

Me, Myself, and I (and You)
By Esha Kaur Walia

Alone. Ever since I can remember, there has only been one place where I can be alone, where I can feel all of my emotions, where I can call my very own: My thoughts (or as I like to refer to them, ‘place’). Don’t misinterpret this, though. It’s not somewhere that makes me feel better all the time or one of those glorified ‘heaven-on-earth’ type of places. Actually, it can be just the opposite of that.

Because honestly, if there is anything I have learned from being in this place for so long, it’s that you have to learn to be comfortable in it. And if you don’t, you could be in for a real ride. Honestly speaking, I still get pretty uncomfortable here sometimes, so I guess this advice is really just advice that I am giving myself.

Now, let’s go back to January 7th, 2003. It wasn’t just Blockbuster and Chuck E. Cheese that existed back then (although those were some of the best places in the world to me as a kid); this place came into existence too. I don’t exactly remember everything about this place from the very beginning because I was so young, but I do know that I felt very self-conscious there and that it could be pretty daunting. My thoughts could sometimes be my own worst enemy, and it felt as if everything, my whole world, revolved around them.

And that is what held me back for so long.

I never fully felt comfortable confronting my relationship with my inner thoughts, yet I spent so much time being consumed by them because they are always with me. Like Dorothy Allison once stated, “place is emotion” (9). This is exactly what this place was for me; the gatekeeper of my every feeling, impulse, and decision. I channeled everything to it. I would abide by its constant demonizing remarks, hoping that by doing so I would somehow magically transform my attitude towards it. But I just couldn’t.

Because of this place, I was an extremely picky eater, afraid to try foods beyond milk, lentils, rice, and grapes. Because of this place, I would sometimes forget or question how to breathe (was it through my nose or through my mouth?) because I didn't trust myself to do it correctly. Because of this place, I would get so nervous before sports games and practices that I would feel sick to my stomach and try to get out of having to go to them. Because of this place, I had only one friend growing up. Because of this place, I would constantly crawl up into a turtle-like shell and be called a turtle by my family for walking with my head hanging low and for having poor posture.

This constant struggle continued for years in and years out. But escaping a bad relationship that has consumed your life for so long is extremely difficult. How do you make such a big leap from a girl living in an overwhelming and all-consuming place and feeling to a woman who now lives across the country and is thriving by herself?

You break out of it.

You break out of this negative, self-loathing, toxic relationship between you and your thoughts. It isn't easy, though. My journey of breaking out of my struggle with this place started just a little over two years ago, when my mom realized just how much control my thoughts exerted over me and how much they were impacting me. She sent me to a new place, where I could talk to someone who would understand and listen to my problems a couple of times a month.

When I first started going to this new place, I would cry. Instantly. It was so hard to talk about how I was being impacted by these vicious thoughts that I have been dealing with my whole life that I would break down and not be able to communicate. I had been trapped in this unhealthy relationship in my own head for so long that I just had no idea of how to even begin to

build a healthy relationship with it. There were also so many other issues going on in my life that needed to be addressed, from being completely overwhelmed by school, my extracurriculars, and my future, to having no good support system outside of home, and to trying to constantly appease everyone. I felt overwhelmed. And trapped.

This new place helped me, though. It made me realize that ultimately, the biggest factor behind all these problems was my lack of self-confidence and my inability to listen to myself.

Because of this new place, I quit field hockey, which had been making me unhappy for so long. Because of this new place, I stopped pursuing STEM as a career even though everyone around me wanted me to. Because of this new place, I decided to pursue business and public speaking because talking in front of a crowd and networking have always come naturally to me. Because of this new place, I am here in the present moment. Because of this new place, I have a newfound appreciation for and a better relationship with the old place: my thoughts.

Everything I had learned began to fall into place last year, when I decided to commit to college across the country. A year ago, my parents and the people around me had genuinely never thought I would be ready for this change, and they even told me so. I was going against everything that my thoughts had been telling me all my life. But when the night of August 30th, 2021 rolled around, I was ready. I was ready to become this happier version of myself. “Fly!” my mom said to me as we both cried while I hurried into the airport, ready to start this new chapter of my life.

And now, my relationship with my thoughts continues to improve and heal. I can’t say that I am always, 100% completely happy because there are still times where I sneak back into my shell. But that’s just a normal part of life, isn’t it?

Here I am. Alone, thriving, happier than before. It isn't just a new physical place that has made me happy, though. It is my mended relationship with a place that is within *me*.

And you are in your very own version of it right here, right now.

Works Cited

Allison, Dorothy. "Place." *The Writer's Notebook*. Tin House Books, 2009, pp. 5-9.