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RESILIENCE AMIDST ADVERSITY: THE SINE QUA NON PRINCIPLE FOR
MEANINGFUL AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented

by

Jennifer Jang Helgesen

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education
Specializing in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

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ABSTRACT

Have you ever encountered difficult moments that trigger you? Do you find it difficult to monitor your internal dialogue after a setback? Do you struggle to find meaning and purpose amidst all the hardship? As leaders in higher education, we must prioritize others, often giving ourselves away in the process only to find there is nothing left within. We might feel empty, beaten down, and exhausted as others need us to repeatedly and reliably show up as competent leaders. I believe the art of cultivating resilience is the antidote for us as leaders to be meaning-filled and effective at work and in life.

Life is full of inevitable major adversities, setbacks, hurdles, and challenges that we cannot avoid. These obstacles often feel unbearable and like our world is caving in around us. We all face them. No one is exempt. Everyone can relate in some way or another, but rarely are we shown a strategic system to explicitly cultivate the art of *overcoming* these hurdles, *recovering* from setbacks, and *transcending* adversity. How do we continue to lead effectively while replenishing our own cups with meaning and purpose?

Through the use of the Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology, this dissertation examines how I am able to transcend adversities encountered in life through practical tips and systems for cultivating resilience. This organic self-disclosure narrative draws upon personal challenges to explore the lessons learned, light bulb moments captured, and epiphanies acquired through a multitude of growing pains and adversities. Written specifically with higher education educators and leaders in mind, but also those who they want to influence, the gleaned value is organized into three sections: What is resilience? Why may resilience be important? How can we cultivate resilience?

While sharing what has worked for me in my journey, I hope to engage, inspire, and empower educators and leaders in the process of becoming more resilient themselves. My goal is to better equip individuals with the tools, skills, and mindset needed to propel us through these inevitable and unavoidable challenges in life. The better we can become as individuals, the better we are as a collective. Resilience should be woven throughout the fabric of our foundation as people. It is an internal boost that enhances our abilities as educators, enriches our capacities as parents, and deepens our impact as leaders.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Six Months

Saipan: a tropical paradise; the beach and the sun; where I grew up. My now husband swept me off my feet with a surprise proposal on a sunset cruise. Two months after we had just traveled halfway around the world to visit my parents on the island of Saipan, I witnessed my healthy, fit, never-sick father suddenly pass away over video conference. Just like that, my world forever changed. It was exactly a month before a joyous occasion he was looking forward to - my wedding. Before we knew it, we were flying back across the globe, managing funeral details, operating my dad's engineering business for five weeks, all learning as we go. We navigated family dynamics, carried out our wedding within 49 days to honor Chinese traditions, then went straight back to full time jobs without a break in between. What followed was dealing with deep seated family issues, mental health scares, suicidal ideations, and moving with my husband to a new apartment in a new town. I took a leave from work attempting to grieve and re-establish my mental, physical, and emotional grounding. In that time, I also heard back from my long-awaited visa process and found out we are pregnant. All of this occurred within six months.

Any of these alone are major emotional life events that require tremendous emotional capacity. Experienced all compounded within six short months? It was intense and felt like complete chaos. There was no time to breathe and acknowledge what was happening in between events. It's as if a tornado invaded unannounced, uprooted everything, tore it all apart, and spit it back out with a sneer. It felt like a giant snowball that kept on rolling and getting bigger. Adding on top of it all, being the oldest daughter

in a traditional Chinese family, I was the person defaulted to be the leader, the mature one, the decision maker that takes care of everyone else's needs in light of the sudden passing, despite my own grief and processing.

As a student services professional in the field of education, it is not news we are often faced with difficult challenges in our students' lives in addition to our own. No matter what may happen, we are in some ways expected to put our needs aside and respond to student situations from roommate conflicts, conduct violations, and academic dishonesty to sexual assaults and student suicides. I felt an internalized pressure to bounce back right away from the trauma of my father's sudden passing and associated aftermath to do my job and serve our students. It is from this lens that I find it critical to discuss practical ways we can cultivate resilience to adequately face life's inevitable adversities in order to be effective leaders in education, our profession, and in life.

Leadership is a skill shaped by life experience¹. Life adversities can either make or break us. They mold us into leaders. They shape our leadership philosophy. They inform our leadership style. "Stressful situations are often transformative², and, for some people, sometimes, positive change and growth are part of their transformation³." They are turning points where we can rise higher or be knocked down. They are opportunities for us to surface our deepest fears, face our nightmares, examine their roots, process these feelings, and come out anewed. They help us become better leaders as we learn through the process.

¹ Standford-Blair & Dickman, 2005, p.13

² Saakvitne, Tennen, & Affleck, 1998

³ Park, 2004, p. 69 Park,

*The journey of a thousand miles
begins with one step.
~ Lao Tzu*

Why resilience? It is something embedded in society that we ought to know how to do, but rarely is the “how-to” explicitly explained and taught. One of the best methods to learn is to put new skills and knowledge into daily practice.⁴ The strategies I have gleaned from my experience is offered in forms of practical tips that can be integrated into daily life. They are small changes that can be easily incorporated, yet can make a huge impact in our overall wellness. It is much more effective to use every small opportunity for personal transformation than attempting with a big overhaul. It’s the little habits that are vital. Little details make big things happen.⁵

In examining my leadership in higher education over the last 14 years, “the need for alternative models of leadership inclusive of identity, coupled with the importance of narrative, particularly by other women of color leaders, has significantly influenced my own sense of worth, value, and effectiveness in the Academy.⁶” I am a hybrid, living in between cultures, navigating a world that is neither my parents’ nor the one I grew up in. I build relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.⁷ Honoring my experience as a first-generation, international, multilingual Asian woman while discussing leadership is of critical experience in breaking the mold of a single story⁸ in higher education.

⁴ Cherry, 2019

⁵ John Wooden

⁶ Adapted from Windy Paz-Amor’s dissertation pg. 2

⁷ Pollock, Reken, 19.

⁸ Adichie, C. N. *The danger of a single story* Ted Talk

Supported by the paradigms of current researchers and thought leaders on the topic of resilience, and exploring thriving in the context of posttraumatic growth⁹¹⁰, clinical trauma theory¹¹, and constructivist self development theory¹², my dissertation will explicitly lay out how one can strategically cultivate the art of overcoming life hurdles, recovering from setbacks, transcending from adversities, and ultimately engage as leaders and educators to actualize a more meaningful, effective, and holistic way of leading.

⁹ Joseph, 2013

¹⁰ Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998

¹¹ Saakvitne, Tennen, & Affleck, 1998

¹² Rendon, 2015

1.2 Previous Published Writing on Resilience, Adversity, & Effective Leadership

Since I've known about Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), it has been a big part of my academic and professional identity. Over the last ten years, I have co-presented ideas about meaning-making, as well as topics of moral conversation, applied ethics, scholarly personal narrative writing, and social justice advocacy dialogue, in a number of venues and national conferences to both faculty and student services professionals throughout the United States. In addition to my love of co-teaching several graduate courses each year on the topic of philosophy, meaning-making, applied ethics, and Scholarly Personal Narrative writing at the University of Vermont, I have also co-published various book chapters and academic articles on these topics.

The first two academic books I co-authored in the SPN genre are inspired by the courses I've co-taught with Robert J. Nash and my experience as a student affairs professional in higher education collaborating with tenured faculty to benefit our students' education journey. After several years of facilitating the meaning-making course, we were incredibly moved by how our method helped students process through challenging times in their lives and become more resilient in their own unique ways, we wrote *Preparing Students for Life Beyond College: A Meaning-Centered Vision for Holistic Teaching and Learning*¹³ to share our insights with others.

In the applied ethics class, we witnessed students benefiting from our framework of examining difficult life moral dilemmas. *Teaching College Students*

¹³ Nash & Jang, 2015

*How To Solve Real-Life Moral Dilemmas: An Ethical Compass for Quarterlififers*¹⁴ was born to help others be equipped with the tools to stay aligned with their values while resolving tough life situations.

The third co-published academic book is based on my experience as a student affairs professional collaborating with a tenured faculty over the years in higher education. *Crossover Pedagogy: A Rationale for a New Teaching Partnership between Faculty and Student Affairs Leaders on College Campuses*¹⁵ reveals how we can overcome the academic and student affairs divide and collaborate effectively to enhance student learning.

All of my writing and teaching around resilience, adversity, and effective leadership are student-centered, where students are empowered to explore their own meaning and discover how to align their decision making with their core values. My Master of Education thesis is in fact on this topic looking from the lens of self-care, titled *Transcending Adversities through Intentional Self-Care: The Rejuvenating Narrative of A Student Affairs Quarterlifer*¹⁶. It focuses primarily on resilience and effective leadership, written in the Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology. I have also published chapters on the topic of resilience, adversity, and effective leadership using the SPN methodology such as

- *Embracing the Cosmopolite Identity: 9 Ways SPN Reawaken My Worth*¹⁷;

¹⁴ Nash & Jang, 2016

¹⁵ Nash & Jang, et al, 2016

¹⁶ Jang, J (2011). *Transcending Adversities through Intentional Self-Care: The Rejuvenating Narrative of A Student Affairs Quarterlifer*. Master of Education Thesis.

¹⁷ Jang, J. 2012

- *The Social Justice Journey of A Cosmopolite: Lessons Learned on Engaging in Authentic International Dialogue*¹⁸; and
- *Transnational Student Identity Development through the Cosmopolite Lens: Benefits and Challenges of Straddling Cultures*¹⁹.

In all my academic publications, the theme of cultivating resilience to transcend adversities into fuel and foundation for effective leadership has always been center stage. I look forward to expanding on this explicitly in this dissertation. I recognize my already-published scholarly credibility is a very unique, almost unprecedented experience for doctoral students. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities I have had and hope to incorporate this experience and involvement in my dissertation.

¹⁸ Jang, J. 2011

¹⁹ Jang, J. 2015

1.3 Chapter Overview

To most effectively present resilience amidst adversity as my through-line theme, I have organized my dissertation into four chapters, presented below. Each chapter is incorporated with maxims, which are short sayings that condense wisdom into a few “ingenious, kinetic lines.”²⁰ I have a special affinity with maxims because they eloquently capture the ideas I propose and the essence of what I expand upon in the following sections. They are concise, open-ended, direct, and convey rich meaning to stimulate our imagination. A visual analogy may bring forth imageries that are not triggered by words alone. Maxims have been richly meaningful for me in my living, writing, and teaching journey. I hope they inspire the same for you as you find relevance, stimulation, and parallels to your own journey of cultivating resilience.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter, I share with you my experience with SPN writing and why I have intentionally chosen it as the methodology for this dissertation. Having been acquainted with SPN for over ten years, written my masters thesis using this methodology, and co-authored three academic books written in the SPN genre, I share with you how SPN methodology effectively delivers the powerful personal narrative I aim to communicate, and how I have structured this dissertation utilizing its four components.

Chapter 3: What is Resilience?

This is the “what” section of the SPN’s “what, so what, and now what” framework. This chapter reveals the culmination of what I have come to understand about

²⁰ Nash & Murray, 2010, p. 179

resilience after 14 years in American higher education. I share examples of resilience from my own life, what resilience looks, feels, and sounds like amidst adversity, and how I have come to understand the concept of resilience. Concurrently, I debunk ideas of resilience that are commonly misconstrued and embed the perspective of current researchers and relevant thought leaders.

Chapter 4: Why is Resilience Important?

