

If We're Being Honest...

Self-Help through Theory Application

**A Collection of Poetry, Short Stories and
Explanations**

Written by Jakeel Harris

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*this is for everything that I've been through and
everything I will go through.*

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Jakeel and Stephanie's Process of Continuous Growth

The Process of Continuous Growth emerged from my experiences working for Upward Bound, a TRiO program serving low-income and underrepresented high school students.

Alongside the most badass and influential higher education professional, Stephanie Gonzalez Alvarez, we noticed the need and willingness of students to address generational trauma. With the creation of a theoretical framework, coupled with a self-developed educational curriculum dubbed *Hood Therapy*, we were able to help students focus on their personal growth and healing.

Watching students develop for 4 years, engaged with the curriculum, inspired the creation of the theory and this book.

Figure 1. Phases for Process of Continuous Growth

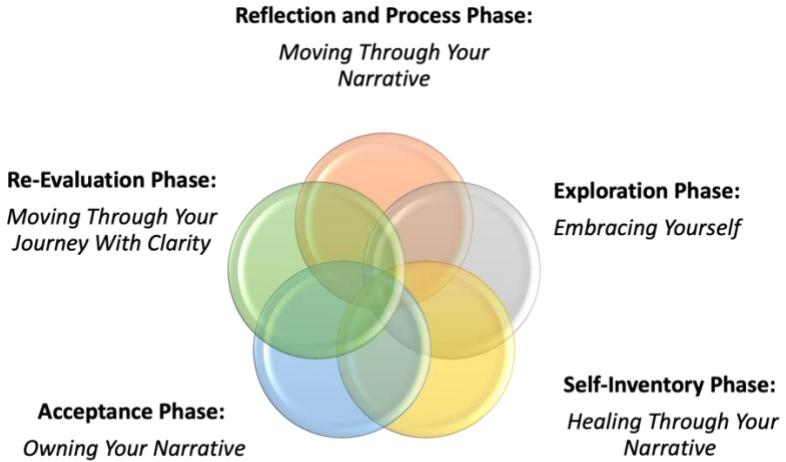


Figure 2. Cycle of Growth

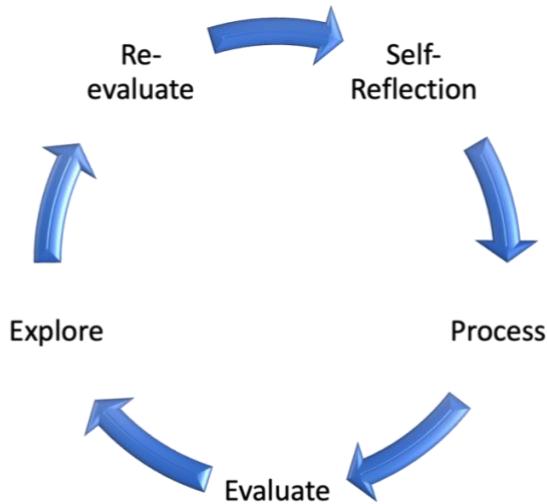


Figure 3. Equation for Continuous Growth



Background: Identifying where an individual may be at in the understanding, acceptance, and healing of their continued lived experiences can help them decide what areas in their life needs more attention (in regard to healing), which areas need more validation (in regard to affirming oneself), and which areas need to be explored (in regard to gaining clarity). The culmination of intentionally engaging within each of these different components leads to personal growth.

Theory Purpose/Goals: The main purpose of the model is to help individuals process their narrative, from past to present, to help them gain more control over their future. The theoretical framework of this model has three main goals in the area of personal growth:

1. To promote clarity in aspects of one's own narrative to help them become more present in their lives.

2. To help individuals find and give themselves constant validation and affirmation in their identity through reflection and exploration.

3. To encourage a self-identifiable method for acknowledging and addressing areas for growth and healing.

Theory Application:

- Self-identifying growth model for individuals to use as a foundation for reflection and healing
- Can be used as a programming model

Theoretical Framework: The Process of Continuous Growth begins with an individual's commitment to engage in the reflection and processing of their journey/life experiences. An individual will have to challenge their vulnerability, reflect on their life experiences (positive and negative) and make the decision to deliberately focus on their growth. According to the model, an individual will transition through multiple phases, focusing on an aspect of their narrative. Individuals will self-identify the phases in which they are in to take the appropriate steps towards healing or growth.

Phases (Figure 1): Each phase of the model are components that promote healing and growth.

Each phase requires intentional reflection, exploration, and awareness of one's capacity for confronting/processing life experiences. While the phases are not linear, an individual may move through each phase in a linear way. Individuals may also move back and forth through each phase or even skip a phase dependent on comfort level with experiences (traumas, triggers, etc.) and clarity.

Moving Through Your Journey (Reflecting and Processing Phase): In this phase, individuals begin the process of reflecting on their journey. They should be starting to ask themselves "Where am I at in life? How do I feel about life? What is my story? The goal of this phase is for individuals to holistically reflect, process and evaluate their life experiences. Once an individual is in a mental/emotional space of comfort, they can begin to address different aspects of their life. They can make decisions about how to move forward with their healing with as much context as they can provide themselves.

Embracing Yourself (Exploration Phase): In the exploration phase, individuals focus on embracing who they are. They begin to explore their different identities (gender, sexual, status, religion, etc.) and the intersections between them. The focal point of this phase is geared towards increasing self-awareness and understanding of who they are, how

they've become who they are (through life experiences), and who they are becoming.

Questions to help guide an individual's identity exploration: Who am I? Who do I want to be? How do I know I am who I am? What does it mean to be *insert identity*?

Healing Through Your Narrative (Self-Inventory Phase): The self-inventory phase is by far one of the most challenging phases that an individual will transition through. Here they are beginning to engage in surface level trauma work and re-establishing/redefining their boundaries. They start to embrace vulnerability by acknowledging and identifying traumas, triggers, and experiences they have to heal from or address. In essence, individuals must learn to get uncomfortable, so they can get comfortable.

Questions to guide self-inventory: What experiences are difficult for me to talk about? What conversations or experiences make me uncomfortable? What are my emotional triggers? What are my boundaries? Have I accepted experiences or ignored them?

Owning Your Narrative (Acceptance Phase): In the acceptance phase, individuals take ownership of their narrative. They begin accepting their life

experiences (bad and good) and give their stories power. The acceptance of their experiences allows them to identify areas in their lives where they need to adjust boundaries or set new ones. This mindful approach to their feelings and experiences allows them to be present in the current moment. Transition through and out of the acceptance phase is marked by clarity and affirmation.

Moving Through Your Journey With Clarity (Re-Evaluation Phase): Much like the reflecting and process phase, the re-evaluation phase places strong emphasis on reflecting, processing, and evaluating one's life journey. Newfound clarity helps individual gain control over the direction they want to take their journeys and the areas they need to focus on. As individuals continue to develop, grow, and heal, moving on with clarity will provide a healthier method of processing continued lived experiences.

Harris, J & Gonzalez, S. (2021). Process of continuous growth

If We're Being
Honest...

PREFACE

Writing a Self-Help Book for Myself

“I put a lot of pressure on myself. I think something's not good enough, and I won't stop until I feel like I've made it. I'm never satisfied.” – J. Cole

This book guides any reader in learning about and applying different strategies to aid in the improvement and development of self-healing practices. I believe in the power of intentional reflection and theory application as a contextual tool to assist and empower people in learning and encouraging them to address their traumas, acknowledge their experiences, and focus on the areas they want to grow in, as it relates to things they can control in their lives.

While the book focuses on my experiences and perspectives, it provides effective strategies for addressing mental health concerns and everyday problems. The book centers on my personal stories and written poetry. The hope is to guide readers through my introspective moments through creative means that serve as a strategy to

encourage a deeper connection among the audience.

