It was liberating... let me tell you.

Did I upset Isobel? I really did wonder this, or perhaps x did. Let's say x. What I reflected on then – and what I reflect on now, is that perhaps my confidence may have struck her as astonishing. Perhaps she hasn't come across someone who can really assert themselves and make themselves heard. I certainly don't mean to blow my own trumpet – but I think a real skill of mine is my confidence. It is apparent to me in many facets of my life: at university, at volunteering, in my work (academic and my immediate life) – many places. I worry that my confidence crushes other people inside. Makes them feel inadequate and incredibly divided and without hope. I think the thought that this might happen, is a possibility. Because if you think about it (and I certainly have!) when you make a display to the extent

that I do, by frequently asking questions, contributing your ideas in front of a group of people. They may begin to wonder certain things about me. And the reality of that is: am I setting myself up for a possible anxiety attack? I certainly felt like this – a lot. But I want to pose an important question here, should it be the case that I test my anxiety? Why can't I contribute as much as I want? Why can't I ask questions to my heart's content (or discontent!). My answer to these questions? Of course I can do all these things! And nobody can tell me otherwise. But again, as I said previously I worry that I am crushing people inside and making them question themselves. Question themselves in "why can't I do that?", "how is he so confident?" "I just don't understand why I can't be as confident as he is, I'm no good". Of course, that is all hypothetical jibber jabber – but it gets my point across. I want nothing but the best for everyone. I want everyone to feel loved, supported and as though they belong in this world. But am I making this too hard for other people, am I crushing their hopes and dreams?

I really don't know where such an abundance of confidence came from to be totally honest with you. It really made itself apparent in, I would say the past 3 years. But see, the best explanation I can give for it is because of the difficult life experiences I have had. I think this kind of consideration is of tremendous importance. So let me take you back to 2010 – I would be delighted to take you through what was an extraordinarily difficult time, a painful time. But a time that I overcame and would be proud to share with you. I am going to slightly get sidetracked though from this point, and try to offer an explanation as to why I developed the level of confidence that I now have. And to do that I will have to explain what happened to me during 2010-2013.

I had many trying and difficult experiences at home. Getting straight down to brass tacks, I tried to **kill myself**. It's a pretty brutal fact, and a very very sad fact. But it sums up rather quickly the circumstances I was enduring to lead me to that point. At the time, I had just graduated VCE. And I was very proud, I managed to get into university with my 73 (or so) ATAR. I was delighted to share this with my parents –

but only to have my parents criticize my choice in the university that accepted my application. It was as simple as my parents chastising my choice, to the point that I became extremely upset with myself – and decided to throw the opportunity right away. And throw away the opportunity I did. I would spend the next 2-3 years looking for work to no avail. I kept myself busy though and kept up with my hobbie in basketball refereeing. But life would only get harder and harder – my brother ended up being diagnosed with schizophrenia, and that really changed the family dynamics – it changed the family dynamics for the worse. It then got to the point that my mother would psychologically abuse me more and more – the worst of her psychological abuse involved her encouraging me to kill myself. This would happen up to 5 times a week. It was her go-to insult, and it **hurt**. It really hurt – it led me to the suicide attempt in the end. I was unsuccessful in that suicide attempt. Things were truly painful for me, and things really only continued to get worse and worse. My mother refused to feed me, she refused to wash my clothes (while she continued to wash my brother's clothes) – if I arrived home late from work (basketball umpiring) she would have all the doors and windows locked to the house and I couldn't get in. I would "sleep rough" in the garage on many occasions, probably 20+ times. I was destined to be a bookworm (and to this day I still am! I own many books now! Currently reading 2!). Back when I was living at home with my parents, I bought books to read – I would spend a lot of my time in my bedroom, out of my parents way (physically out of the way) reading. I would buy books all the time with the money I earnt from refereeing – and this made me pretty happy. But unfortunately, my mum didn't want me to enjoy my books. She'd destroy them when I left to go to work. She'd throw them in the fireplace and just tear them to bits. Or they would just go missing... I will never know what possessed my mum to do all these things to me – why didn't she love me? Why did she revile her own flesh and blood – her own *child*? I take that back actually, because I do know something that happened to my mum. One day she revealed something in front of me, and maybe she regrets it – but mum said to me,

and I quote: “something terrible happened to me long ago” – and I know exactly what this means. And to this day, I still have no doubt what happened to her. Mum was raped.

Did I get a break? Would I break free of my parents evil evil clutches? Yes I would, and it was all thanks to my best friend Kate – she told me to get in contact with an organization called Pathways – and from there things only got better and better. I remember the day I announced to my parents that I was moving out. I simply said to them: “hey mum, I’m moving out tomorrow”. And it was the next day! Could you believe it?! I went into what was known as “crisis accommodation” – I lived with two other guys: Andy and Michael. I wouldn’t spend too long at this house, eventually I would move out again – into my own private rental – where I still live to this day. It’s been 3 years now, 3 years of good progress, personally, professionally and most importantly - academically. By the end of the year I will have completed half of my degree. I am doing a Bachelor of Psychology at Deakin University. I now know that I would like to do social work. I plan to do post-graduate study at Melbourne University, and I plan to do my masters in social work. I believe in myself a lot now – I know I can do anything that I set my mind to. There will be many ups and downs ahead for me. But I have so much support around me now, and I have no doubt these people will be there for me during these difficult times. I cannot stress how much I have grown as a result of the experiences I had over those 2-3 years. I am no longer being emotionally bullied and abused by my own family. I live in peace on my own, and I am really happy. I promise you that.

So with that being said, can you see why I *constantly* evaluate my life now, in the context of what happened to me at home during the years 2010-2013? I can at least, I mean how can I not? They were 3 very, very difficult, painful and heart wrenching years. Many tears were shed, many times was I totally let down by my emotionally unavailable parents. And many times, *many times* – was I ridiculed, psychologically abused, scoffed at and left in the dark. And to top it all off, my mother – **the one who**

gave life to me, and raised me for well over 15 years encouraged me to do myself in. What a betrayal – how that *destroyed* me inside. And how the pain of those experiences still lingers 3 years on.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read this – I realise I got a little off topic and went into my life story. But hey, it happens when I write. I love writing these kinds of pieces... I hope this piece inspired you, wherever you may find yourself in life right now – I hope you can look at my life experiences and see what I overcame, and what I know in my heart you can overcome too.

Anything that the mind can conceive and believe – it can achieve.