This is the “so what” section of this SPN. Here, I discuss the role resilience plays in our lives and what can happen without it. This chapter reveals three accounts of adversities I have encountered in life. Each of these challenges ties back to my time in education and are all related student issues that higher education and student affairs professionals interface with on a regular basis. Through my personal narratives, I take you through the journey of how resilience brought me back to life following my most difficult times, and how having resilience can be used not just to rebound, but to elevate your life. In this chapter, I reveal how resilience enables us to survive, strive, and thrive in life as better people, educators, and leaders.

Chapter 5: How to Cultivate Resilience?

Now what? Resilience is a skill you can cultivate, but how do we do it? I humbly share three principles that are fundamental to my resilience as well as my personal toolbox for cultivating and maintaining my mental, emotional, and physical wellness. The head, heart, and body. The toolbox is comprised of a series of practical tips that will help you strengthen your resilience muscle. These simple habits are small actions with big impact. They have transformed my life for the better and I continue to utilize them to replenish and rejuvenate. They help me achieve and actualize a better sense of

groundedness, empowerment, and advocacy in life. I hope they will inspire the same for you.

Chapter 6: Uniquely Me, Universally We

This chapter focuses the attention on the implications of cultivating resilience in the field of higher education and student affairs. How does the concept and practice of cultivating resilience relate to us as educators and leaders? I take the specific and apply it to the universal. How does my unique journey connect to the larger human experience? Points of universalizability will be presented throughout this dissertation, and may be self-evident, but I will make explicit connections on how these “universalizables” positively impact the way we do our work as higher education and student affairs professionals, educators, and leaders.

*There is nothing we human beings like more
than to contribute to one another's wellbeing.
~ Marshall Rosenberg*

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY & PROCESS

In this chapter, I share with you my experience with SPN writing and why I have intentionally chosen it as the methodology for this dissertation. Having been acquainted with SPN for over ten years, written my masters thesis using this methodology, and co-authored three academic books written in the SPN genre, I share with you how SPN methodology effectively delivers the powerful personal narrative I aim to communicate, and how I have structured this dissertation utilizing its four components.

2.1 Why Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN)?

*SPN writing can take many forms.
While it is personal, it is also social.
While it is practical, it is also theoretical.
While it is reflective, it is also public.
While it is local, it is also political.
While it narrates, it also proposes.
While it is self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from readers.
Whatever its unique shape and style of communicating to readers,
an SPN's central purpose is to make an impact on both writer and reader,
on both the individual and the community²¹.*

SPN connects globally, across cultures and generations. It illustrates the power and connectivity of storytelling, and promotes evolutionary benefits of solidarity, inclusivity, belonging, and validation²². It is a methodology “that shows how it is possible for writers to connect their own personal narratives to the scholarly writings of others²³”. In my story, I lost more than just my father, but my role model, mentor, guide, supporter, family structure, and the silent rock that held everything in place. He

²¹ Nash, 2004, p. 29

²² Jang, J. 2014

²³ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 86

was the true unsung hero that kept my family grounded and together. Even though through my academic career, I am familiar with both quantitative and qualitative methods, writing in the genre of Scholarly Personal Narrative enables the incorporation of both the powerful learning from my lived experience as well as the scholarly research of others. From this lens, SPN is the methodology that is most integrative, authentic, and appropriate for my topic.

It takes courage and vulnerability to disclose and share personally. SPN requires a deep personal investment from the author as they share personal experiences. SPN can be a powerful teaching tool because in its relatability, it validates others knowing they are not the only one that faces hardship and struggle. SPN draws connection to the universalizable human experiences that connects us on a deeper level. SPN transcends learning styles, thinking preferences, and cultural barriers. SPN evokes memories of our own experiences when encountering narratives of others.

SPN helps to explore all the relevant contingencies in my contexts of meanings. There is no SPN truth that goes all the way down to some bottom line, basic foundation, or final answer. In matters of narrative truth, there is only interpretation, perspective, point of view, and personal preference²⁴. SPN also brings to life the scholarly research of others and makes them more relevant and relatable for my audience and readers. It evokes the reader to be self-reflective. It allows others who have also experienced loss, grief, and the challenges associated with it to connect to the deeper research. The beauty and glory of SPN writing is that there is a universalizable

²⁴ Nash, 2004, p. 40-41

piece that connects to the human core of each and every one of us. Despite your experience, identity, upbringing, family status, earning potential, lifestyle, or habits, there are fundamental values and emotions of what it means to be human that connect us all. SPN brings these to life.

While SPN writing is versatile, it illustrates the power and connectivity of storytelling. It has demonstrated our evolutionary survival need to share narratives. It is certainly more widely practiced than formal “research” and is consistent throughout our many dimensions of differences. Storytelling and sharing narratives serves multiple purposes of solidarity, inclusion, and validation. Everyone has their own style of processing and relating to experience. Some are thinkers, storytellers, actors, musicians...et cetera. SPN is one style among the many avenues to interpret and communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions.

Describing accounts paints mental pictures in the minds of people and boosts community building. It enriches related experiences and stimulates a sense of bonding and solidarity. It transports one to imagine a certain memory. The story can be brought to life with a combination of visual, audio, and kinesthetic aids. Therefore, sharing narratives promotes inclusivity as it accommodates different learning styles in the classroom, work, and interpersonal settings. Storytelling creates a shared intellectual and emotional experience that enhances humor and laughter, which affirms and validates a sense of belonging.

*“SPN is about giving yourself permission
to express your own voice in your own language;
your own take on your own story in your own inimitable manner.
SPN is your grand opportunity to practice listening
to the sound of your own voice.*

*Find your special sound and style, and you will find your story.
Lose these, and you will continue to be silenced...
Scholarly personal narrative writing
is meant primarily to benefit readers,
touch readers" lives by informing their experiences,
by transforming the meaning of events..."²⁵*

The above epigraph acutely depicts what Scholarly Personal Narrative is. It allows the author to use their language, take on their own perspective in how they walk in the world each day, and allow that powerful voice to inspire, rejuvenate, and transform others. SPN allows the writer to have true authorship in their learning, writing, and teaching, and have the opportunity to redefine their life and make meaning from their experience.

SPN methodology consists of four components that interweaves the personal, the scholarly, and the narrative together, enabling a smoother connection of meaning to the large universal community of humanity. These four dimensions of exploration and discovery that craft the structural framework of SPN are outlined below²⁶:

1. **Pre-Search: "How do I get started?"** This is an opportunity for the writer to establish self-confidence, commitment and discipline in their writing. This is also a time to establish an overarching theme(s), as well as who your audience is.
2. **Me-Search: "What is my personal narrative regarding the ideas emphasized in my writing?"** In this section the writer will define and establish the "me", by creating personal questions, finding your writing voice,

²⁵ Nash, 2004, p.24

²⁶ Nash & Bradley, pp. 6-7

connecting central points to personal experience, and identifying stories that deepen the theme of your research.

3. **Re-Search: “What scholars and researchers have informed my writing?”**

In this section the writer will identify primary and secondary scholarly sources that ground the research, central themes that form the core of the writing, creative ways to re-define and support, conventional understandings of research.

4. **We-Search: “What are the implications for my profession, or field of**

study, that can be generalized from my scholarly personal narrative?” To what extent are my experiences similar to my readers’ experiences? How can I create a narrative overlap between my life and my profession? How do I universalize my findings to others in such a way that my ‘*I*’ can co-exist with the ‘*we*’ who are reading my document.

2.2 Pre-Search

My Audience

“Knowing who you are writing to, and for, will remind you to return to the ‘true north’, your audience compass. For in the end, the audience determines the tone of your writing, the reason for the writing, and the vocabulary or professional language you choose to use²⁷.” This Scholarly Personal Narrative dissertation is written primarily for leaders in higher education that seeks to cultivate their resilience quotient while juggling challenges in life. Specifically, it is written for individuals, learners, and educators that

²⁷ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 53

want to better equip themselves to navigate adversities as leaders, while helping those in their scope of influence to further cultivate meaning and resilience.

Overarching Theme

Why resilience? From being bullied as an English language learner to overcoming a spectrum of eating disorders, managing life alone as a teenager on a foreign continent to surviving the trauma of a sexual assault, battling crippling perfectionism to negotiating my sense of belonging as a woman without a country - the perpetual alien, traversing a threatening stalker situation to navigating the complicated challenges and limitations of immigration status in this country - resilience amidst adversity has always been a theme in my life. As the oldest daughter from a traditional Chinese family, I have always been asked to step up and lead, even while facing these challenges. How did I get through it all? How did I stay afloat? How do I bend and not break? What kept me going during all these adversities, setbacks, hurdles, the five weeks in Saipan, or the six months thereafter? These questions further encouraged me to write about *resilience amidst adversities* as my dissertation.

Life is full of unexpected twists and turns. Some take us on a beautiful scenic route where we wish we could stay, while others are sharp turns that we never see coming, like my dad's sudden passing. Life is full of major challenges that we cannot avoid. They are inevitable. We all face them. No one is exempt. Resilience is the antidote. These inevitable adversities can be difficult, seem unbearable, and feel like the end of the world. Everyone can relate, but most often no one strategically lays it out clearly to show how we can actually master the art of overcoming these hurdles, recovering from setbacks, and transcending adversities.

2.3 Me-Search

Me & My Voice

SPN writing encourages us to see ourselves as the pivotal variable in the research we do, without whom there would be no research at all. Why? Because, more often than we are willing to admit, me-search is prior to research. Our personal lives and experiences are central to our research and scholarship.²⁸ Since my father's passing, I have experienced six months of intense major life events from arranging funeral logistics to still executing on the wedding within 49 days to comply with cultural traditions, learning to grieve while returning back to full time work with no breaks, navigating a new role as wife, daughter-in-law, sister, and oldest daughter while navigating suicidal ideation in the family, traversing job changes to handling more loss and struggling with my own mental health, managing further complicated family dynamics as each person grieves in unique ways to allow myself the time, space, and permission to not be okay. Meanwhile as I am resurfacing, my husband and I realized we are expecting a baby. The journey of revival and survival is real and I strive to thrive.

The aim of SPN writing is not to test, evaluate, or discover whether something is true. The main design objective of SPN research is to investigate, present, and analyze the inner life of the writer in order to draw insights that might be universalizable for readers²⁹. These six months have presented moments that were the lowest of the low and darkest of the dark. Some of which are compounded with sharp learning curves, patience with grief, and taunting traumas from the past; yet these moments are alleviated with

²⁸ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 58

²⁹ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 83

hopeful beautiful glowing possibilities, such as marriage and upcoming baby. Dad would have been a great grandpa. He was a natural. Kids cherished his presence. They treasured his company. We will speak of him. His stories will be told. He will be remembered.

Personal Questions Examined

“SPN scholars place themselves at the center of their research design. Everything else, although of pivotal significance, evolves from and revolves around the self-exploration of the author. Data collection, literature reviews, and analysis and interpretation of data (whether empirical or theoretical) always emanate from the central themes and the self-narration of the writer.”³⁰

The genre of Scholarly Personal Narrative requires the author to examine deeply of who they are, why they are, and how they are. The process involves deep introspection and reflection. In doing so, the writing aims to evoke self-examination from the reader. Rather than creating “interview questions for examining the inner and outer lives of others, in SPN, researchers choose to self-interrogate³¹.” Below are some of the personal questions I examined when constructing my SPN research.

1. What are my core values that are revealed from adversities like this?
2. What are my life principles and beliefs that helped me to stay afloat despite the circumstances?
3. What characteristics and habits separated me from my family members who “couldn’t stand it” or were “falling apart?”
4. Why might these values, principles, beliefs, and habits be important in the bigger picture?

³⁰ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 87

³¹ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 83

5. How can my lived experiences, “my truths,” be universalizable and help others in their resilience process?
6. How can I encapsulate these lived experiences, that has helped me immensely to be resilient in the face of adversities, into practical tips that can be utilized in benefiting others?