I think you will find this book to be a refreshing change from the standard approaches that most poetry books or self-help guides take. The stories and experiences within this book occurred at various stages of my life. All the words expressed in the poems, stories and explanations all come from my experiences as an educator, poet and most importantly, a Black man trying to navigate the life he inherited.

As you read, it is my hope you will say often, “I do some of this already, but I never thought of this part.” Please enjoy the book for its insights into different experiences, for the ways in which it builds on common life struggles, and for its attention to reality of implementing new ideas. Finally, in keeping with our intention to help you grow in, I seek your constructive feedback.

As you reflect on the book’s ideas, share your thoughts with me. Please note which ideas work best, what you find problematic, and what alternative strategies are helpful for you. This book is a continual work in progress, as I navigate life. Contact information will be included in the acknowledgments.

Special Features of This Book:

This book contains an in-depth description of a theoretical framework to address growth. It also includes 17 lessons and processes within my journey to self-healing and building a positive mental outlook on life. Each lesson contains an explanation and poem(s) associated with my experiences within it.

Lessons:

1. Sacrificing for the Sake of Healing
2. Dissecting Ambition
3. Having Difficult Conversations with Yourself
4. Overcoming the Infection of Overthinking
5. Bullying Fear
6. Neglecting the Perceptions of the Unimportant
7. Asking for Help
8. Embracing Your Story and Healing Through Your Narrative
9. Accepting Love and Avoiding the Aspect of Settling for Less
10. Finding Consistency
11. Breaking Old Habits
12. Getting Uncomfortable to Get Comfortable
13. Removing the Barrier of Perfection
14. Becoming "The Best You"
15. Cutting Ties and Aligning with Being a Distant Ally
16. Being Selfish isn't Selfish
17. Learning and Practicing Gratitude

If We're Being
Honest...

Sacrificing for the Sake of Healing

In your growth, there will be sacrifices that you didn't want to make and ones you never thought you would have to make. Those sacrifices will sometimes be so painful that you will doubt if it was necessary to do. In that pain, you will find clarity. That clarity will come in the form of hope and challenges.

Lean on your growth and make decisions out of clarity. If you are unsure about something, someone, or some aspect in your life, it is important that you reflect, evaluate, analyze, and ask for support in any area you are uncertain about. You do not have to have all the answers, but you must want to find them, if they are to be found. If not, create a new solution out of the reality of your circumstance.

This is called "doing what's best for you." Some will call it selfish. I call it an important part of healing.

Persist: Letter to Myself

Dear Me,

2022 was truly a year of growth
coming with lost love and gained hope,
I know.

sacrifices were prominent this year
but so was beneficial transitioning.
though your normal routines were “comfortable”
to say the least,
something great awaits you in 2023.

don't obsess over your failures
or allow them to be a reason
you forget to be proud of your accomplishments.
remember, you are exactly
where you worked to get to
so, take time to bask in the gratitude
of your hard work on the way
to your next blessing.
be focused but don't neglect what is.

persist.

continue to make your healing a priority,
stop skipping therapy and understand
you'll never be happy carrying on through life with
saturated grudges.

more importantly,
never holster a compliment to anyone,
especially yourself
but embrace humility
because you deserve some appreciation too.

sincerely again,
The Future You



Dissecting Ambition

When you are laser focused on your goals, it is easy to let ambition blind you to the achievements you should be celebrating. Sometimes we don't take the time to be in the present moment because we are so locked in on planning and building our future. We are always looking for the next exciting adventure, next loving relationship, next big thing.

We forget that there was once a time where we wished we were in the current position that we are in now. It's okay to take some time and enjoy what we've worked for.

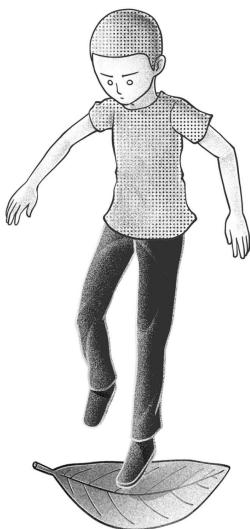
Being Ambitious

there's this unknown source
confined to the walls of my soul
that is dissatisfied with the present.
it always asks questions
about if my work ethic is good enough
to be complacent.
it sees my potential
and scoffs at my achievements
like it knows I can do better.
it lives inside of me in abundance,
offering me nothing but raw purpose.
yet, I have no idea what to do with all this
determination.



Defining Ambitious

ambition is a compelling spark
renting a room in the back of your mind
that asks the effort you exert to be used for
something more than careless acts of insignificance.



Understanding Ambition

ambition can be a double-edged problem when it
pushes you away from the present moment.



Having Difficult Conversations with Yourself

Some of the most difficult conversations you will have in your life, will probably be in isolation with yourself. When we are alone with our thoughts, we sometimes doubt our lived experiences. We doubt the choices we have made throughout the day. We even doubt our feelings and values. It is important to stay grounded in these moments.

Learning how to have productive conversations with yourself will be a deciding factor in how you perceive yourself. Self-talk is a healthy way to build motivation, calm your nerves, provide yourself clarity, and can even help you analyze situations better. It is an extremely useful way to check in with yourself and organize your thoughts on a given situation, circumstance or feeling.

Inner dialogue is essential, especially when things are difficult in your life. Internal problem solving can be a valuable way of addressing issues before they become reasons for panic attacks or long-term anxiety.

The way in which you talk to yourself is important as well. Negative self-talk will not increase your productivity. It will add on to the destruction of your self-esteem. There are already so many things in this world designed to break you down, why add to the concerns.

In conversation with yourself, remember to stay positive. Emphasize your known strengths. Be honest with yourself but don't beat yourself up in an attempt to "keep it real." You are allowed to be imperfect. Be prepared for some discourse to be hard. Be patient with yourself.

Focus: Letter to Myself

Dear me,

you've come a long way from lying to yourself
and smiling the pain away.

remember you are not a psychopath
on a cycled path but a kind soul on an intellectual
journey to success.

stay focused.

I'm writing you to warn you of the new year.
don't let your ego scare away your true friends.
do unspeakably nice things, just because you can.
Be Ready Every Amazing Thing Happens Eventually.
In other words, BREATHE.

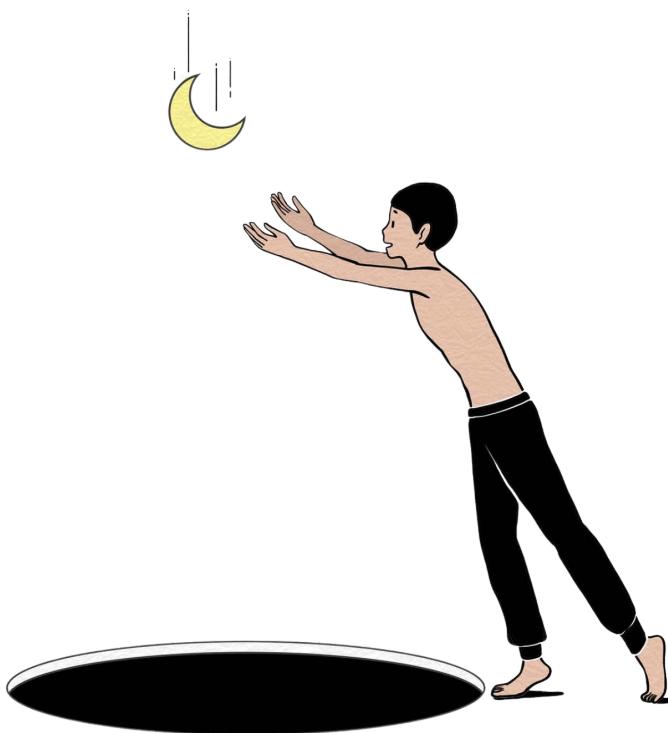
doubt kills.
success is not perfection, its progress.
carry on with GOD first.
keep your family and goals in mind.
don't forget to keep your smile.

be cautious of indirect routes
by directly being in charge of your decisions.
stay driven.

when people start to tell you

that all you do is a façade for trying to fit in,
and trust me they will,
be kind.
even the unkind
deserve to feel what benevolence is.
most importantly,
love yourself and God will see you through.

sincerely,
The Future You



Adjusting: Letter to Myself

Dear me,

you've done a lot of growing
and your achievements have planted a few seeds.
don't let comfortability
be the reason you don't proceed.
remember, you are more
than the results of systematic oppression.
you are a concoction of emerging intelligence
and sincere kindness

keep adjusting.

