

Kevin

“There was an Elephant Stepping on my Chest.”

Interviewer: Kevin (K)

Interviewee: Mr. Lee (ML)

For my Crisis of Meaning project, I decided to interview one of the most influential people in my life, someone who has completely changed the way I think, treat others, and view the world, my 11th grade high school teacher, Mr. Lee. Sitting in a quiet, empty classroom in a high school in Boston, I had the privilege and the honor to interview a man who was able to overcome hopelessness and despair and ultimately made it his mission to serve others.

The Crisis

ML: During my freshmen year of high school, I was rushed to a psychiatric hospital after a suicide attempt. Unlike most kids at school, Kevin, I suffered from severe depression and anxiety. I shut myself in my room and cried every day. I was also very anxious about school, just like you Kevin. I constantly worried about grades and tried so hard not to fail my classes. My anxiety got the best of me. It felt like there was an elephant stepping on my chest. I wanted to be the best, but I couldn't. I was bullied at school for being dyslexic. I couldn't even freaking read normally like the other students! It was so embarrassing! When I sat in class, I prayed the teacher never call on me to read. Can you imagine sitting in class and feeling that every single day? I was an angry child back then and I hated the world.

The Family

I was born in a family of seven: my parents, my three older sisters, my brother (second youngest), and me (the youngest). According to my parents, my three sisters were the best behaving in the family. My brother and I were the worst, we always caused trouble. My parents constantly yelled at us and my father always called us useless. It deeply hurt me, especially whenever he said that to us. Inside my head, I had a wooden bat. Whenever I felt useless, angry, and depressed, I would beat myself with my bat. That was the feeling of depression and anxiety altogether.

During my freshmen year, my depression got to a point where I contemplated suicide. I felt hopeless and extremely sad. I didn't see the point of living anymore. The day I decided to kill myself, I wrote my family a very long goodbye letter and left it on my mother's pillow. When I was in my room and overdosing on pills, my oldest sister found my letter, rushed into my room, and stopped me just in time. She called my mother, who then rushed home from work and called the police. It was very emotional when my mother returned home. My sister, mother, and I all cried together in the living room. Had it not been for my sister, we would have never met, Kevin.

What It Felt Like to Have No Reason to Live

My life lost purpose and meaning, completely spiraling downhill. I didn't have a reason to live anymore. I thought I was useless to the world, and I tried to end my life. At the very beginning, I was in complete shock and denial. I couldn't believe I was feeling this way. I was very confused. While I was in the midst of suffering, I felt hopeless and learned to accept the fact that I was going to die. Before I put the first pill in my mouth, I reconsidered my options. I was scared and didn't want to die this early. But then I thought about all the bullies, what they all said, my abusive parents, and all my failures. I made myself believe there was no end to the suffering and that I should end it right now.

I also remember walking around school and taking one last look at everything before I die. It was heartbreaking. But I accepted the fact I was suffering and that I was dying soon. I didn't want to die because I would miss my friends at school and my family. But still I thought there was no purpose in living and I was so tired of suffering.

Recovery and Return

After about 3 or 4 weeks, I was discharged from the psychiatric hospital. I remember it very clearly; my entire family was all waiting for me and it was very emotional. We all cried, even my father. I felt very happy when my father hugged me. He told me I had grown up, become a man, and now I had a responsibility to help take care of the family. At the hospital, I learned my life actually has a purpose; I will grow up and help others who were just like me. I also felt sad, but in a good way! I felt sad because I had gone through so much in life and knew that this experience would change my life forever.

After I was discharged from the hospital, my family and I all went home. I started feeling happier and more confident because I had faced and defeated a traumatic, life-changing event. I had won the battle over depression and was a resilient man. Transitioning from the hospital back to school was an extremely difficult process. None of my classmates knew what had happened and what I went through. When I got back after missing weeks of school, all my friends ran to me and gave me hugs. It was the best feeling ever. I felt accepted and supported by my friends. Those bullies bullied me a lot less. I started to try harder in school. My grades started going back up. My teachers heard about what happened and offered to stay after school to offer me extra help. As a result, I formed stronger bonds with my teachers. My motivation and energy came back. I was motivated to take on the world and I was also less tired. I felt like I was in full control of my life. I became happier and more confident in myself; my self-esteem boosted dramatically.

I started to learn that I actually did have a purpose in life and that was to help others who are just like me because I've been through it. I was starting to feel that my friends, classmates, teachers, and family accepted me. I became happier and my health improved.

The Lessons Learned

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Suicide is never the answer. Get help or find a trusted friend or family member to get help for you. When you are suffering from a loss or planning to end your life, know things will get better in life because it will. Never let go of hope because it will help you get through difficult experiences. I became a teacher because I want to help others who are just like me. When I was younger, as I mentioned, I was bullied for being dyslexic. I became a teacher so I could prevent students with disabilities from being bullied, so they will not go down the same path I went through.

K: *I stood up, thanked Mr. Lee for his time, and walked out of the classroom. Deep inside my heart, another beautiful, life-changing memory had planted itself; a memory I will hold and cherish forever.*