2.4 Re-Search

Scholarly Framework

This dissertation is framed by the intersecting paradigms of posttraumatic growth^{32,33}, clinical trauma theory³⁴, and constructivist self development theory³⁵ as supported by current researchers and thought leaders on the topic of resilience. I incorporate my own experience and leadership in American higher education for the last 14 years to shine light onto an often silent population - international Asian women of color, a hybrid between cultures, a philosophical intellectual, navigating leadership and education from a marginalized identity perspective.

Central Theme

The central theme of my dissertation is to explore the what, why, and how of cultivating resilience. My dissertation will explicitly lay out how one can strategically cultivate the art of overcoming life hurdles, recovering from setbacks, transcending adversities, and ultimately engage as leaders and educators to actualize a more meaningful, effective, and holistic way of leading. It incorporates themes of self-

³² Joseph, 2013

³³ Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998

³⁴ Saakvitne, Tennen, & Affleck, 1998

³⁵ Rendon, 2015

examination, holistic psychology, healing our inner child, self-advocacy, love, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, acceptance, boundary setting, deep reflection, self-trust, empowerment, and accountability. All the things I continue to learn about, grow from, and practice to enhance each day.

Limitations of SPN

The obvious limitation of the SPN methodology is that it is subjective in nature. Since Scholarly Personal Narrative requires the incorporation of one's perspective, interpretation, and memory of their experience, this dissertation will be solely based on my personal experience. In this sense, I as the author, "accept full responsibility for the personal disclosures, universal themes, and illustrative stories. In SPN falsifiability has more to do with whether or not the writing is authentic, honest, and, especially universal³⁶".

2.5 We-Search

Universalizability, unlike other types of replicability, is not measurable in scientific terms. In contrast, the universalizability of thematic motifs, principles, and beliefs is more felt by the reader than counted, tested, interviewed, or measured by the scientist. Because each SPN is different, what remains universalizable are the common existential themes that underlie these differences and touch all human lives, regardless of the unique empirical differences³⁷. SPN writing as a methodology enables me to make meaning in the process *of* writing, shine light onto an important topic *in* my writing, and empower myself and others *through* my writing.

³⁶ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 84

³⁷ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 84

The overarching question of this section asks, “What are the universalizable implications for my profession that can be extracted from my personal narrative and from my research in this SPN dissertation?³⁸”. In illustrating how I have transcended adversities encountered in life using practical tips of cultivating resilience, I hope to engage, inspire, and empower educators and leaders to become more resilient themselves. Points of universalizability will be presented throughout this dissertation, but specific connections will be made explicitly in the final implications chapter.

My goal is to better equip individuals with the tools, skills, and mindset that will propel us through these inevitable and unavoidable challenges in life. The better people become as individuals, the better we are as a collective. Resilience should be woven throughout the fabric of our foundation as people. It is an internal boost that enhances our abilities as educators, enriches our capacities as parents, and deepens our impact as leaders.

³⁸ Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 106

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

This is the “what” section of the SPN’s “what, so what, and now what” framework. This chapter reveals the culmination of what I have come to understand about resilience after 14 years in American higher education. I share examples of resilience from my own life, what resilience looks, feels, and sounds like amidst adversity, and how I have come to understand the concept of resilience. Concurrently, I debunk ideas of resilience that are commonly misconstrued and embed the perspective of current researchers and relevant thought leaders.

3.1 The Phone Call

It was the day I tried on my wedding dress. I took pictures and sent them digitally for my parents and sister to see on our family chat. Unlike their usual speedy response, I hadn’t heard a reply from my parents for some time. I was in the middle of wondering what was taking them so long on such a happy occasion when I saw my mom’s name pop up on my phone – calling. That’s unusual, I thought. With the 14 hour time difference, we usually aren’t able to sync up to have the chance to speak on the phone. I joyfully picked up the call anticipating to hear her excited voice after seeing her daughter in a white dress for the first time. That was not the tone. Her voice sank my heart. It was one of shock, fear, and uncertainty. Shaky while trying to minimize panic. My strong healthy father who is fit, never sick, and has a good belly laugh, suddenly died, one week before their trip to the States for my wedding. This was a lifetime too soon for my mom. Nobody saw this coming.

Scott, my fiancé, was luckily beside me when I answered the call. We had just embraced one another lovingly talking, ironically, about how special it is to be alive in

the moment with each other; how rare it was for us to have found each other and to be loving each other at the same time; and how we ought to cherish our togetherness in this lifetime because our times together are not guaranteed and one day we will have to say the inevitable goodbye. It was a loving, sweet, yet sentimental bittersweet moment recognizing how short this life is. Almost without skipping a beat, my phone rang with my mom calling – bringing my thoughts back to the white dress and to hear the devastating news.

We spoke in Chinese on speaker phone for less than a minute, but from her voice alone, Scott knew something was wrong. Something major. I hang up. In shock. Looked at him blinking. Translated the short conversation. Processing the information as I spoke.

“My dad’s in the emergency room.”

“The ambulance took him.”

“His heart stopped.”

“He fainted in his shop.”

“He had a brain aneurysm.”

It all seemed surreal. My mind was blank. No thoughts. I chuckled at the absurdity of the situation, the words coming out of my mouth, and how this all did not make sense. My brain going blank yet full of jumbled thoughts.

*Yeah right.
No way.
This is a joke.
Really?
Really?
Nah.
Can't be.
This isn't real.
Now way.
What?*

*No.
He'll be fine.
This is just a scare.
They'll resuscitate him.
He'll wake up.*

I thought...

Scott, being my 007 agent - calm, collected, rationale, logical, good at decision making – knew right away the gravity of the situation. More realistic than I had convinced myself. He was compassionate and delicate in embracing me after the call. I was lost in shock and conveniently hid in the denial of the situation.

*This can't be happening.
Of course he has to be fine.
He's dad. He's always fine.
He has to be okay.
Right?
But this sounds major.
There must be a glitch in the system.
This is not supposed to happen in a happy movie plot.
This is a celebratory time.
I just tried on my wedding dress.
Did he see it?*

My parents are scheduled to fly 8,000 miles and arrive in the States in one week. Literally 7 days. Emily, my younger sister who lives in Georgia, will pick them up from the airport and see him for the first time in almost two years. I'm flying down from Vermont to surprise them when they get off the plane. Both daughters will be there to welcome them into wedding season! This is the plan. The vision.

*Is this still all going to happen?
It can't not, right?*

The next hour was an emotional rollercoaster to say the least. Learning more about his condition – brain filled with blood. Being briefed on his circumstance - no

chance of waking up. Video conferencing mom to see him plugged in on life support laying in the hospital bed - no consciousness. Lifeless. Being instructed to talk to him and let him hear my voice - but at a loss for words. Holding on to hope that his eyes might just open - but know deep down it's unlikely.

Processing the information given to me about his condition. Realizing my mom is learning for the first time about a do-not-resuscitate form - and having to decide what to do with it in the moment. Grappling with the thought of how traumatic it is to sign that form in this circumstance - when she thought she still had so much life with him. Watching my mom losing it, pleading by his side for him to wake and come back to her; wailing that he can't just leave her like this. My tears and heart going out to her, yet feeling myself go numb on the inside. Shielding up. Protecting myself. Stone faced. Wrapping my head around his condition... Coming to terms with the situation... Seeing my mom in absolutely devastation beside him... was heartbreaking – more than what I could comprehend about losing him at the time.

*His heart stopped. It stopped beating.
No more breath. No more life.
No resuscitation. They let him go.
My mom lost it.
I silently watched.
Witnessing. Taking it in. Feeling numb.
Frozen in time.*

Just like that, he's gone. I didn't get to tell him I love him. I haven't even talked to him lately. The last time I saw him briefly over video call was him passing by while my mom and I discussed wedding plans. I was cluing in only mom, thinking I'd have plenty of time to loop in dad... Never knowing that would be the last time...

The next thing I know, I'm trying to keep composure and hold it together reporting to my boss my status update, but couldn't contain it. Bawling on the phone with my future in-laws canceling plans and breaking the news. Coordinating travel plans with my dear sister, whom held it together so strong and brave given her existing recent loss, heartbreak, struggles. Not to even mention the tantalizing reality that she was about to see him in just seven days after not seeing him for over a year and a half... I can only imagine how difficult it was for her.

Then it was emotional lockdown and logistics. Booking last minute cross-globe, five-segment, international flights. Packing a thrown together carry-on, bringing mainly black clothes. Deciding whether we should sleep now or when we get to the airport in two hours. This is the beginning of a 24+ hour flight 8,000 miles across the ocean carrying the devastating shock of Dad's sudden passing and the heartbreaking circumstances of my mom's new reality.

3.2 The Five Weeks

Resilience is the ability and capability to bounce back, recover, overcome, and transcend amidst inevitable chaos, challenges, defeat, struggles, difficulties, disorder, problems, and obstacles. Resilience is what gives people the psychological strength to cope with stress and hardship. It is the mental reservoir of strength that people are able to call on in times of need to carry them through without falling apart³⁹. Resilience comes from deep within us and from support outside us. It comes from gratitude for what's good in our lives and from leaning in to the suck⁴⁰. It comes from analyzing how we process

³⁹ Cherry, 2018

⁴⁰ Cherry, 2018

grief and from simply accepting that grief.⁴¹ It's most often easier said than done. What was it actually like in those five weeks after receiving that phone call? How was I able to stay afloat to support mom managing Dad's business when it is easy to get dragged down by my own sadness and despair? What kept me going? How did I get through it all?

In those five weeks...

Resilience Looked Like

- being able to prioritize emotions and logistics concurrently
- allowing myself to be sad and wallow in paralyzing despair but also coordinate travel plans and book plane tickets
- giving myself permission to ugly cry on the long plane rides over to Saipan knowing this is part of a healthy reaction and process
- making sound decisions and plan funeral logistics despite the devastating shock and necessary grief
- staying level headed despite the despair to focus on operating the engineering business I've just been dealt, despite having no prior experience

Resilience Sounded Like

- expressing my needs, wants, and desires to my fiancé as I let the news of Dad's already being gone sink in and grieve on our long travel journey
- articulating to Scott the memories of dad that are surfacing, things that I'm sad about, and what I may need from him in terms of support without fearing I'm coming off as not being strong enough, tough enough, or perfect enough

⁴¹ Sandberg & Grant, 2017. Pg. 29.

- informing Scott the moments I needed an embrace and letting him actually care for me in times of vulnerability
- being the voice of logic to my mom and sister how we ought to prioritize things based on urgent and important demands amidst volatile emotional rollercoaster
- communicating my frustration and irritation after spending 24/7 with family for five weeks yet still committing to staying on Saipan to help

Resilience Felt Like

- tears surfacing and allowing myself the strength and empowerment to release the cry instead of bottling it up or suppressing it down
- heart breaking denial and yet aware enough to name I am in denial
- reminders to self that I am worthy of attention, affection, and tender, love, and care even when I am sad
- conflicting priorities between honoring my feelings or my thinking, and being able to make a decision as to which one felt more important, urgent, and necessary in that moment.
- tasting bittersweet regret, but able to recognize it, acknowledge it, and not wallow in it to become paralyzed by it

3.3 Resilience is...

*Fall down seven times, get up eight times.
~ Japanese Proverb*

The Latin root of the word resilience is *resilire*⁴², which means to rebound, recoil. Resilience is having the mental clarity, emotional groundedness, and physical wellness to bounce back from life's inevitable challenges and obstacles. Every setback and struggle in life has its significance and meaning. I choose to take them in as my vitamins to life. The journey may be difficult, requiring me to keep going and refuse to give up while I learn new lessons, make difficult decisions, develop new perspectives, practice these new skills, and discover more about myself,⁴³ but it is certainly worthwhile and enlightening. Even though the classroom of life experiences may test me with pop quizzes first before I receive the lessons, I know that I will come out better on the other side. It is a way life tests my commitment and determination to the goal I am pursuing.