I'm writing you again
to prepare you for the new year.
don't let work ruin your connection with friends.
become more charitable
because you know you can.
live simply by simply living,
there's never a need for complexity.
honestly,
take some time to relax.

doubt still kills,
stay away from its sights.
keep your eyes open.
people who can't see where you
are going in your life will try to

take control of your path,
stay focused.

smile when you are happy.
cry when you are sad.
no more holding your emotions in,
express yourself.

when fear starts to creep its way back
into your heart,
be courageous.
as it is just a figment of your imagination.
most importantly,
practice self-care
and stay authentically true.

sincerely again,
the Future You



Self-Love: Letter to Myself

Dear me,

2019 contained a profound quantity of clarity and more awaits you in 2020.

you've adjusted to your circumstances by staying focused on your journey, remain balanced.

I am writing you again to provide you some advice, in hopes to help you obtain a propitious start to the new year.

let me start by stating give yourself more grace.

it's okay to make mistakes.

understand you are attempting to complete pending milestones without becoming a familial burden.

you are trying to take advantage of the opportunities created from your ancestor's struggle.

remember,

oppressive systems don't give a fuck about your mental health.

so, engage in more self-loving.

there's nothing more important than establishing a healthy mentality.

also, acknowledge harmful character traits
that can potentially cause trauma or add to it.
even if they are the results of it.
in other words,
work on your toxic tendencies.
don't forget to give people compassion
without losing authenticity.
never underestimate the warmth of expressing
empathy.
simply enjoy life.
love always.
be grateful.
promote positivity and watch
the impact you have on people.
your influence goes a lot further than you think.
more lovingly,
appreciate your blackness.
uplift women.
elevate kindness.
let it rise to the surface.
watch it spread like wildfire.

most importantly,
continue to remind yourself to **BREATHE**
and admire who you grow into.

sincerely again,
The Future You



Growth: Letter to Myself

Dear me,

2022 is upon us,
so, say goodbye to 2021.
you've withstood unexpected obstacles
that shook your perspectives into order
moving forward,
make sure to usher in some more reflection.
don't use pandemic problems
as an excuse to impede self-learning.

keep growing.

let bygones be bygones.
forgive but never overlook the actions
that once caused you hurt.
forget about holding grudges,
they'll make hypocrites out of everyone.

I'm not telling you to change
as if the old you
didn't already transform some,
and did so by finally reaching out for help.
I'm just asking you
to be the enhanced version of yourself.
focus on the things you can control.
control your doubts.
be proud of your progress

while striving to be the best you.
more importantly,
indulge in the simple things
and love honestly
because growth is coming soon.

sincerely again,
The Future You



Overcoming the Infection of Overthinking

Overthinking can be an early indicator or a symptom of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. Overthinking can stem from trauma, heartbreak, and other psychological stimuli. Sometimes, it is simply a result of doubt brandishing its talent in your thought process.

To stop overthinking, you can try challenging your thoughts. Decipher between what is certain and what is causing you panic or worry. When you can focus on what's unquestionably factual, you can be more secure in your thinking.

If that doesn't work, reach out for support from loved ones or a mental healthcare professional. Exhaust all resources to address the cycle of overthinking intruding your everyday life. We cannot afford to be paralyzed by our worries, **ESPECIALLY** when we have a happy life to live.

The Cycle of Overthinking

it starts with a simple
“I need to talk to you about something”
or any other statement or action
peppered in the same anxiety.
I’m then alone with my thoughts.
these thoughts have me questioning
everything I’ve said and everything I’ve done that
led to this point.
I’m afraid of the possibility
of a difficult conversation.
but then the questions become obsessive.
I panic and worry if I’m in the wrong for something.
I can’t quiet these thoughts with distractions.
thinking becomes exhausting.
until I get these answers,
I stay on edge and ready for disaster.



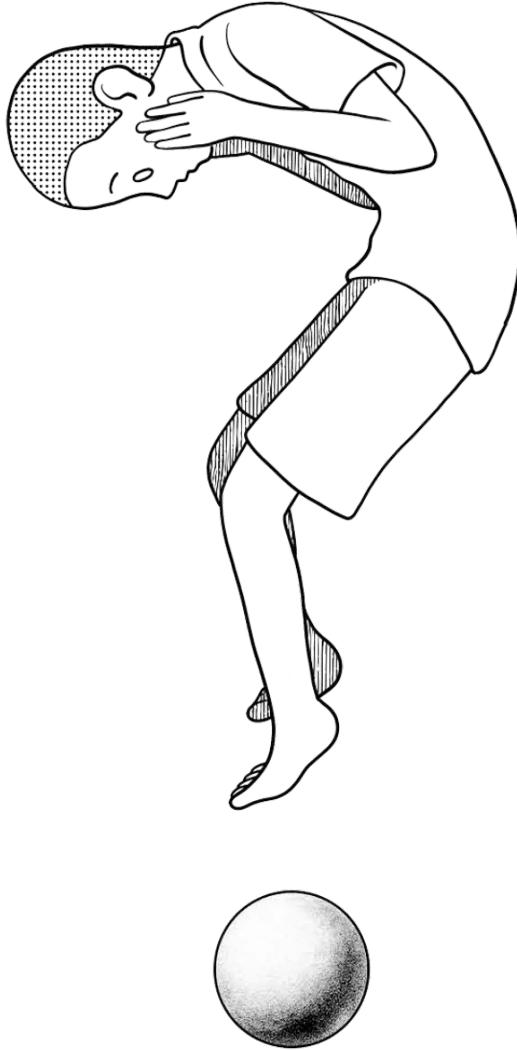
Obsessing Over What?

I used to let my racing thoughts prevent me from making important decisions about how I engage with the world.

it got so bad that I stopped moving with purpose and only out of caution.
auctioning off responsibility
of my next intentional movements.

I had a debilitating compulsion to avoid giving responses to my behavior.

and then one day,
I asked myself
“what are you using these obsessions for?”
I couldn’t come up with a reasonable answer,
so, I decided to let go of the impulses.



Bullying Fear

Fear can protect you. It can help prepare you for the dangers that the world presents. That fear can be used for the betterment of your survival but what about the fear that prevents you from being decisive. The fear that makes it hard to navigate outside. This fear does not provide any foreseeable benefits to your health, physical or emotional. What do we do with it?

Fear affects us in so many different ways. On the physical level, it alerts our nervous system and sets our body's natural responses into motion. This means an increased heart rate, faster breathing and the activation of flight or fight mode.

On the emotional level, fear is a gate. A penetrable barrier scaring you to ignore what is going on behind closed doors. It locks rationality, confidence, and certainty behind closed doors and expects them not to argue with each other.

Fear is unhealthy when it makes you more cautious than you really need to be to stay safe. Also, when it prevents you from doing things you would otherwise enjoy.

While fear forces you to re-examine the things holding you back from achieving your goals, it also asks you to ignore them. Fear can either motivate you to break out of inadequacy or it can hold you back from your potential.

We choose how we approach fear and what we allow it to control. We must remove the barriers it creates, whether it be anxiety, doubt, or mistrust. We do this by pacing ourselves and taking fear head on.

