

A SNEAK PEEK INSIDE:

“How the fuck did I end up here?” Big letters were draped along the top on the page. Confusion whirled; I wondered what egregious mistakes I made that I did not see at the time. The rage subsided, leaving me open, curious. Abstain my belligerence with spirit and willing to hear, my heart opened to know the truth of how I found myself in this mess. Where did I go wrong? I knew I was responsible for all of the choices, decisions, actions, and behaviors that led me to this point. I knew it was my fault. I just wished I knew what I did wrong. Where did I go astray? I did everything I knew how to do, to the best of my ability, but this was where I landed.

Without working for a week, the delicate pulse on my business told me the time was coming for tough choices to be made. I spent a few hours a day at the office and the remaining hours of the day was in bed, sleeping, unable to muster the energy to play volleyball or go for a walk. I didn't have the energy to engage with Jasmine or Mom. All I wanted to do was sleep, disconnect from the entire world and let it all come crashing down. I was tired of trying to hold up my life, to keep it going, tired of trying to make it work. Beyond tired or drained: depleted, exhausted; I had nothing left.

I was bankrupt: emotionally, physically, spiritually, financially. I had nothing to give to anyone. Not myself, not my child, nothing. I pushed my body past the redline, using fumes to keep me afloat. I gave myself permission to crash.

Facing life-altering decisions, I needed space to think, to process all that transpired. At home, Mom's constant glare followed my every move. Feeling her condescending, critical eyes, I stayed in my room,

coming out only when she was gone. Once my immediate health threat passed, Mom made little effort to hide her disgust at my lackluster desire to get back to work.

I knew there was no more work to do. I had three weeks left until I made a formal announcement. The choice had already been made for me; I had just not yet accepted it yet. I had not yet processed the magnitude of what was happening; it was too big to fully wrap my mind around it and face the truth, along with the consequences.

Twelve years had passed since I last had time away from work. A road trip with Jasmine would do me some good. I needed to come up with a plan of what's next.

First stop, overnight at a friend of twenty-three years; it was always fulfilling to spend time with her. I made my way up the coast; Monterey was a beautiful stop, perfect for a few days with another friend of twenty years. I headed out across the bay and stopped in my former hometown, a last-minute gift: Dominic. Facebook kept us acquainted with one another, never more than a friendly hello. An exchange of kind, loving words, twenty-five years overdue, from the day I stormed off the basketball court. Onward to my cousin's house for a few more days.

Clarity and peace of mind were still eluding me.

Sixteen years ago when I left San Jose, I didn't take the time to say goodbye to the life I had. I just left, anxious to leave behind the life I wanted to escape from. A brief Facebook exchange reconnected me with another friend I had left behind. For five years, my workout partner, buddy, friend, was a constant in my life, until I just walked away, leaving our friendship behind. I found out he lived less than a mile from my cousins. I made time to see him and complete what I left behind.

I spent a few days with my cousins, rounding off a ten-day trip. It was 4:30 a.m., and Jasmine was sleeping in the back seat as I made my way onto Interstate 5. Sixteen years ago, my heart filled with

possibility and joy as *Journey* kept me company. This morning, the forceful voice of Josh Groban was playing, highlighting the purple, pink, orange, and yellow hues of the sun kissing the early morning sky, luring out the contents of my broken heart. Today, the confusion in my mind rendered me unable to think rational thoughts at the daunting prospect of facing what awaited at home.

Reflecting on friends and family of the past ten days, an odd sensation overwhelmed me. It was as if I had the chance to say goodbye to some important people from my life. If something were to happen to me, at least the final memory they'd have of me would be good.

In three days, I would be taking the final course of action that would seal the fate of my office. I had exactly enough money to pay for one month of rent, either home or office, not both. I was able to pay rent for a home for one more month, and that was it. I still hadn't figured out a plan. I still didn't know what I was going to do. One absolute certainty I knew for sure:

God, I am sorry. I fucked up and don't know how to get out of this mess. I am too tired to fight. I will not live without my child. If I find myself in a situation where she's taken from me, I will execute my plan to take both our lives. I refuse to live without her and have her taken from me for my failures, my inability to care for her, support her, and provide for her. If suicide is my only way out, I'll do it. I don't want to die. I just don't want to live like this anymore.