Life can be like ocean waves, it has its ups and downs, crescendo and diminuendo, gradualness and abruptness. It can be vibrant, pulsating, and vivacious; at the same time beautifully painful, and painfully beautiful. There are going to be the inevitable hardships, struggles, and pressures from societal norms, cultural values, family standards, social dynamics, and personal beliefs. In the face of these obstacles, challenges, and what it may feel like overwhelming odds, I know I need to be persistently resilient. I do not wish for everything to be smooth sailing in life, but I wish for the courage and perseverance to carry on.

It is not about sticking to an optimistic outlook on life, or always managing to be at a good place emotionally, but being able to bounce back from the low. It is not about preventing challenges or avoiding difficulties, but how I choose to react to these trials.

⁴² resilience | Origin and meaning of resilience by Online Etymology Dictionary

⁴³ Canfield, 171.

Whether it is words, actions, or energy, I decide what to accept and how it impacts me. It is about having the tolerance level to bear the blow, the strength to climb back up from the valley, and the ability to accumulate experience capital to emerge nothing less than totally transformed - stronger and wiser. This is what makes me the person I am today.

To understand the essence of what something is, sometimes it is best to also see what it is not. Our human brain retains best when learning opposite concepts at the same time because it plays into our natural ability to recognize patterns.⁴⁴ I will share what resilience looks like, feels like, and sounds like while debunking the way it may be commonly misconstrued. The following is a culmination of what I have come to understand about resilience.

*They try to bury us.
They didn't know we were seeds.
~ Mexican Proverb*

Resilience is not never encounter obstacles.

Resilience is growing stronger and better despite the challenges.

Resilience is not never lose a fight.

Resilience is bouncing back after trials and tribulations.

Resilience is not never fall down.

Resilience is getting back up after you have been struck down.

Resilience is not dodging all the blows.

Resilience is taking the brick others throw at you and build a firm foundation⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "How Relearning Old Concepts Alongside New Ones Makes It All Stick," 2014

⁴⁵ Inspired by David Brinkley quote

Resilience is not never feel overwhelmed.

Resilience is staying afloat when wave after wave succomes you.

Resilience is not forgetting the bad.

Resilience is loving who we are by embracing the experiences that shaped us.⁴⁶

Resilience is not never get hurt.

Resilience is healing yourself after you have been wounded.

Resilience is not never feel down.

Resilience is knowing you are a seed being planted when you feel buried.⁴⁷

Resilience is not never experience defeat.

Resilience is maintaining perspective when your whole world is swirling.

Resilience is not never give up.

Resilience is holding on firm and know when to let go.

Resilience is not never feel lost.

Resilience is finding your way back up after being at your lowest low.

Resilience is not doing everything.

Resilience is knowing our boundaries and honoring them.

⁴⁶ Inspired by Andrea Dykstra quote

⁴⁷ Inspired by Mexican proverb

Like Bamboos

Resilience is bending and softening like bamboos so we do not break.⁴⁸ It is flexible, bending with the wind but never breaking, capable of adapting to any circumstances. It suggests resilience, meaning that we have the ability to bounce back even from the most difficult times. Our ability to thrive depends, in the end, on our attitude to our life circumstances. Taking everything in stride with grace, putting forth energy when it is needed, yet always staying calm inwardly.⁴⁹ Bamboo shoots takes years to grow a couple inches, but in the fourth year they shoot up exponentially each day. Why the difference? Because in those first few years, they were building foundations by reaching roots deep underground. Do not underestimate the power of laying a good foundation despite the judgement of others. Your growth later with will be exponential.

Resilience is not about always being the leader.

Resilience is knowing when to step up and when to step back.

Resilience is knowing when to speak up and when to listen, and the difference between the two.

Resilience is not forcing ourselves out of what we know is best for us.

Resilience is adapting with your environment despite the comfort of your old routines.

Resilience is listening to your inner voice instead of letting others drown it out.

⁴⁸ Yoga mantra

⁴⁹ Fu & Fox, 2013. Ping Fu's "Shanghai Papa"

Resilience is not demanding answers from ourselves.

Resilience is sustaining our groundedness when it is easier to get flustered.

Resilience is developing familiarity in the face of being the perpetual alien - foreign and odd.

Resilience is not suppressing feelings and never show emotions.

Resilience is dedicating time to honor and process the hard challenging feelings.

Resilience is forgiving those who have harmed us in the past and peacefully detach from them.

Resilience is not shoving our needs to the side so we can please everyone else.

Resilience is liking the company we keep when we are with ourselves.⁵⁰

Resilience is keeping the promises we make to ourselves when it is easy to betray.

Resilience is not coercing ourselves to fit social image that does not align with our values.

Resilience is staying true to yourself when it is easier to give into peer pressure.

Resilience is upholding your values consistently in the face of opposing group norms.

*A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation
with the bricks others have thrown at them.
~ David Brinkley*

Resilience is not doing it all.

⁵⁰ Inspired by Mandy Hale quote

It is doing what brings you joy, meaning, and fulfillment - and know the difference.

Resilience is not knowing it all.

It is knowing what you need to know and what you can look up - being resourceful about it.

Resilience is not showing it all.

It is being grounded and confident in who you are to be able to truly draw out others and listen.

Resilience is not knowing your passion.

It is having the courage to explore, discover, and reveal your passion to yourself.

Resilience is not always being needed.

Resilience is feeling confident in ourselves that we do not need to be needed.

Resilience is believing you can bounce back and have the self worthiness to do it.

Resilience is knowing that this is not the end of the world, and trusting yourself on that.

Resilience sounds like the inner voice reminding you that you can do it when times get hard.

Resilience looks like the tough seed inside you pushing through insurmountable dirt to reach sunlight.

Resilience feels like giving yourself permission to rest and remembering you are not responsible for fixing everything that is broken.⁵¹

Resilience is gaining clarity about yourself.

Resilience is understanding your tendencies, knowing your values, reflecting on your upbringing, and getting clear on your transference.

Resilience is getting to a place of inner peace and groundedness.

Resilience is not being perfect.

Resilience is not having it all together.

Resilience is knowing and believing I am worthy of love and belonging, even if I am not perfect.⁵²

Resilience is knowing our value.

Resilience is believing in our worth.

Resilience is trusting what we know and believe.

The Lotus Flower

Resilience is emerging like the beautiful pristine lotus flower, reborn each day, unstained from its surroundings. It grows from the bottom of a dark, murky, muddy pond and surfaces each day. We as people can also rise above the difficulties encountered in

⁵¹ Tweet by Jim Kwik

⁵² “Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead: Brené Brown

our everyday existence. At night the flower closes and submerges underwater, like a cleanse, and at dawn emerges and reopens with the light, like a renewal.⁵³ Resilience is when life pulls you under, you kick against the bottom, break the surface, and breathe again.⁵⁴ To be resilient is to use the strength within us to find the dynamic equilibrium with what surrounds us.⁵⁵ We can take the good in our lives and leverage them as foundation for growth and progress.⁵⁶ With resilience, we grow and become who we are, not *despite* our conditions, but *because* of our conditions.

Our Immune System

Think of resilience as built up immunity. The little things we do each day can build up our quotient of resilience. Resilience is like having a strong immune system. It protects us and helps fight against outside pathogens and diseases. Without a strong immune system, any virus can make us sick, and we might find ourselves ill all the time, more distressed when sick, and slower to recover. Without resilience, disappointments and failures can leave a person struck down. They might find themselves feeling down all the time, as if stuck in the muck, more distressed when feeling in a rut, and slower to find a way to surface back up. In both cases, individuals might attempt to cope with unhealthy, unproductive, and perhaps destructive behaviors hoping for a quick fix, temporary relief, or to just make the symptoms go away - but not fixing the root of the problem.

⁵³ Jayasuriya, n.d.

⁵⁴ Sandberg & Grant, 2017. Pg 29.

⁵⁵ Ago, 2018

⁵⁶ Metin, 2017

When it comes to resilience, we need to keep this figurative immune system strong and vibrant so we have the capability to defend and recover from metaphorical illness, sickness, flu and colds. Similar to how we build up our physical immune system by getting exposure to different elements, each of our life experiences enhances our figurative immunity to further obstacles. The more exposure we have to various life circumstances, the more prepared we will be the next time we encounter something similar. Similar to how vaccinations work - giving our body a sample of what we might encounter so we can gear up to fight it in the future. We need to keep our mind healthy, heart strong, and body nourished so we can literally and figuratively *bounce back* from the challenges, down currents, and heartaches of our lives.

A Muscle We Can Train

Resilience is a muscle we can train. An unforeseen winter experience solidified this concept for me. After experiencing a couple of powder snow days, I was not afraid of the big jumps in the terrain parks. As a tropical island transplant, I was a novice living in a snowy icy climate. I did not take into consideration that I had just waxed my board and that this is a particularly icy day - and that my newly waxed board will go much faster on ice. I went a lot faster than I anticipated and lost my balance going off the big ramp. Without the agility of a cat to adjust position in mid air, I came down on compacted hard icy ground. The impact was so hard that it knocked my hip out of alignment. The sky patrol team thought I might have also fractured my spine so they called an ambulance, put me on a stretcher, with an oxygen mask, and there I was - on my way to the emergency room. Luckily, I did not fracture a vertebrae and my spine is well in tact, but I

did end up in a wheelchair for some time and then crutches in the dead of Vermont winter. Getting around was tricky to say the least.

While in the wheelchair going in and out of public spaces on campus and classrooms, I had the opportunity to experience first hand the frustrations of many individuals in wheelchairs. Strangers would talk louder and more slowly to me, with exaggerated gestures suggesting that because I am in a wheelchair, I may also be mentally impaired. I became aware of the kind of door knobs that were easier to open, the direction in which doors swung, and which entrance had automatic doors on campus. I had an insight to how much of a challenge accessibility were in a place that snows heavily. It was almost impossible to navigate around with a wheelchair or crutches because of the natural weather conditions. It made navigating life, work, and academics extra challenging as an international, English-language-learner, woman of color, first generation college student.

Eventually I was able to return to what was like my usual old self - but not quite. I ditched the wheelchair and no longer needed crutches. I was able to sit and stand up without assistance, walk to class with my heavy backpack in the snow, move around at my demanding jobs, and even work out on the elliptical. However, I experienced consistent aches in my shoulder, neck, and low back, persistent headaches, and occasional shooting pain down my leg. I was alive, in existence⁵⁷, and functioning, but something was off.

⁵⁷ "Definition of SURVIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

My story could have just stopped here. I survived the incident. I bounced back. I am functioning. I can meet basic needs. I was not eliminated by the accident. I kept going. I stayed afloat. I did not let the experience drown me out. I adapted and overcame the challenges, but was still experiencing the residual side effects, pain, and misalignment, from the incident. Just like how we become functional again after a traumatic incident of loss, depression, or grief, but not fully healed. The residual effect lingers. We might experience long term wounds we are afraid to deal with, insecure attachments, suppressed feelings, deep *seeded* self doubt, wary of trusting others, or afraid of loving again. As someone who has long been passionate about holistic wellness, health, and fitness, I have always been fascinated with our body anatomy.

Resilience is a muscle we can train - catering to our very need. It is a muscle that needs to be developed, maintained, and strengthened in order for us to function properly. It is like training for endurance or lung capacity. The more we utilize it; the more comfortable we become at using it. The more we exercise it; the stronger it gets. We aim for progress. Like an actual muscle in our body, it needs proper stretching and releases to not experience pain, discomfort, or trigger other body parts to compensate. In our body, each muscle needs to pull its weight in order for us to be in proper alignment. Similar to how each aspect of our lives needs to be in delicate balance or else we feel misaligned. How does this relate to the snowboarding accident?