We don't have to conquer our fears in one day, but we can make progress on it every day.

Challenging Fear

fear has broken too many people
to not be called a bully
and we will not become
one of their victims.
we cannot give them that power.
instead, turn the tables on them
and make fear tremble
at the sight of our composure.
intimidate fear with a stare that signifies “you don’t
want these problems.”
and if it does,
follow through on that promise.



Fear the Imposter

fear is an incompetent impersonator.
it puts on the tough guy act
because it has the reputation
of scaring those who don't know
how to confront it.

fear pretends to be strong
when it is frail.
can be conquered with sheer persistence.

fear is afraid of its own shadow.
it hides behind its own pride
and doesn't have the courage
to attack anyone with enough
nerve to stand up to it.





Neglecting the Perceptions of the Unimportant

The only opinions that should matter, are the ones that impact you most, which means yours. Your foundation for creating opinions should come from the context of your likes and dislikes. No one else's. When you are forming thoughts about yourself, how you live your life, or what you want to do in it, you can listen to other voices but at the end of the day, yours is most important.

Opinions or Judgment....

depriving someone of your authentic self
out of fear of rejection or judgment
is a disservice to the personality
you've built from enduring trauma,
exploring interests and connecting to your cultural
lineage.

but I get it.
criticism can make certainty
feel wrong
and insincerity seem normal.
it's completely understandable
to hide behind a facade
when you're scared that you'll be berated for being
who you are
and want to be.



Validated Worth

I need to remember
that the only opinions
I should harp on,
are the ones that validate
who I am.

I want to be affirmed in avenues
that are good for me.
only spaces that value my worth.



Asking for Help

It is almost painful to ask for help. We are afraid of being judged. Afraid of being laughed at. Don't want to be seen as incompetent, so we struggle by ourselves. We think that asking for help makes us weak. Some of our cultures are built on that idea. We suffer at the hands of isolation framed as independence. Framed as a rite of passage.

Asking for help doesn't mean you are incapable. Asking for help means you understand that a problem is easier addressed when it is aided by support.

Don't be a causality to arrogance, ask for fucking help!

I Love Support

support is validation displayed
it will fuel my purpose
on days where I feel empty.



Embracing Your Story and Healing Through Your Narrative

From the moment we are born, there is an overwhelming pressure to live up to expectations that we could never satisfy. This unnecessary burden places stress on our lives and pushes us towards questioning our worth. We become dissatisfied in who we are and begin to believe every traumatic thing that has ever happened to us was warranted. It wasn't. We shouldn't have experienced that trauma, but we did. As much as we'd love to reverse the hands of time and pull our younger selves out of incidents, we can't.

What is within our control is our responses to our unearthed trauma and the pain living on the surface. When we take intentional focus on healing from these things, it becomes easier to embrace who we are. Once we embrace who we are, we can accept our circumstances and heal from them.

Not every situation in our life deserves the attention of confrontation. Sometimes, we aren't even ready to approach them and that's okay. We

don't have to be prepared for every mental battle to win them.

Embracing who we are is an integral element of our healing process. It's our starting and end point. Our narratives hold such powerful stories that shape who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming. It's important to be authentic in the retelling of those narratives. Whether that be to ourselves or to others. It's crucial to speak on your narrative from an introspective standpoint with unyielding grace.

We are the deciders in how our stories are told. We can adopt to recount our journeys, especially once we accept them. We do not have to be proud of all the choices we made to get where we are, but we can be proud of the voyage, nonetheless.

We are the ones deemed responsible for choosing when to focus on our healing. And when we choose to heal, all facets of our narrative need to be respected. All parts of our comfort zone need to be protected. All aspects of our being need to be supported.

Embrace who you are, so you can heal through your narrative.

Kind of an Ass

kindness is an ever so existing behavior quality that will remain a salient aspect of my identity, but that doesn't mean that I am nice.

I can be a bit brutally honest in some of the weirdest situations.

I'm aware of the sensitivities people express and will never cross boundaries intentionally, but if the wrong people take advantage of my kind moments consider me an asshole because I will act a whole ass.

in fact,
your first impression of me would probably characterize my aura as rude. I definitely have resting "don't fuck with me" face. you'll probably come to this decision due to the bluntness in my attitude always showing up in transparent fashion.

I'm a really welcoming individual but don't mistake my openness for a fear of conflict.

I am just as eager to deal with confrontation as I am with showing compassion.

I react to my circumstances but I am proactive about putting more good in the world than the negativity I exude in it.



The Story Continues

my name is Jakeel Harris, and this is my narrative.
holding untold trauma, tragedies, successes, and
massive amounts of life experiences.
my profanity usage is profusely apparent.
If anyone who has a sensitivity to explicit language
overhears me discuss topics,
I am passionate about with sincerity,
I apologize in advance.
but you have been warned.

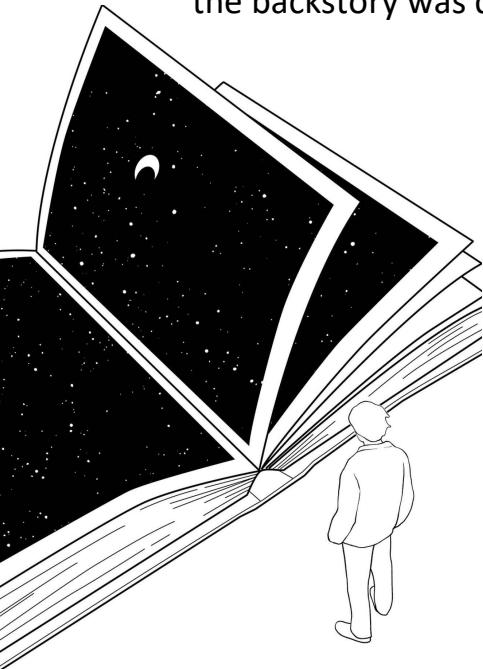
my name is Jakeel Harris, and this is my narrative.
as a youngling, my personality
swung from jungle gyms of anxiety
until I became strong enough to
joke my way into a coping mechanism.
teenage me was a comedian.
putting on an act to entertain people.
he thought their laughter meant approval.
didn't care if it was with or at him.
as long as he was the source of it.
he weaved lies into his character
to amuse everyone he came in contact with.
his crippling need for attention
is an embarrassing memory to recollect
nonetheless, it's a part of my narrative.

adulthood has had its string of memories too.
from beating generational curses

plaguing mindsets on the daily.
to rediscovering a fascination in existing.
no more self-loathing.
or desired attempts to end it all.
maturity manipulated me into mattering.
childish simplicity still has me giggling
at carefree behavior.
fart jokes and all.

my adulthood is just childhood
with a better grasp of humanity.
and several sides of bills
I don't want to pay.

my story is still being written.
and I have finally got comfortable
reading through its content
without cringing or wishing
the backstory was different.



Accepting Love and Avoiding the Aspect of Settling for Less

Love is very strange, in all its forms: self, romantic, platonic, you name it. Romantic love, by far, has to be the most confusing of them all. There's something so unusual about the idea of metamorphosing your affection for someone into the aspect of you not being able to recognize the person in the mirror. Because love is blinding. If it's not attached to a coupled identity, we get amnesia. Forgetting our own individuality. We consume this belief and call it love.

I refuse to believe love is losing yourself inside someone until your souls intertwine. I believe love is being able to give someone everything they deserve without sacrificing who you are and when you provide that same energy to yourself, you will not just give love, you will become it.

Love is an unrelenting force of nature that everyone deserves. Love is a never-ending plea to be cared for. Whether externally given or internally provided, love is an offering begging to be accepted.

Sometimes we doubt the idea that we are deserving of love or believe we are not destined to be loved. We occupy a huge chunk of time searching for love and settle for anything that looks, feels, or sounds like it. We need to be patient and proactive in our pursuit of it.

