

Loneliness Can Suck The Life Out Of You: But you don't need to let it win.

I have led a very solitary life. Growing up in a single parent household with a thoroughly dysfunctional family never really taught me *how* to build great relationships.

Most of my relatives cut off from each other when they disagreed over anything. That means our family gatherings became more few and far between as I reached my teen years.

My efforts to build good relationships were also stunted by the fact that my family didn't have a car.

Of course, it didn't help that I am autistic, though I wouldn't be diagnosed until I was almost 34.

And it certainly didn't help that my adolescence was occupied with daily injections and monthly testing to treat precocious puberty and PCOS.

My life was solitary, complicated, and stressful from a very young age.

I was an extremely lonely child.

My mother and my sister say I had imaginary friends. I've never been able to remember having any, but if it's true I assume it's because I was such a lonely kid.

There was a great deal of sadness in my life which I never knew how to verbalize or even get through with other people:

My best friend drowned and died one summer in grade school.

I was no older than 8 when I realized that I could never truly be myself around my mother.

Also by age 8, I developed a *real dread* for most every holiday because I had learned to expect to spend so many alone. While other families were making time for each other at home or having cookouts at local parks, I was usually holed up in our dark apartment.

My mother went through a phase in my youth where she mostly slept and told my sister and me not to disturb her. She reported frequent migraines and even told us that she had a brain aneurysm.

When I was in junior high, my mom said she had bone cancer.

Basically, as far as I knew, my mother was *always dying* and

that made my childhood strange. I don't think that strangeness did me many favors when it came to making friends. Not *real* friends, anyway.

In some ways, I got used to my solitary life. But I always felt something like a flower that was hidden away from the sun, and I waited for a rescue.

I made a depressing damsel.

There were a few different men who came into my life and I thought that meant the end of my loneliness. My first love at 18, my ex-husband at 20, and my daughter's dad at 32. They all took note of my situation. Of my loneliness. And they all took it upon themselves to save me.

Until they each found somebody new.

For a long time, the fact that *all* three men whom I have most loved cheated on me felt like this enormous failure in my life. Like it must have been my fault.

And although there were other lovers and even other heartbreaks, those 3 particular exes really did a number on me.

Each romantic relationship left me feeling more lonely than ever. I was frustrated because love wasn't supposed to be like this, right? Loving wasn't supposed to leave me feeling worse

for wear.

Or was it?

My life as a lone reed.

The bulk of everything I've learned about loneliness and relationships has been self-taught. I'm not ashamed to admit that, nor to admit that at nearly 37 years old, I've yet to find my tribe.

But for many years, I was indeed humiliated to count myself as one of the lonely. It's not as if I've been unable to make friends *at all*. But I've struggled to maintain deep connections as the years go by.

In too many cases, my friendships simply fizzle out. I used to think it was something about me not being interesting enough. Or other people simply not caring about me.

But I see it much differently now.

Despite my single status, I feel like I have more or less "beat loneliness." I think this because I no longer feel particularly isolated or lonely. A deep sense of loneliness no longer consumes my mind.

It's a little bit funny because my life is

actually *more* solitary than a couple of years ago. My social life hasn't even seen any real improvements. Mom's Night Out isn't happening. I'm not dating much or hanging out with people nearly as much as I'd like.

And yet?

I'm content.

My life is an imperfect one. I'm working hard to build a better life and become *my idea of* a better person, but it's no secret that I have a long way to go before I feel... settled or even whole.

But I do have a tremendous amount of peace despite my struggles.

I'm not lonely anymore.

That's an incredibly strange thought for me to process. It doesn't mean I wouldn't *like* companionship or more genuine relationships in my day to day life.

Truth be told, I'd still love to *belong somewhere* on the holidays so I didn't have to figure it out as I go along. As in asking who will let us crash their Thanksgiving, etc.

But I'm also perfectly fine without that too, and I now have a

few different theories about managing loneliness.

Your worth doesn't come from other people.