In Our DNA

Our bodies are naturally wired to compensate for our survival. It is in our natural DNA of defense and instincts. When a muscle is injured or weakened, our bodies instinctively call upon other parts to help us function and do what we need to do. After

the accident, I was able to walk again - not because I was fully back in alignment but because other parts of my body compensated for the hurt, injured, and malfunctioning part of my body that was traumatized in the accident. I did not have to consciously allocate which body parts to take over so that I can be out of a wheelchair or crutches. The stronger muscles, ligaments, and tendons instinctively compensated for the weakened and injured parts of me. This is how our bodies compensate for our survival.

Similar to the rest of our lives beyond the physical body, we too are wired for survival and we find ways to compensate for our non-physical trauma and injuries. That is how we survive and continue carrying on through life's setbacks, challenges, and obstacles. Neither type of compensation, however, get us back to our highest potential mentally, emotionally, or physically. Instead of letting my body compensate for the trauma and injury to merely survive, I aimed to strive and thrive. In this stage and age of abundance and higher meaning, why do we want to settle for just getting by?

More Than Survival

Resilience is more than survival. It is about striving to thrive. Imagine how many of us are in mere survival mode, compensating for the struggles in our lives but not able to fully fix it from the root. We are fine and okay, but not good or great. Getting by and feeling exhausted because there seems no way out of this cycle. We want things to be different but cannot seem to see a solution. There feels like no hope outside the status quo. I did not want to settle for just getting by. I desired a more holistic and sustainable approach. I want to actually heal and recover from this incident.

I sought out chiropractic and muscle testing, which revealed that my hip was completely out of alignment and one leg was an inch shorter than the other (and I am

only 5'2). This process helped me gain awareness of my misalignment and how my body was compensating for the trauma and injury. I learned more about postural alignment, functional fitness, fascia release, and self adjustment. I practiced how to utilize functional exercises on a regular basis to maintain my own wellness. Now I share these golden nuggets with others so that they can take charge of their own physical maintenance.

Striving beyond survival is me seeking out a holistic chiropractor, opting into muscle testing approaches, gaining awareness of my misalignment, and taking action to return my body back to consciousness and life so that my body can flourish again⁵⁸. Striving is not settling for my body just getting by, compensating out of alignment for the injury, feel fine but not good, and not fully thriving and well. Striving is getting to the root cause and actually heal and recover from the injury in a sustainable way. Striving is me taking the initiative to learn more about my body and its intricacies while putting it to practice to maintain my own wellness. I want to become knowledgeable of this physical injury so that I am not dependent on external forces, figuratively and literally, to adjust me, fix me, revive my system, and put me back into alignment.

Thriving beyond surviving and striving would be me embedding a system to consistently make progress on strengthening my postural alignment and injured muscle so that they are stronger than ever and no longer need to be compensated for. Thriving is when I feel empowered to share these golden nuggets of healing and alignment with others so that they can take charge of their own wellness.

⁵⁸ "Definition of REVIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary

Chapter Summary

What is resilience? What I have come to understand about resilience after 14 years in American higher education is that resilience is the ability and capability to bounce back, recover, overcome, and transcend amidst inevitable chaos, defeat, struggles, difficulties, disorder, and problems. Resilience is having the mental clarity, emotional groundedness, and physical wellness to bounce back from life's inevitable challenges, obstacles, and adversities.

Resilience is what gives people the psychological strength to cope with stress and hardship. It is the mental reservoir of strength that people are able to call on in times of need to carry them through without falling apart.⁵⁹ Resilience amidst adversity can look, feel, and sound different for everyone. It is certainly never being all around strong, perfect, and having it all together. Resilience comes from gratitude for what is good in our lives and from leaning in to the suck. To be resilient is to use the strength within us to find the dynamic equilibrium with what surrounds us.⁶⁰

Resilience is a muscle we can train. It is a muscle that needs to be developed, maintained, and strengthened in order for us to function properly and up to our highest potential. Similar to the rest of our lives beyond the physical body, we too are wired for survival and we find ways to compensate for our non-physical trauma and injuries. To survive is wonderful; to strive is elegant; to thrive is flourishing.

⁵⁹ Cherry, 2018

⁶⁰ Ago, 2018

CHAPTER 4: WHY IS RESILIENCE IMPORTANT?

This is the “so what” section of this SPN. Here, I discuss the role resilience plays in our lives and what can happen without it. This chapter reveals three accounts of adversities I have encountered in life. Each of these challenges ties back to my time in education and are all related student issues that higher education and student affairs professionals interface with on a regular basis. Through my personal narratives, I take you through the journey of how resilience brought me back to life following my most difficult times, and how having resilience can be used not just to rebound, but to elevate your life. In this chapter, I reveal how resilience enables us to survive, strive, and thrive in life as better people, educators, and leaders.

4.1 The Role of Resilience

*Sometimes adversity is what you need to face
in order to become successful.
~ Zig Ziglar*

Dealing with change or loss is an inevitable part of life. At some point, everyone experiences varying degrees of setbacks. Some of these challenges might be relatively minor, while others are disastrous on a much larger scale. How we deal with these problems can play a significant role in not only the short-term outcome but also our long-term wellness.⁶¹ Resilience is our ability to utilize our skills and call upon our inner strength to cope when we are struck by challenges and recover from them.

Without resilience when facing life’s inevitable challenges we fall apart, stay undone, and let hypothetical tragic waves drawn us. After an injury, we no longer clean

⁶¹ Cherry, 2018

out the wound so it can heal properly; we cover the wound just so we can avoid looking at it, secretly hoping it will just go away. We fall apart, we give up, we suppress our feelings. We betray ourselves and have no boundaries. We are crushed by the pressure of never being weak and needing to be perfect. We become overly attached to some, unattached to others, and most importantly, we forget to forgive ourselves.

It was particularly heartbreaking to hear stories of him discussing with his friends what American weddings are like, rehearsing walking me down the aisle, and practicing how to do the father-daughter dance... I have tears streaming down my face as I think back to how he must have felt... eager, awaiting, looking forward to, and excited about this big day for not just his daughter but the entire family. He has been wanting us to get married, build a family, and have the next generation of babies to hold... none of which he shared with me directly. I never knew any of these. He was the often quiet, reserved, humble dad that cared deeply beyond measure but did not always know the words to express his love.

How did I suck up my tears and run my father's mechanical and electrical engineering business with no prior experience for five weeks? How did I manage to negotiate sales, take warehouse inventory, handle accounting, and break the news to his customers? How did I liquidate his 20+ year business all while managing family dynamics, navigating funeral details, negotiating wedding logistics, and mourning his sudden death personally and as a family? Resilience helped me feel the experiences, learn to grow, and adapt to survive.

Feel & Experience

Life presents us with various life circumstances. Some we experience as positive. Some we view as negative. The juxtaposition of the good against the bad is what makes up life. They come hand in hand like ocean currents. There would be no waves if there are no natural rhyme to the ups and downs in nature. The ability to handle the good, the bad, and ugly is to experience fully the human condition. The same vulnerability that lets us feel sad, angry, fearful, and lonely is the same capacity that allows us to feel joyful, happy, loved, and sense of belonging. We cannot selectively numb. When we try to numb what we consider the negative feelings, we numb all feelings, including the positive ones⁶². It is a gift to be able to feel the range of emotions. Both sides of the spectrum are needed for us to be whole and fully human. Resilience is the ability to fully experience the negative emotions, yet able to adapt to maintain perspective, and bounce back to establish new equilibrium in the midst of the struggle and defeat.

Learn & Grow

There are valuable lessons to be seized in every life circumstance. They are meant to be learned. There are growth opportunities from every life experience we encounter. If we do not fully grasp the lesson, the circumstance may present itself over and over again in our lives. It may seem like a confusing struggle, wondering why we always seem to get caught up in these same situations - may it be relationship, finance, family, or career related. The challenges may repeat themselves until we learn the lesson that was embedded in the circumstances. If we do not transform these hardships into growth

⁶² Brene Brown - researcher and storyteller studying shame, belonging, vulnerability, and human connectedness. "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead: Brené Brown

opportunities, they might weigh us down, be negatively internalized, and break us. It is our growth from these experiences that helps us to be stronger and smarter. The process of leveraging our circumstances to grow are the golden nuggets that makes us more resilient.

Adapt & Survive

The ability to bounce back is one of the most important qualities of survival. It is the essence of adaptation. It has evolutionary benefits. In the natural world, the most adaptable in the face of change and hardship is the one who survives. For example, birds fly south, herds migrate, redwoods rebirth⁶³, sequoia regenerate⁶⁴, and the emperor penguins march “ever since they have decided to stay, to live and love in the harshest place on Earth.⁶⁵” Our life experiences do the same for us. It presents opportunities for us to shift, change, adjust, stretch, bend, overcome, and adapt to survive our harshest circumstances. Resilience helps us survive the hardship, strive to become better, and thrive to empower others. Having resilience can enhance the quality of our life.

Survival is the stage where we can naturally bounce back - like how most of us are plagued by less ergonomic postures over modern technology, a more sedentary lifestyle, and a diet of higher sugar content than we need, yet we are getting by and surviving. But what happens when we are confronted with big traumatic challenges and crippling life events? This is why resilience is important. It allows us to Survive, Strive,

⁶³ “RedWood,” 2015

⁶⁴ “Why the Giant Sequoia Needs Fire to Grow,” 2017

⁶⁵ March of the Penguins, 2005

and Thrive in life. These three dimensions help us to overcome, heal ourselves, become better, and find our way back to living and becoming our empowered selves.

4.2 Survive

*(Verb) to continue living through hardship or adversity⁶⁶,
to remain alive or in existence, and to live on⁶⁷.*

In my 22 years in the United States, I have experienced some unique circumstances that demanded survival. From experiencing the trauma of parentification to being ripped away from the only world I have ever known, dealing with bullies as a english-language-learner to overcoming a spectrum of eating disorders, managing life alone as a teenager on a foreign continent to surviving the trauma of a sexual assault, battling crippling perfectionism to negotiating a sense of belonging as the perpetual alien, traversing a threatening stalker situation to navigating the complicated challenges and limitations of visa status in this country - I have had to remaining alive, in existence, and to live on. Here is a personal narrative of how resilience helped me survive at an early age facing one of the biggest traumas in my life.

With One Plane Ride...

It seemed like it was only a few years ago, a father made a quick announcement in Taipei, Taiwan of his decision for the whole family to move to Saipan. In less than a month, in a state of devastation and shock, a ten-year-old girl was ripped away from the only life she had ever known. Everything that she called home forever vanished with one airplane ride. Without knowing a single letter of the English alphabet except for A, B, and C, she was thrown into an English-speaking environment two months later.

⁶⁶ “What does survive mean?,” Definitions.net.

⁶⁷ “Definition of SURVIVE,” Merriam Webster Dictionary.

The first day of school came around the corner and every cell in her woke up at five in the morning. She quietly assembled herself the way she had been planning for this big day. She situated herself into the couch looking out the living room glass sliding doors. The air was crisp and clear. The room was calm and silent. She felt her heart pounding. The quietness reflected the high pitched eeriness in her adrenaline rushing body. Her shallow breaths were the sounds she heard while she watched the darkness of the night slowly being risen from the ground. Excited? Yes. Nervous? As she well should be. Anxious? As on any other first day of school. Worried? You bet. Fearful? Absolutely. Deathly afraid? Oh yes.