We must also give love. And when we do, we should love outrageously often. We should love immeasurably bold. Because there's something about loving limitlessly that is boundary provoking. When we love carelessly it is plateau shattering. We need to understand that love doesn't peak when it is continuous and unconditional.

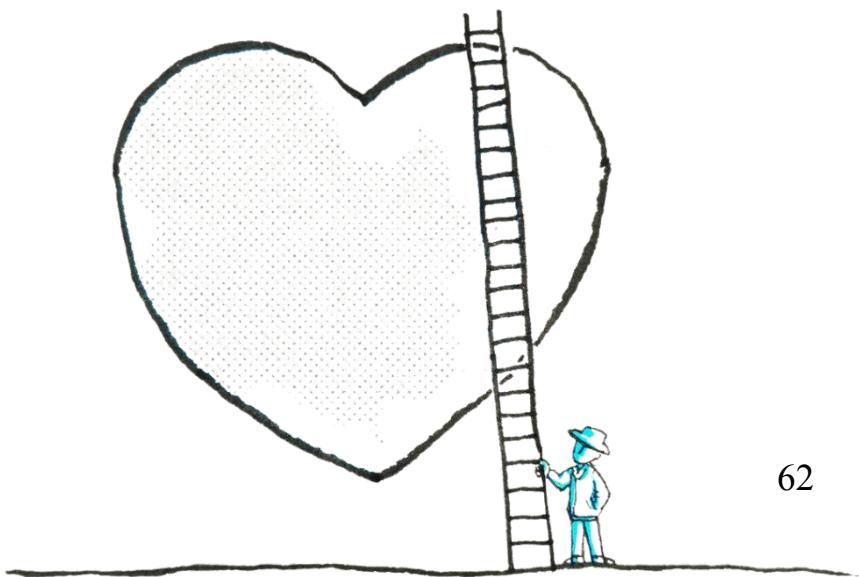
When we settle, we are resetting our hearts to a point where it decreases its standards. We can't spare any leeway for false love to take advantage of us. If we strengthen our boundaries, assert our values, and reject the idea of settling for less than what we deserve, we can be ready for love to shower us with endless care, free of broken expectations.

So, let love guide you, but let patience allow you to be in the present moment. Let it welcome a love in your life that you don't have to beg for.

Accepting Love

someday someone is going to give you
so much love you're going to be glad
your heart stayed courageous enough
to be hopeful.

it'll cause you to forget
about those lonely days
where you never felt
the tenderness of it.



Loving Without Limits

I want to love you
in the same way
the world loves the moon.
everlasting appreciation
over mystic qualities.
a deep fascination for the unknown.
passionate about having so much left to explore.

I want to be invested
in every phase you grow through.
and present
for every moment of your life cycle.



Love Risks

love loves to leave lacerations lingering loosely on
the layers inside your heart's ventricles.

causing catastrophic conflicts creating confusion at
the core of your contemplations.

meaning

love is irrational.

it has a terrible timing.

never understanding

when it isn't wanted or forgiven.

love doesn't apologize.

knows heartbreak

like it sees it in the mirror.

but love

can make fear quiver.

insecurities disappear.

courage bloom.

how love responds to you

depends on if you're willing

to take your chances with it.



Loving Afire

we want to be loved so bad
that we set our emotions on fire
thinking someone will be brave enough
to rescue us.

but we are surrounded by those who are fascinated
with watching everything around them burn.

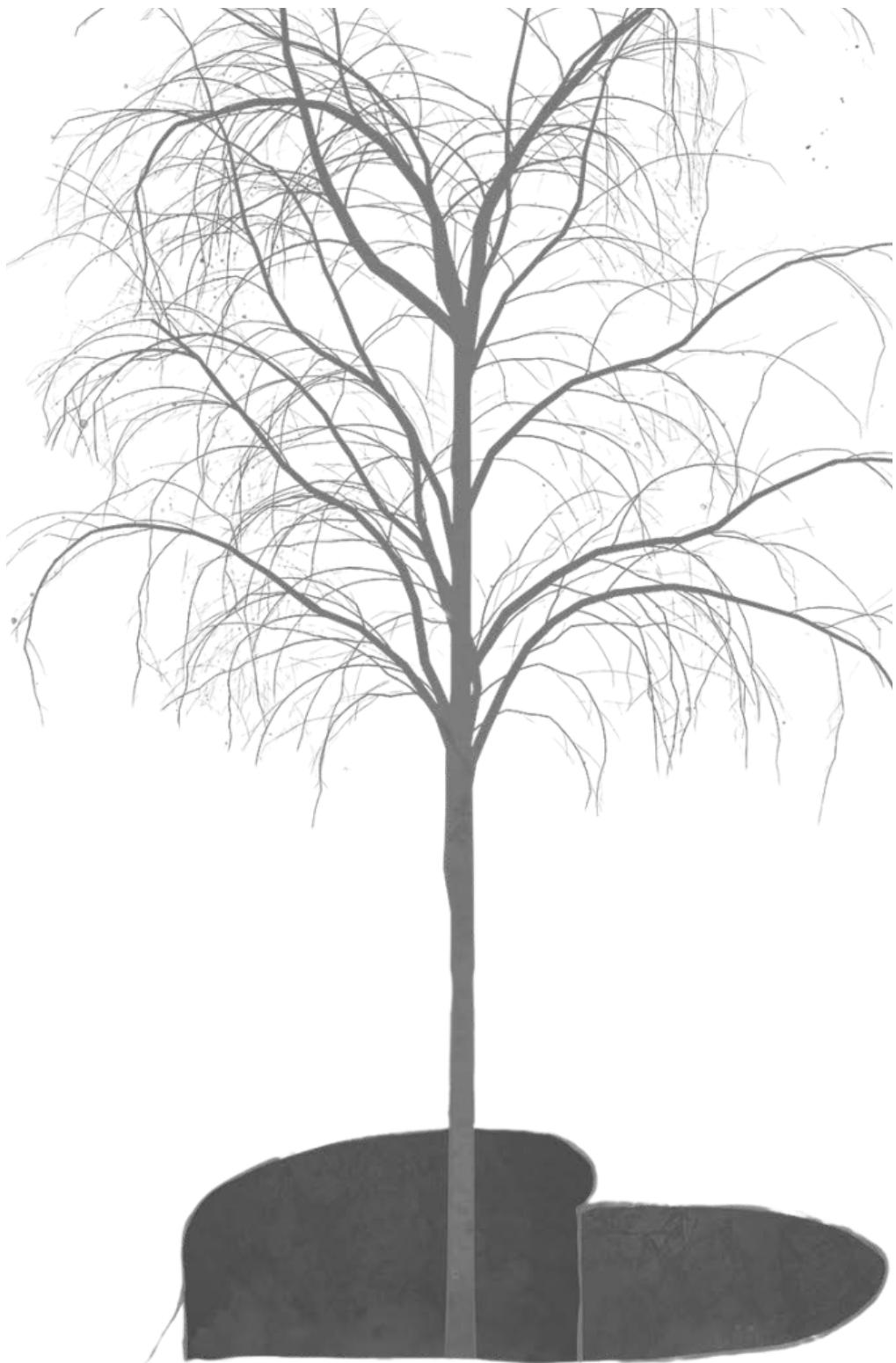


Loving through the Confusion

people have been so deceived
by toxic relationships
that they have developed
trust issues and an inaccurate
understanding of what love is.

so misled
that they mistake
loyalty and consistency
for love,
even though
they are just necessary tendencies
that are needed to be inhabited
by those who decided
commitment was more than the relationship title.

don't be fooled by attractive qualities.
some people have learned
how to be present in a relationship
without providing an ounce of love.
call it "trying to be better"
yet misplace all the effort
they claimed they had.