The sooner you come to terms with this the better. I used to swim and drown in loneliness and the way it made me feel so worthless. Like *if only* I mattered more to other people, then I would feel less pain.

I used to think that my loneliness was evidence of my failure as a person. But once I quit evaluating my worth by the way other people treated me, and finally developed healthier self-esteem, I became that much less lonely.

Other people don't determine my value, I do. That's been a game changer for me. And it might change everything for you.

You can't always control your circumstances, but you can control your reactions.

As much as I believe that loneliness is more of a social problem than a personal one, I understand that we can't control what other people do.

In an ideal world, single mothers would never be lonely, because other folks would step in to help *be the village* we so

desperately need. But in the real world, this isn't happening for most people.

Our society *should* be better about befriending the lonely, but it's not. And we can't dictate what other people do. It's up to us as individuals to help fight loneliness whenever we see it in others.

It's also up to us to do whatever it is that we *can* do. That includes how we manage our own feelings of sadness and loneliness too.

Some people are more prone to loneliness than others.

If you battle significant loneliness, it pays to recognize this reality. Some of us were dealt a very shitty deck of cards and it's no wonder that we'd struggle with our relationships.

I don't think there's anything to be ashamed of if you happened to be predisposed to loneliness. In fact, recognizing your reality is empowering.

Some of us have to work harder than others to even have a shot at healthy connections. That's just life. And knowing that makes everything easier.

It's easier for me to simply admit my awkwardness with the

people I care about. Rather than letting everyone assume I'm just aloof, it's easier to warn them that I don't always know how to handle things like "normal people."

Like opening presents.

I prefer to open presents in private because I seem to have a face that sucks at displaying happy emotions. I wish I was different, but I've had years to discover that expressing "proper" emotions across my face as an Aspie woman is next to impossible.

I am comfortable with sadness. But not so great with joy. People like me innately seem to battle loneliness more than the average person. Accepting that makes it easier to move forward.

You have got to be your own hero.

Nobody is coming to save you and I'm sorry if that sounds harsh. As much as I claimed to understand this, I don't believe it's anything I truly grasped until this past year.

It's not as if it's *impossible* to feel like somebody else stepped into your life and changed it. But you can never bank on that future. And I'd be pretty damn wary about letting anybody play the role of constant hero in your life.

Ultimately, you have got to be the hero of your own life. You

can't play sidekick to anybody else in that respect, or you will never actually make it on your own.

Help from your loved ones is a beautiful thing, and I don't mean that you should reject their help. I only mean that the main protagonist of your story must be you.

Every person on this planet needs to figure out how to quit looking to outside forces for their saving. It will dramatically change your life and how you experience loneliness.

Keep in mind that loneliness may be temporary.

I don't know what the future has in store for me or you, but I do know that I'm done waiting for the lonely feelings to fade.

At the same time, I also know that some feelings of loneliness are fleeting and tied up in other issues and insecurities.

The truth is that loneliness is a helluva lot harder to manage when you let yourself believe it's some life-long sentence. Once you grant yourself the ability to hope and believe that at least *some of your loneliness* is temporary, it's much easier to handle.

When you recognize your loneliness could be a temporary hurdle, it's also easier to focus less on the circumstances

you can't control and more on your own course of action.

Focus on building a life that makes you feel strong.

There's something to be said about being too busy to let your sadness consume you. As a person who has often battled loneliness, depression, and abandonment fears, I have found out that having a passion project can honestly crowd out the sadness which once consumed you.

Writing is my passion, but it may be different for you. Essentially, I've found that the more you invest in your passions and dreams, and the more you can do your part to improve the world, and the less space there is for loneliness.

This is not an excuse to intentionally hold yourself at a distance and avoid connection. It's encouragement that if you focus on doing the things that make you feel strong, you'll find yourself feeling a lot less lonely.

Building a life you love might be the best way to battle loneliness. Helping others instead of worrying about who will help you. When you focus on getting through your darkest emotions in a positive way, you'll start seeing a brand new world.

(Source: Medium)