She knows she can no longer depend on her parents at age 10. With the uproot, everyone is fighting their own battle each day. This is not a battle her parents can assist. She can only rely on herself. Soon she will meet potential life-long friends, laugh on the playground, have sleepovers, yet, it is still a foreign unknown experience. The thought of what could stifle, hurt, and wound her, suffocated her little lungs. Chills trembles through her body. She will be on her own, utterly and completely, alone. This is a war that she needs to endure and learn the art of it.

The morning of her first day of school, she acted as if she was too excited for school to sleep, yet wondered if it was nervousness and anxiety that kept her from sleeping. She told herself to be tough and not show the fear that is quietly consuming her internally. She has to be the role model for her younger sister. After the goodbye hug and her dad still by her side, partially holding on to her, she took a deep breath and let go of his big warm hands of safety and security. Without making eye contact with any of the 60 eyes staring her up and down as she walked into their claimed territory as the new face in

town, she walked through the door into her nightmare for the next year and a half. My name is Jennifer Jang, and I was that girl. With one airplane ride, my whole world had died.

First Day of School

In a small, narrow classroom with no windows, I sat anxiously in the last cluster of tables waiting for that familiar bell to ring. The bell that has signaled me to take a ten minute break in between each 50 minute class session without fail for the last 4 years in my passport country. The freshly-pressed uniform has yet to feel comfortable on the first day. I listened attentively to the teacher's tone of voice and tried to decipher his body language. He was speaking a language I could not comprehend. In my carefully selected versatile bag, I brought a book from home. Written in a language I could understand, I expected that this is where I can escape to and feel comforted when the anticipated bell rang. I waited for 8 hours that day, for an opportunity to use the bathroom, to get a drink of water, to escape into my book. The bell never rang. This school does not use bells. I did not know that. I could not ask. I could not understand. A new reality hit me.

The first day of classroom experience was a real life game of what I have come to know as Charade. In this case, I did not have teammates and everyone else was allowed to talk except for me – I did not know how. Talk about helplessness and isolation. I had a mouth but I could not speak. I had a brain but I could not articulate...

The memory of my first in-class activity was full of uncertainty, guesses, and shame. The teacher drew a box on the white board, and wrote the words, "name, date, subject, and activity" on the top right corner of the box on the board. With no language skills and context for the culture of writing our name on your paper, I typed in these

words into my translator attempting to figure out the demands of this assignment. Those four words were the only context clues I had. I gathered that I should be writing away as all my classmates are, but I did not know how or on what. With my head down, I panicked internally having no clue what I was supposed to do. I thought long and hard while everyone in the class obviously gets the task and is working away quietly. With what I can gather from the board, I concluded that the teacher must have wanted me to write down and record the name of the items I had purchased in the past, the date I purchased it, why I purchased it, and what it was used for. As a result, I attempted to ask my neighbor how to spell *pen*, the shortest and simplest object word I could think of. However, as simple as it was, I could not communicate what it is that I was asking for him to be able to help me. I sat alone quietly, marinating in embarrassment shame. Something must be wrong with me. I am not good enough.

With the uncertainty and disappointment about to explode inside me, my head dropped back down. My breath was shallow, heart beating fast, and hand shaking out of anxiety as I picked back up my digital translator. I punched away at it. Knowing that it will not give me any more context clues as to what I am to do in the classroom. Yet secretly hoping, maybe and just maybe, if I went over the definition of the words one more time, I will perhaps catch something I missed - in the previous 20 times of looking at these word translations. I was in a concealed panic, extremely self-conscious, and highly self-critical as I felt like I was failing my family as well as myself. I tried to focus on suppressing my fear and distress inside me while attempting to channel all my might to write something down on my blank piece of paper. The white page stared back at me.

Until this day, I still have never understood that in-class writing activity. Evidently, the first day of school was tearing and wearing on the little shoulders of a ten year old. I was left exponentially more shattered and broken - emotionally, mentally, and physically, in the proceeding 700 days...

Masks I Hid Behind

Three months after being ripped away from my roots across the ocean, I was thrown into an English speaking school without the ability to understand and communicate a word of English. I was considered strange, foreign, and odd. My teacher referred to me as *mentally retarded* and peers bullied me for not being able to understand, comprehend and interact *normally*. My precious belongings, jewelry, or school supplies would suddenly become others' new acquisitions simply because I did not possess the ability to communicate my ownership of them in English. This small private, supposedly elite school failed to offer me any transitional classes such as English as a Second Language (ESL) lessons, instructions, or any remedial educational alternatives as I later learned that other schools provided. I was handed the same text books, tests, and classroom instruction as other native English speaking students and implicitly expected to excel. I struggled, was alienated, and felt marginalized.

Meanwhile, I took on the responsibility of being the sole protector for my one and only sister, Emily, as we headed into what became our battle grounds each day. I put it on myself that I needed to stay calm and collected as I was the only person she could turn to, the person that always had her back, and the person that is always watching out for her in this culture of vultures. I had to put forth a tough exterior even though my nature is soft, loving, and tender. I had to constantly be the warrior against an army of scavengers even

though I had no protective layer myself. I defaulted myself as the eyes and ears for my sister as she was physically smaller than me at the time, and was the target for bullying. I had to be strong, the one holding up the sky, and the one building an armor of protection around us. I could not appear to be frazzled from the mean-natured behaviors, intimidated by the bullying and harassment, or disturbed by the nonverbal attacks. And tears? Can't show them tears. No crying allowed. Even though at times I felt the tidal waves of these emotions, I bottled it up.

This pressure cooker was slowly simmering away inside me. It caused a difficult family dynamic as these negative emotions had to go somewhere. I ate lunch in the bathroom stall with tears streaming down my face. It felt like I had no one to turn to. No one seemed to care. No one reached out. At the same time, my family value of resiliency and survival ensured I had a tough exterior and an everything-is-okay appearance. I put up the facade that I was strong and not afraid, calm and not anxious, brave and not about to cry, and confident and not self-conscious. Behind the strong and beautiful masks I wore every day - I lost who I am; I no longer had a face.

The ripple effect of this abrupt and stark transition from Taiwan to Saipan left a permanent imprint on me not only as a ten year old, but continued to adulthood. The recurring night terrors evolved to me becoming internally confused regarding my sense of home and how to respond to the seemingly simple question, "where are you from?"

*"When a tree is transplanted too often,
its roots can never grow deep"⁶⁸*

⁶⁸ David Pollock & Ruth Van Reken, authors of *Third Culture Kids*

Inescapable Nightmare

Not only did I feel defeated from my new world, I became afraid to sleep. The same repeating horrifying nightmare haunted me for a year and a half to the point where I feared going to sleep. I did not want to dream. Every time I was in it, the nightmare was of me escaping from my room to the outside of the house, attempting to reach the gate at the end of the driveway. This whole dream was like a saved section of a video game. It was me escaping the same route filled with evil spirit literally at every corner of my path. I resisted going to bed each night - crying terrified. I begged my mom to sit by my bed and hold my hand secretly hoping with her company, I can prevent myself from falling asleep. No matter how hard I fought it, the sleepiness would come. Inevitably, as a ten year old, I would drift into sleep. I was exhausted from the school battlefield each night without exception. I then dream of the same plot - not able to escape.

Many times, I would know I am in this dream but cannot wake myself to get out of it. Other times, I found myself jerking awake gasping for air. My face was in the pillow, facing down. I am a back and side sleeper. I am not sure how I turned myself around with my face in the pillow, but feeling I could suffocate any time when I go to bed did not ease the sleep anxiety. In the nightmare, I have made it out of the house a couple of times but the thought of my mother, father, and sister being left behind gets me to go back inside the house. There was no way I could abandon them. The times that I have made it outside of the house *with* my family, the driveway would get longer. I would be running towards the gate but the ground below me would keep on extending in length. No matter how far I ran or how fast I sprinted, I could never run to the end of the driveway to get to the gate. Until this day, I have never successfully escaped. Those two

years, I focused on surviving - one day and one night at a time. This inescapable nightmare was just the start of a series of ripple effect this traumatic transition had on my life.

No Grounding

As I grew older, I realized the meaning of home could vary drastically depending on the interpretation of the individual. Home is a word and concept very concrete and familiar to some, yet abstract and foreign to many. Home could refer to my *homeland* indicated by a legal document, or a place where one *feels at home*.⁶⁹ I did not feel a distinct link to any one place or set of traditions. I do not have a sense of community or identity as someone who has lived in the same town for generations. Coming from a multi-ethnic and multicultural experience, I do not fit easily into one social category constructed by American culture. It made it difficult to understand how I fit into this culture's perception of the world. *Home* for me became an emotional location rather than geographical one.⁷⁰

I identify as a Cosmopolite. The Greek roots of the word *Cosmopolite*,⁷¹ (koz-mop-uh-lahyt) are *kosmo* and *polites*, which means *citizen of the world*. Having spent a significant part of my developmental years in Saipan outside of my parent's Taiwanese and Chinese culture, I was comprised of many different cultures. Each culture has parts of who I am, but none fully encompasses all of who I am. I built relationships with all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.⁷² How do I define home when the

⁶⁹ Storti, C. *Art of Coming Home*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2001, p.3-4

⁷⁰ Pascoe, Robin. *Homeward Bound: A Spouse's Guide to Repatriation*. North Vancouver: Expatriate Press Limited, 2000.

⁷¹ Nash, personal communication, 2010.

⁷² Pollock, Reken, 19.

concept of it may be very unclear? In the lifelong journey of defining home, how do I build a shelter within myself?

College in the United States was a neither/nor world, a culture that is neither my parents' nor the culture I grew up in. To succeed as a first-generation international student alone in a different continent, I had to work extra hard. I internalized various pressures and told myself that returning home was not an option. On my back lies not only the standards I hold for myself, but a tremendous amount of pressure from cultural backgrounds, societal principles, and family values. I suppressed the need to reconnect with *home*. It weakened my heart, my mind, my body, and my soul tremendously. This in turn weakens my metaphoric immune system to strive and thrive. I only had the capacity to focus on surviving.

Internal Confusion

Where are you from? This question always gets me. Where *am* I from? I pause every time, wondering how I should answer. How does a person who has moved around respond succinctly? Each time I am asked that question, I am forced to choose which part of my past to share, decide the level of vulnerability I will share with this person, and examine the cultural context in which the question is asked to determine the socially acceptable answer. I get better at responding as the years go by, but I used to get anxious thinking that I may be taking airtime from others, dominating the conversation, or preventing others from engaging in the conversation when I am in a group setting.

Sometimes it appears to me that when people ask this question, they are not genuinely interested in where I am from. Rather, they want to know what they can expect from me, what my beliefs are, and how they should interact with me based on where I am

from. It is social sense making. A simple label. Moreover, the question, *where are you from?* comes often times with the assumption that my values directly correlate with a location and are shaped entirely by one single geographic region. This simple innocent question triggered a lot of childhood uncertainty for me.

Having to deal with these triggering and microaggressive⁷³ interactions on a regular basis has negatively impacted my holistic wellness. I did not realize how broken my spirit has become until I took the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i).⁷⁴ It alarmingly reflected that I had thought something was wrong with me, feeling disconnected from what *normal* is. This further deteriorated my immune system to thrive. I can only focus on surviving.

How I Survived

Darkness cannot dim the light of a single flame.
~ Unknown

Culture can provide a strong sense of identity, confidence, and belonging. Living in a culture long enough to be able to interpret behaviors and understand their connotations gives one a sense of certainty. One has an intuitive notion about what is appropriate, humorous, and offensive in various settings.⁷⁵ As adults, we transition through cultures all the time. Whether it is culture within a country, region, or a new

⁷³ Microaggression is a theory of specific interaction between those of different cultures which focuses on interactions experienced as non-physical aggression. It involves demeaning implications and other subtle insults. Sue, Derald Wing. *Microaggression in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual orientation*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010.