Finding Consistency

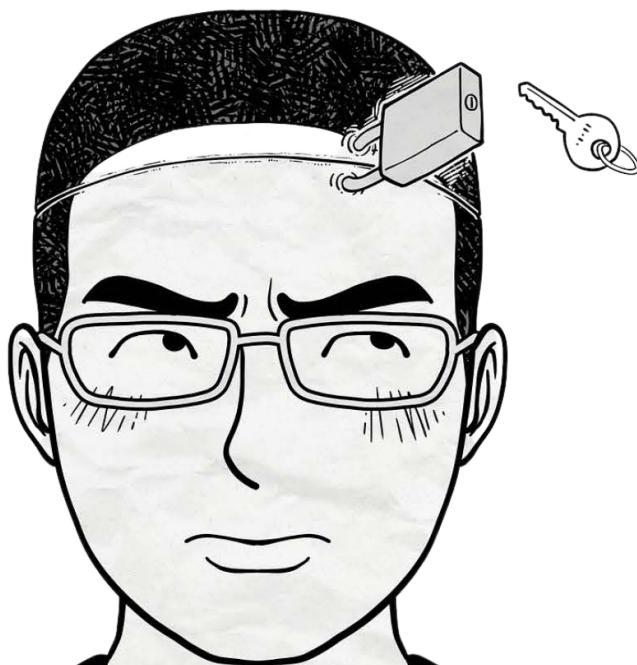
We struggle to find consistency because we focus on the outcome of growth rather than the process of it. We'd rather focus on seeing results than indulging in the struggle of the journey. Most of us abandon our commitment to ourselves because we've been struggling too long without seeing any rewards.

Consistency in anything starts, with a commitment to effort. We must decide and follow through on wanting to dedicate energy towards a goal. We must be purposeful in each attempt to grow while also preventing ourselves from believing consistency and intensity are the same thing. We must have sustained effort in doing different actions with the same intentions to spark consistency in a single mission.

It is difficult to not fall victim to the pressures of consistency when, at times, the burden of maintaining it, outweighs the joys that come from engaging in it. **As long as we are purposeful and intentional in our actions, we can be deliberate in promoting consistency.**

Consistency is Key

I had a physical education teacher
who used to scold me for apologizing.
he'd say, "don't be sorry, be better."
this mentality was instilled in me.
now I want to be better.
everyday.
every minute.
every second.
so little by little,
day by day,
I make strides on doing that.
no time to take breaks.
straight consistency.
no matter the sacrifice.



Breaking Old Habits

We are all guilty of having habits that we want to get rid of. Habits that we have held onto for the very reason that it is something that we are used to doing. What we classify as a bad habit is a trait we believe is unproductive or unhealthy to the way we move forward in our lives.

To break a habit, we must replace older behaviors with new ones. We will need to avoid situations or environments that encouraged the behavior in the first place. Sometimes that includes the people in them.

Sometimes we get urges from our habits. How we respond to these urges will decide how we break them. Just like growth, breaking a habit or constructing a new one, takes a willingness to be persistent and a commitment to making mistakes.

To break a habit, we must first consciously have a desire to.

New Year, New Habits, New Blessings

Part 1

I indulge in isolation like a passionate hobby.
letting the four walls of my room
contain every piece of me.
comfort traps itself.
within the lining of my bed sheets
I experience peace.
in silence, I reflect.
but love myself loud enough
for the world to hear.
I sit in the corner of my room
and have conversations with my poetry journal.
trying to convince the pages
to be patient with the words that spew themselves
carelessly over them.
I fall in love with the sound of nothing
carrying a tune of yesterday's relaxation.
I wait patiently for an epiphany.
but not wasting the moments
I have on borrowed time.
I allow my problems to vocalize themselves.
uninterrupted.
and let them know
that I'll respond to their concerns later.
I remind myself
that the first step to healing is acknowledgement.

so, I recognize the progress I am making.
my trauma always comes knocking.
whether invited or not,
I don't let it invade the certainty solitude created.
I hold onto contentment.
while I sleep and dream of finding me.
I live.
and realize.
it's a new year.

Part 2

it's the time of the year
where the opportunity to start anew
comes in the form of committed resolutions.
typically, I'd dedicate my time
to a variety of habit shifts and unrealistic changes
but this year, I'm only devoting
my energy to three.

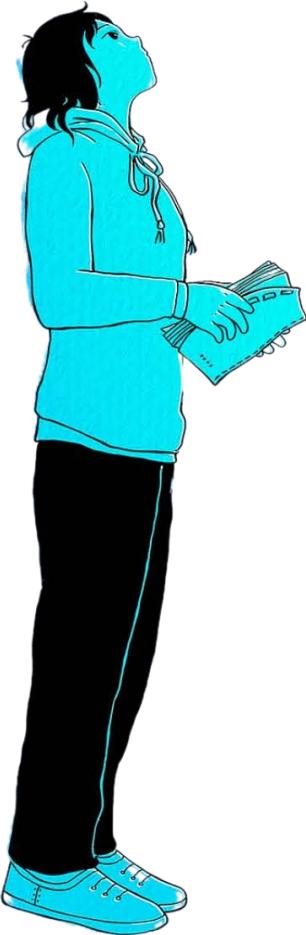
first, no more quieting my needs
because I'd prefer to support the solving of other
people's problems rather than addressing my own.

secondly, I need to take
more risks with love.
I've been hesitant with embracing it
since my experiences with it
has always led me to
expecting the worst.

I know there is a love on standby,
waiting for me seize it.

thirdly, no more excuses.
gotta stop procrastinating
this work on myself.

I deserve to be sane and happy
with no negative trade-offs.



Getting Uncomfortable to Get Comfortable

Most of us stay within our comfort zones because we are afraid of the consequences that may present themselves the moment we choose to become vulnerable. You must not let that stop you from learning about your resilience. Let it bring you to the current moment and push you towards accepting the reality of your experiences. That discomfort will show you things that your comfort zone could never prepare you for.

Your comfort zone can become a cage. Preventing you from realizing the reality of the world beyond its enclosure. It will block endless possibilities and will become the strategy for you to stay in the safety of familiar, but in the rare moment fear forgets to trap curiosity behind the wall of your bad memories, you'll see that the world is full of opportunities. **The challenge is for you to decide if you want to step out of those gates and take the chance at thriving or continue to protect yourself by not taking risks.**

What is Comfortable?

what is comfort?

is it a sense of calm or ease?

is it a restricted boundary,
marked by a soothing certainty
that there is a stress-free zone nearby,
safe from worry.

is it safeguards being let go?

defense systems being shut down.

is comfort familiar?

is it recognizable in a crowd of uneasiness.

is it safe?

always?

does it come unannounced?

does it speak?

how will I know I have found comfort?

will it approach me?

Searching for Discomfort

I'm looking to achieve post-traumatic growth.
not just by learning from my mistakes.
not just by adapting to the consequences
of my problematic ways.

I'm talking about analyzing the mechanisms
that socialized me to think
I needed to behave
in certain disadvantageous patterns.

I'm searching for the discomfort
that turns a trigger into a mending tool.

probing for clarity that can turn
a toxic trait into a nonexistent quality.

I'm forcing myself to heal.



Removing the Barrier of Perfection

Society constantly pushes this idea of perfection to us. That we can have the perfect relationship, perfect body, perfect lives but that's just not realistic. We have to redefine perfect as a situation and not a state of being. Like our circumstances are "perfect" during the moments we are in them. That it will come with challenges. It will come with mistakes. It won't always be smooth but for the most part, it will make us happy. Happiness is what we should strive to create, not perfection.

Once we do away with the idea that we can achieve perfection, we can begin to foster in everything we deserve. In reclassifying perfection, we have to understand the societal structures put in place for us to compare ourselves to. The ideal body image. The ideal income. The ideal home. The ideal relationship. The ideal family. The ideal everything.