⁷⁴ The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i®) is the first scientifically validated and most widely used Emotional Intelligence assessment in the world. Based on more than 20 years of research worldwide, the EQ-i examines an individual's social and emotional strengths and weaknesses. Stein, Steven J., and Howard E. Book. *The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success*. Mississauga: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

⁷⁵ Kebshull, B., and M. Pozo. *Third Culture Kids/Global Nomads and the Culturally Skilled Therapist*. LCSW, 2006.

organization. It is natural to experience culture shock when we transition between cultures. There is an adjustment period as we take in new information and learn a new set of implicit expectations embedded in that new paradigm. We as adults go through this adjustment period with all of their core values, relationships, and beliefs established. Children, however, do so before they have formed their own personal and cultural identity.⁷⁶ This presents many challenges, as anyone who has always been the new kid in school can tell you. My uprooting experience to Saipan was exacerbated by the drastic change in every aspect of the culture. Instead of learning and practicing the essential social interaction skills between peers, for example, I was learning how to overcome the language barrier.

In that first year on Saipan, math was the only subject I could comprehend. Not because English was easier to understand in math class, but because numbers are a universal language. If you showed me an equation, I can solve it. If it was a word problem, I had no clue. Being in-the-know, on the contrary, provides a deep sense of security and stability. My sense of identity and self are challenged every time I transition cross-culturally. Learned behaviors become no longer acceptable or appropriate. I have to adjust again and again to the basic rules of how the world around me operates.⁷⁷ My energy is spent “surviving rather than thriving, struggling to understand what is happening rather than fully participating.”⁷⁸ Hesitating to interact with others out of fear of making social mistakes that would jeopardize relationships.

⁷⁶ Pollock, David C., and Ruth E. Van Reken. *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001, 39.

⁷⁷ Fail, H., J. Thompson, and G. Walker. "Belonging, Identity and Third Culture Kids: Life Histories of Former International School Students." *Journal of Research in International Education* 3 (2004): 319-338.

⁷⁸ Kebshull, & Pozo, 2006.

My waking hours in school were spent being hyper-aware of what is going on around me. Observing faces, watching nonverbals, and determining the level of danger each hour. Making it through each school day was the goal. Hours at home were dedicated to translating every word on each homework assignment. I spent the majority of time trying to decode what the assignments demanded rather than actually forming a response. This is before the days of Google Translate or individual laptops being a norm. My parents helped with a digital translator where you punch in each English word and it tells you what it means in Chinese. But that can only go so far. It must have been overwhelming and beyond stressful for everyone. I cannot recall how we got through that first year. Playing with the puppies after school was my escape. It was a world without language barrier.

That first couple years of navigating language acquisition and social confusion was emotionally draining. My figurative immune system was on overload. But it did get lots of exposure from all sorts of newness. My DNA's instincts to survive kicked in and propelled me to focus on getting by. I could have let the bullying crush my self-esteem, stifle my desire for education, and disempower my learning for English, but I chose to use these cruel words and harsh energy as a catalyst. They fueled me to become better.

I do not want to be a part of what the Taiwanese culture calls, the *strawberry generation* – those who have a low tolerance for adversity and therefore bruise easily like strawberries. The best way to negate and repudiate bullying is through my successful triumph. I strived academically, earning my spot on the President's List for the rest of my primary and secondary education. Now thriving, having earned two master's degrees and

completing my doctoral dissertation. I overcame and survived because I refused to become discouraged by my defeats. I choose to have my resilience persist on.

4.3 Strive

*(Verb) to devote serious effort or energy*⁷⁹

Striving beyond Surviving is getting through instead of just getting by. It is becoming better versions of ourselves instead of just overcoming hurdles. It is focused on our revival. The return to consciousness of life and become active or flourishing again⁸⁰. It is healing ourselves. Making way and recovering. Transcending and adjusting. Adapting and evolving. Striving was me overcoming the trauma of being ripped away from the only world I have ever known by learning to utilize the English language and mastering it, instead of asking my parents to return to Taiwan where I know the language and culture. Striving was me soothing myself from the year-long recurring nightmare of escape caused by being bullied as an English language learner by becoming an honor roll student, instead of changing schools or calling it quits on Saipan - which many other Taiwanese families did. Once in college, Striving was adapting to the U.S. culture and frigid Wyoming weather as a tropical island transplant. I did so by embracing the winter and taking on snowboarding instead of transferring to a warmer school or staying in my room, feeling miserable.

Striving is recovering from the wounds, reclaiming my sense of self, advocating for my needs, and overcoming the challenges - moving countries, learning a language, adapting to cultures, facing bullies, healing my emotional trauma, adjusting to climate change and way of life, and navigate life alone on a new continent. I did not overcome each of these challenges by just surviving them - continue living through hardship or

⁷⁹ "Definition of STRIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

⁸⁰ "Definition of REVIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary

adversity⁸¹. I learned to manage them, traversed around them, and navigated through them. I got to where I am today by going beyond survival and striving for more. Here is a personal narrative of how resilience helped me to not only survive but to strive by myself in this country.

Always the “Other”

Coming alone to this continent as an international student in pursuit of higher education was not an easy task. When I came to the United States, I was insecure and overwhelmed by being on my own in a completely new cultural context, that I had to learn in order to survive. I struggled with a complete change of language, climate, culture, traditions, values, societal standards, and a way of life. On top of it all was the 8,000 miles distance from family during this difficult transition into college. I experienced many challenges.

From my previous transient lifestyles, I lacked a sense of security in my own identity that my peers may acquire growing up, strongly rooted in the same social background. Stemming from this is a prominent sense of isolation, with the inability to relate to my peers or form close personal relationships. I also experienced restrictions around immigration status that I not only have to think about, but anticipate it to plan my life around the limitations and timelines. The following is my personal narrative about being on the fringe and feeling isolated. These are experiences that other marginalized students may come across in American higher education: dealing with always estranged

⁸¹ “What does survive mean?,” Definitions.net.

as the *other*, coping with the long-term separation with the closest people in life, and navigating the complicated immigration system.

Differently from peers who are born and raised in the same culture, I have a split sense of identity. I can easily navigate several cultures, but own none - belonging simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.⁸² I was like a chameleon. Adaptable and changing color to fit my surroundings. However, I assimilated so well that I lost my identity in the process. *Who am I?*

When I am in my passport country, I am the westernized international. When I am abroad, I am the foreign eastern. In college, fellow Chinese international students claim that I do not look fully Chinese, speak unaccented English, have more *American* friends, and dress differently. Therefore, they claim, I am not Chinese enough. I felt a sense of loss. There was no community with the folks I shared a cultural background. It felt like I did not have anyone I could turn to in my undergraduate years. I was not enough.

Almost as a language, when not used, one tends to forget how to speak it. As with my racial identity, with 99% of the people that I encounter everyday looking racially different from me, I struggled to find a sense of self. There are days the only time I get to see a person that looks like me is when I look in the mirror. Over time, I feel I am forgetting what it means to be Asian, Taiwanese, or Pacific Islander. In order to succeed in this culture, I had to set aside certain aspects of myself to integrate, amalgamate, and adapt to the American way. In doing so, I have lost touch with my own culture and

⁸² Pollock, & Reken, 2001

traditions. Something that is very close to my heart and very painful to push away. But I did.

My primary education experience in Taiwan situated me to be the outsider by default - having no shared education experience with my college peers in this country. I went to a first through six grade elementary school where every grade had 18 classes and every class had 30+ students. There were no janitors. All students actively participated in a cleaning period to maintain the cleanliness and quality of our educational environment. Playgrounds and physical education class took place on the beach. We had warnings for tsunamis instead of earthquakes or hurricanes.

Without having lived the experience, it is difficult to comprehend what it was like to have a volcano erupt on a nearby island. The air was pitch black during mid-day due to volcano ashes. School was dismissed because of potential health hazards and liability. Usually retelling stories from a childhood renders resonance and reassurance from others about your experience. However, sharing my life narrative is usually not a grounding experience of affirmation or validation. It is a very lonely process reminding me that I do not belong.

Those days felt truly isolating. There was no one I felt a sense of solidarity with and no one truly understood me. My belonging is rooted in my most salient identity - being a global citizen. But there I am, feeling I have to choose between my identities in order to be *normal* - to fit in and be accepted. My resilience was like a rubber band. When stretched long enough, it loses its elasticity. I felt depleted and drained. My multiple selves were forced to confine into one identity box; feeling alienated and marginalized.

Due to my life experiences, I have developed a very distinctly different world view and perspective. My way of thinking and taking in information sets me apart from most of my peers. In a conventional society where it is more acceptable to conform to the norm, I am the natural outcast. I live by my high standards and do not give in easily to peer pressure. In almost all situations in my life, I am the alien, foreigner; estranged, and odd. I am always the other.

Long-Term Separation

Eight thousand miles. That was the distance between what I consider *home* and where I have been sleeping every night for the past 2150 days in my first six years in the United States. Due to the 14 hour time difference and conflicting work and school schedules, my family and I could not speak at a reasonable time. Before the time of Skype and FaceTime, leaving voice messages via international calling card and writing long emails to each other was the most common way we communicated. Growing up in a family who already had a heavy emphasis on documenting our lives with photographs and home videos, taking and sharing photographs of my daily life became an even more salient part of my identity. It was hard being so far away from family.

In terms of food alone: I grew up eating seaweed ties and congee, fried squid and raw octopus, duck tongue and gizzards, beef tripe and pig liver. There was no place for salad and cheese. I had to get used to eating cold raw vegetables with dressing on top. Fish cheeks and pig's feet are delicacies. Chicken feet are popular movie-munchies. Pork blood rice cakes and fermented tofu are popular street food. I am from a culture where dark meat is better than white meat, leafy greens are better cooked than not. In the United States paradigm, however, these delicacies are unheard of and seem unfathomable.

Unlike many of my peers, I am unable to return home on weekends and holidays. It took me 28 hours to travel to the States in 2005. My first time home was summer of 2010 while in graduate school. Home is where the family is, but because of time and distance, I was unable to visit. Celebrating national holidays and religious festivals was always away from family. When my peers would complain about a 40 minute drive home, or how they despised their parents visiting them at school, I struggled. I was wildly jealous of their easy access to home, yet did not know how to deal with those feelings.

I struggled with homesickness without realizing it, feeling lonely and not belonging. I had a hard time being comfortable with the person that I spent the most time with – myself. It was challenging gaining self-awareness and tune into what I really needed inside and out. I wanted to make my parents proud. I feared failing and not being good enough to return home. I never allowed myself to look up a plane ticket home. I did not let myself believe that I have the right to return. Thinking if I let myself know returning home is an option that I would not strive as hard. I forced myself to accept eight thousand miles apart as my permanent reality.

Woman Without A Country

Being on an international status in the United States exposes one to additional stress and struggles. More so than I anticipate before signing on to be an international student. It sounds ridiculous, but true at times - I was a woman without a country. You got to be from somewhere right? Yes and no. From my extended time living outside of my passport country, Taiwan, I have been deleted from the system. But what about Saipan? you ask. Due to the United States Commonwealth complications, even though my parents have lived and worked there for more than twenty years, they are not eligible

for immigration status. My parents could not come to my bachelor's degree graduation due to the United States taking over Saipan's government. If they had left at that time, they would potentially risk not being able to return home. Obviously, I would not want that to be the case. I told them not to come. I did not go to my undergraduate graduation either.