We must establish our own definition of these things and push back on the way society wants us to be perceived. We must do this. For our health. For our sanity. For our well-being.

Imperfectly Perfect

I used to be addicted to perfection.
no matter what I did in life,
I believed I could accomplish it free of mistakes.
predictably, I made more than my share of them.
I'd beat myself up for every little difficulty
a challenge presented
and would give up
before giving myself the opportunity
to learn how to do something.
anything.

I claimed to be proficient
at everything I was good at
because I never took chances on failure.
I refused to enter any space authentically.
I wanted everyone to believe I was flawless.
every little blunder made behind closed doors,
or with a full attendance,
would have detrimental consequences
to my self-esteem.

overtime,
I've learned that imperfections
are just perfect little details
teaching us how to figure ourselves out,
in the most honest of ways.



Becoming “The Best You”

Learning how to be our best self is an age-old struggle. As we age, our sense of self changes. Who we are as individuals is not a static phenomenon. Sometimes, we may feel that our mind, body, and spirit tell us to act in one way, but society demands us to act in another. This is a difficulty many people face but we can navigate this by exploring our authentic selves, which in turn, will teach us how to be true to ourselves in a relationship, encourage us to be comfortable in our own skin, and to live our lives to the best of our capabilities.

Being our best self means we are living in an authentic manner, flaws and all. To be true to ourselves, we must stay true to the values that inform our beliefs. Being our best also means understanding the things that are within our control and the things life controls, without our input or feelings in mind.

In the pursuit of being the best you, it is important to prioritize the things that really matter to you. We often rely on other people’s opinions to dictate what’s important to us. In this world, it is hard not to. Our identities are formed through our social environments, family, upbringing, and associations. While we are constantly developing our identity, we

also need to learn how to sift through the societal pressures forcing us to be things that we aren't.

Alternatively, we must learn to accept help from others. While our healing is a solitary mission, it isn't a solitary effort. Our pride can hold us back from evolving into a healthier version of ourselves.

To experience growth, we need to embrace failure and celebrate the little victories. Failure will impart life lessons on your journey, so be sure to reflect and do the work to learn from it.

We must learn how to be better to ourselves. We must learn how to be better to the ones around us while also building our careers, taking care of our families, and thriving to be who we want to be. When life throws us difficulty, it is important that we laugh, shake it off and keep moving forward.

There are no shortcuts when it comes to self-improvement. It takes patience and hard work.

Finding Me

when I was little,
I'd watch superheroes
change personas
from average civilians to knights in shining armor.
I'd admire how they could balance
the complexities of these identities
but I always wondered
how they coped with the difficulties
when the tv was off.
did they find struggle in pretending
to be someone that they weren't
for most of their lives
while secretly deep down
knowing they are much more
than what they present?

when I was teenager,
I tried to be like the heroes
I used to idolize on screens.
but not in the ways of fighting crime
or defeating evil,
I attempted to pretend
to be something I wasn't
until everyone was convinced
that I was who I was
on the surface.
I normalized this behavior,
forgetting I was simulating an idea

of whom I was trying to be.

as an adult,
juggling personalities that aren't yours
is wasted effort.
no one cares how well you shift
into different characters
when they all lack connection to what's real.

because I spent so much time
avoiding my own persona
I wouldn't recognize my personality
in a line up.
I have to spend the rest of my adulthood
searching for who I am
and I probably won't know it
when I've found him.

lately,
I've been dedicating time
to the things that bring me fulfillment.
I've been discovering different parts of myself.
and what an exciting process it has been.



Becoming Me

bloom like thriving comfort.
bloom without fear.
bloom without hesitancy.
bloom safely.
until you become a garden
of your own independence

Accepting Me

I used to avoid mirrors
because I wasn't comfortable
staring at my flaws.

I was afraid of confronting
the possibility that I wouldn't like the "me"
living on the other side of the glass.

it made it easier to pretend
that I was confident in myself.

these days,
I make sure to spend a little extra time
smiling at every reflection.
I need my flaws to understand
I accept and admire them.



Choosing Me

today, I chose to be better.

I ignored the frivolous drama occurring
outside the windows of my growth
and remained determined.

I neglected those routine calls of stagnancy
inviting me to stay comfortable where I'm at.
I decided that I only want to move forward,
no matter how small the step.

I'm choosing not to let my past
keep my attention more than it needs to.

I'm choosing progression
from this point on.



The Best Me

I haven't even scratched the surface
with actualizing my potential.

I am capable of being
much more impactful,
I can feel it.

and I'm determined to become it.



Cutting Ties and Aligning with Being a Distant Ally

There's a wise saying that goes "when you start to focus on yourself, you'll begin to lose friends." This may be because you stop focusing your energy on people who thought your sole purpose was for their contentment. They leave once they no longer find use in using you.

Other times, you'll need to cut people off. Fact of the matter is, some of our most trusted and loyal friends are not good for us. Some of our beloved family members are toxic to our growth. In this case, learn to be a distant ally. Support everything positive they are doing for themselves but don't indulge in their negativity or be anywhere near their toxicity.

They do not have to be inherently bad people or commit some horrendous act to be cut off. You will simply outgrow some of the people you hold a lot of love for. They just won't be a benefit for you to keep close. It's okay to put restrictions on your relationship with them because of it.

Sometimes these people will want an explanation as to why you decided to create space between the

two of you, but don't feel like you owe them a response. Giving them an answer would purely be up to you and if you feel inclined to but by no means are you obligated. Some relationships aren't built to last. Others are built to survive. Most will change overtime but all need to be consistently reevaluated. Familial ones are no exception.

At the end of the day, the relationships you keep near to you will be the ones that have the greatest potential to influence you; for the better or for the worse.

Peace Out

ignoring someone
that you should be letting go of
doesn't stop them from hurting you.
until you completely cut them off,
denying them access,
they'll still be able to impact you in unpredictable
ways.

no matter how good you think you are
at avoiding the problems
they are the source of,
they'll still be able to get to you.

Distant Allyship

without a doubt
you mean the world to me.
you are someone who has
seen me at my momentary best.
appreciated me at my worst.
even showed patience
during my frequent ghosting sessions
but we've grown distant.
I can't have our camaraderie
be the downfall of my growth.
I can't be dragged down
by your comfort in stagnation.
if you decide to work on yourself,
I'm here for it.
but if you prefer to stay in the difficulty of familiar,
which I wouldn't blame you,
just know you'll only have my support from a
distance.



Being Selfish isn't Selfish

We often neglect ourselves and our health to avoid the feeling of being selfish. We've built this idea in our minds that selfishness is the worst quality to possess while simultaneously, allowing toxic relationships to fester. We see selfishness as a negative connotation containing synonyms like self-centered, self-involving, and self-serving.

Selfishness gets a bad rep. People categorize it as a negative quality because something does not go in their favor when they interact with a person who is making decisions for themselves. These decisions can have damaging consequences to people who feel like they should have been taken into consideration.

I define selfish as an act of doing what's best for you, in circumstances that would otherwise be a detriment to you. Selfishness is not the satisfaction of emotions regardless of their cause, it's validating one's existence with a choice to improve one's own condition by putting ourselves first.

As it relates to healing, we need to make sure that every choice we make is in the best interest of ourselves. Sometimes this means cutting off people who aren't conducive to our growth. Sometimes

that means dropping relationships with people who once helped us. This includes family and other loved ones. That's why selfishness can be a hard decision to make.

We shouldn't beat ourselves up for being selfish at times. There are times where being selfish is the only reasonable option to protect our mental health and well-being. These are also the times, where taking care of yourself is absolutely necessary.

Selfishness

I am tired of putting all my effort
into everyone except for the one
who is truly suffering, me.
from this day forward,
I'm going to be greedy
with mending myself back to stability.
I am going to be stingy with my time.
even more so than I already am.
I am going to be illusionary with my presence.
showing up for myself
and everyone else placed on the "if it's important
enough I'll get to it" waitlist.
I am going to spend so much time
addressing my pain,
some will say I've performed a disappearing act.
and I'll respond with "call me Houdini."
I will become a world-renowned magician
if that's what it takes
for everyone to understand
that my healing is my solitary priority.



Learning and Practicing Gratitude

Most of us know it is important to express thanks to the people who help us, or silently acknowledge the things we are grateful for in life. Living life with gratitude has many benefits. Reducing stress. Aiding in a healthier lifestyle. Countless research has associated gratitude with optimism and showed signs of decreasing feelings of loneliness and depression. Just like an apple a day keeps the doctor away; daily gratitude will keep affirmation in circulation.

There's no denying that the world is a scary place. That it is hard and honestly, unfair to some. Especially with these last five years presenting great challenges for people. Police brutality, pandemic problems, rises in ignorance, families being torn apart and the reality of death. With the mistreatment of people being ever so prevalent, it is important, more than ever, to practice gratitude.

Building your capacity for gratitude doesn't have to be difficult either. It just takes practice. The more you can bring attention to that which you feel grateful for, the easier it'll be to become gracious. I am by no means asking you to neglect your

hardships. In fact, to be grateful, it is critical to remember the hard times that you experienced and continue to experience. When you remember how difficult life used to be, how far you have come, and where you currently are positioned, you set up a realistic and clear contrast in your mind. This will help you be more mindful.

Practicing mindfulness will help you notice the things happening around you. You'll be able to bask in the little victories because you will finally notice them.

You must commit to being grateful, wholeheartedly. Not only for yourself, but for others. Share your gratitude with others and watch how it strengthens your connection with the world.

Resist

some days
we wake up to a struggling world.
in plain sight lies
unforgiving predicaments.
hidden in the crevices of our lives
we will find grief.
we will see doubt.
we will hear fear whisper poorly
and tell lies about what we are capable of.
sometimes we'll be convinced to believe them.
to be honest
on several occasions
it won't take much effort to persuade us into
agreeing with their viewpoint.
after all,
life has tried to discard some of us.
has placed tragedies on our families.
taking away hope in the form of people.
people we never thought we could live without.
hoping we never recover.
that we decide to live within our burdens.
want us to commit to giving up.
but life is afraid of our resilience.
jealous of how we can dedicate ourselves
to success while existing in our pain.
life doesn't understand
that our achievement isn't a solitary mission.

that we carry the memories
of our loved ones with us.
they live vicariously through us
even when their soul departs.
that we still see their smile.
it carries us through each day.
we still hear their laughter.
it acts as encouragement
to help us continue to push through.
we still find purpose in our journey.
we know they are still watching.
and we will make them proud.
despite what life throws at us.
we will catch it
and make meaning out of the moment.
so, on those days
where the world is still struggling
we remember who and what we're living for.
and persist through it.



Embracing Gratitude

gratitude leads to happiness.
at its core,
gratitude is a congregation of thankfulness
banding together
to show someone they are more than appreciated.
gratitude is the reassurance needed
to show kindness that it matters.



Being Grateful

we have a finite number of years
on this Earth and some people
will waste it being spiteful.

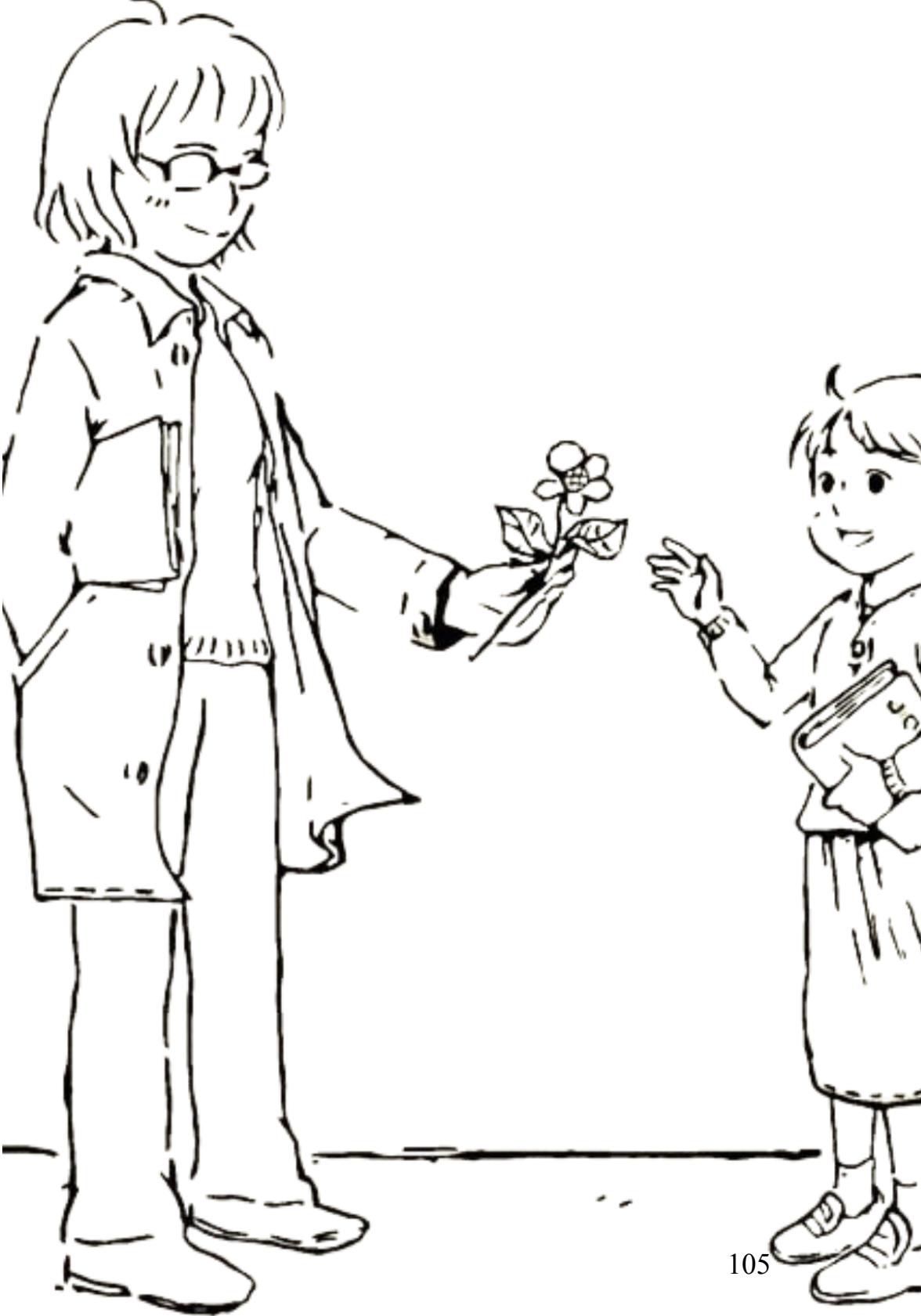
others will be more inclined to spend it
being mindful of the smiles
they created with their kindness.

time is endless,
but our presence in it
is constantly fleeting.

we must cherish it,
because time is precious.

so, when someone chooses
to intentionally deplete their time breathing
by going out of their way
to provide you some generosity,
be grateful.

not everyone is willing to use their stint on this
planet to make others feel appreciated.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Moving Forward

“Change is definitely every day. It's an ever-changing world. Everything changes, so I really don't know. I just hope I become a better person, a better man.” – J.I.D

First and foremost, thanks to everyone who contributed to making this book possible. I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my coworker, theory creation partner and friend, Stephanie Gonzalez Alvarez. Without your continued support and realness, none of this would have been possible.

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