For me in the United States, I needed a temporary student visa to attend school. Being a Taiwanese citizen, I could visit for tourism but cannot stay to study or work unless I apply for certain visas. This added a layer of tremendous stress when graduation loomed near. Not only do I have to find an employer like everyone else, but one that will sponsor an expensive work visa in order for me to stay in the U.S. I have one year of Optional Practical Training (OPT) which is a temporary status that I can use when the employer decides whether or not they will sponsor my work visa. If I do not find an employer that will sponsor my work visa, or the government denies the work visa sponsorship, I get shipped off. I have to leave the country within a very short window. I will not be permitted to go back *home* where my parents are, Saipan, but back to my passport country, Taiwan, where only my citizenship resides. Because Saipan is a U.S. Commonwealth, I need a visitor's visa to return to where my parents have been living for 20+ years and where I consider *home*.

Even after finding an employer that is willing to sponsor my work visa, the government can still deny our application. This is what happened in my first professional job. After a year of OPT, the employer and I both wanted the working relationship to continue, but the work visa sponsorship was denied by the government. Luckily, I was proactive enough to have secured another full time job offer who was willing to sponsor a

work visa. The tricky part was that the process takes time. In this case, it took eight long months. This time frame is not explicit upfront. They do not tell you to plan for eight months. It was one day at a time. Expecting I would hear something the next day. Every day. From May all the way to December.

You are told that the results should be in soon, but you have no idea when soon is. It was agonizing. I had a job that I cannot begin. Other employment opportunities I cannot take, because work visas limit you to that specific job only. A home country I cannot return to because I cannot leave the country while my paperwork was in process. For eight long months, I lived in limbo, out of boxes, and off of savings. Many nights involved crying myself to sleep paralyzed by the overwhelming uncertainties.

This is just a little glimpse at concerns that constantly circle the back of my mind everywhere I go. They are invisible yet suffocatingly heavy. Essentially, I am a woman without a country. Under these tough circumstances, how do I continue to live my life with integrity, dignity, style, purpose, intelligence, and grace? How do I keep myself motivated when I feel my spirit dimmed and broken? I am not satisfied with settling for just surviving. I strive for more.

How I Strived

*To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream;
not only plan, but also believe.
~ Anatole France*

Being a woman without a country was hard. I had no home to go to. That eight months in limbo on top made it tougher. I could have thrown in the towel and given up. But I did not. I believed there was more. I trusted I could make it. Even though there were moments of serious doubts. I accepted the limbo status quo as reality. After the

initial frightened months of insecurity. I used the remaining months to work on myself. I called them self improvement months. One month was learning the American system of credit scores and financial literacy, another month was diving deep into the world of credit card points and frequent flyer miles, one month was exploring my interest in interior design, and another was setting up and fine tuning a system for my personal finances to be automated. That was me striving beyond mere survival.

I devoted serious effort⁸³ striving to become stronger in the midst of what could have been a serious emotional breakdown. I invested much energy striving for higher ground so I would not sink into a mental depression. It would have been easy to give up facing the physical departure of leaving the country at a moment's notice. I did not realize I was grieving the loss of my freedom and mobility. It just felt powerless and hopeless. Similar to grieving at the end of a relationship, we grieve not just with the loss of the relationship and partner, but with part of ourselves. I was grieving the part of me that once had a sense of autonomy and authorship. In addition to the dynamics with our partner, many times it is our own ego that causes the pain. We might feel rejected, deceived, or embarrassed. We doubt our self worth and adequacy. We judge ourselves and our decision making. We feel guilt and shame. There were many layers of insecurities I judged myself in those dark nights of uncertainties. Wondering if I was not good enough, smart enough, qualified enough, and fill-in-the-blank enough. Both scenarios drew up past traumas, wounds, and triggers. Much healing is involved.

⁸³ "Definition of STRIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

When I was at the end of a serious relationship, I looked up the stages of grief, then proceeded to naively schedule a day off of work to take myself through the cycle of grief. Thinking I was ahead of the game and managing my emotions. You know this is not going to end well. Evidently, I did not understand how emotions really worked at the time. I kept myself in self-protecting denial mode focusing on mere survival. That meant suppressing strong emotions, just getting by, compensating emotionally along the way, and never truly process, heal, and recover from the hurt, pain, and heartache. If I could go back and do it again, I would focus on striving. Striving is digging deep, fixing our misalignment, healing from the root, facing the hardship, adjusting our status quo, and overcoming the challenge in a sustainable way. Thank goodness I had this awakening and started focusing on striving in future emotional scenarios.

Striving is calling upon the courage to truly examine what makes us sad or angry or hurt about the ending of a particular relationship. Striving is letting ourselves feel the whole range of difficult emotions, may it be related to sadness, betrayal, insecurity, trauma, abandonment, or trust issues. Striving is allowing ourselves to not be okay, instead of putting on a mask that further suppresses your flourishing. Striving is honoring our grief⁸⁴ and let ourselves feel the denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and repetitive and cyclical nature of it all. Striving is not setting a deadline for our grieving process. Striving is releasing the hurt, purging the pain, letting go of self-defeating beliefs in a cathartic way. Striving is doing things that remind you of your value as a person. Striving is helping to rebuild your inner stability by impressing yourself with accomplishments.

⁸⁴ “Five Stages of Grief by Elisabeth Kubler Ross & David Kessler,” n.d.

Striving is reaching a point of emotional alignment that you no longer avoid the other person's photos, phone calls, voice, or presence. Striving is feeling more grounded, certain, and assured, from feeling inadequate, unwanted, self doubt, uncertainty, and not good enough. Striving is coming to terms with the situation and ourselves in the status quo. Striving is devoting serious effort or energy⁸⁵ to return to consciousness in our relationships with others and with ourselves⁸⁶. This is how I got through it.

Luckily the work visa eventually got approved and I could begin working the job I was offered. It, however, still came with limitations. Having to stay in the confines of the role, job, and department stated in the work visa, I was restricted from being considered for promotions, expanding responsibilities, and career mobility. The renewal process three years later presented another stressful time of limbo not knowing if and when I might have to uproot the life I have built to leave the country permanently. My life was all up in the air.

Through my 21 years of visa experience, every hurdle was a challenge, but I never gave up. I used each one of them as a learning opportunity and became better and stronger as a result. When I had to move multiple times in one summer, I got good at packing strategically. When I had to live out of boxes, I got creative with living minimalistically. When things are out of my control, I learned the art of surrendering and accept it as reality. When circumstances seemed stacked against me, I cultivated the skill of looking at the silver lining. When I had to survive eight months on savings, I got

⁸⁵ "Definition of STRIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

⁸⁶ "Definition of REVIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary

resourceful with food. When I had to live in limbo, I got real good at making contingency plans. This is how I strived.

When in Striving mode, the focus is often times inward, honed in on self preservation, maintaining perspective while going above and beyond to manage our higher selves. We become more knowledgeable of ourselves, and more skilled at navigating the external world. We are able to fuel, align, and recharge ourselves. We become the version of ourselves that exhibit confidence, certainty, level headedness, and steadiness. We feel grounded in who we are becoming. Our experiences make us stronger, more experienced, and more capable. What we do, we become. Success is not an act or magic trick, but the result of consistent powerful habits⁸⁷. We focus on building our daily routine to Strive towards Thriving.

Striving in both of the visa process and relationship example is when we devote serious effort or energy⁸⁸ to invest and build ourselves up to be high value⁸⁹ individuals. To be someone who grows and becomes better partners ourselves. Someone who knows what we want with certainty. And someone who goes after what we desire and not settle for less. We build ourselves back up to trust in our value and believe in our worth without relying on external reassurance. It is up to us how we feel about ourselves. It is up to us to feel good, grounded, strong, competent, and enough - so that we can Thrive.

⁸⁷ We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. Aristotle

⁸⁸ "Definition of STRIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

⁸⁹ Hussey, 2014

4.4 Thrive

(Verb) grow vigorously and progress toward or realize a goal despite or because of circumstances⁹⁰

Thriving is having so much abundance in our lives that we want to and can share with others. Thriving is when our system of small success actions have become automated habits. Thriving is when pieces in our life fit together nicely like meant-to-be puzzle pieces. Thriving is when our focus moves from self preservation to elevating others. Thriving is when we have the capacity to think of others' success. Thriving is having true confidence - the kind where you walk into a room not thinking you are better than everyone, but knowing you do not have to compare yourself to anyone in the first place⁹¹. Thriving is when you have the desire and capacity to spread the wealth of knowledge and wisdom learned through experience. Thriving is when you have time and energy to want to help others survive and strive to thrive. We do not all start at thriving though. Here is a personal narrative of me Striving from Survival to Thriving.

Battling the Mirrored Self

*Most of the shadows in this life are caused by
us standing in our own sunshine.
~ Emerson*

Cultural Definition of Femininity

It all started with wanting to be healthy. I sat down on a chair next to a full body mirror one day and noticed how my stomach was not completely flat when I brought my knees to my chest. Who's is? Talk about unrealistic internalized expectations. At age 15,

⁹⁰ "Definition of THRIVE," Merriam Webster Dictionary.

⁹¹ Modification of anonymous quote: Insecure people have to make excuses and put others down to feel confident. Confidence isn't walking into a room with your nose in the air, and thinking you are better than everyone else, it's walking into a room and not having to compare yourself to anyone in the first place.

I was self-conscious, ashamed of being *fat*, and wanted to change it. I was culturally conditioned to hate my body. “*Wow, you would be really pretty if you were skinnier.*” “*A lot of people would be attracted to you if you were smaller.*” These well-intended harsh comments from family friends reinforced the cycle of being overly self-critical and worshipping the gods of thinness.⁹²

Growing up in a culture where the thinner the better, this societal message is implicit yet omnipresent. It is more desirable for girls to be cute and take up less space so they are protected, than for them to stand up for themselves. We are always the damsel in distress waiting for Prince Charming to the rescue. What an interesting gender dichotomy it sets up. On the spectrum of body sizes in the United States, I am considered petite. In the Taiwanese culture, however, I was almost always considered to be *bigger*. I felt tremendous pressure to epitomize the cultural definition of feminine: thin, passive, weak, eager to please, and non-threatening.⁹³

I aimed to be fit. At a time of limited internet resources, I sought out health articles and wellness related information. My family naturally ate a very healthy diet, always with lots of greens and seafood, but I encouraged it to be even healthier. Exercise is where I up my game. Concurrently, this was the time I developed my love for tennis. It brought me joy. I played with a consistent group after school for fun. It was a way for me to relieve stress, and I had a lot of it in high school. This seems like a well balanced and healthy lifestyle right? It really was at first. It was not until this betterment of my inner health and outer appearance no longer had a ceiling. The perfectionist side of me kicked

⁹² Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Riverhead Trade, 2005. Chapter 9.

⁹³ *Reviving Ophelia*, Chapter 9.

in. This betterment to be *fit* simply did not have a limit to it. I took this aim for healthy to the extreme and out of proportion.

*I don't care how much it hurts
I want control
I want a perfect body
I want a perfect soul⁹⁴.*

Anorexia: Taking On A Life of Its Own

More and more, I became obsessed with weight. My thinking about food was increasingly rigid. I recorded everything that came across my mouth, counted the number of times I chewed each bite before I permitted myself to swallow, monitored my water intake, and documented each calorie I consumed. I thought calories in calories out was the magic formula. Eat less and move more right? I can do that. I went to sleep hungry, forbidding myself to eat after a certain arbitrary hour. Waking up in the morning was for the sole purpose of eating. I weighed myself each morning and night. Recorded all the details. Every little fluctuation was catastrophic. It controlled my mood. It dictated my self worth.

Fruit was *healthy* so I ate fruit with reckless abandon. Fat was *bad* so I cut it out completely. This meant I, unintentionally, put myself on a quick-to-hunger diet. High sugar low fat. I was hungry before I finished the last fruit. My body had no proper balance of nutrients. I started looking at food magazines. I convinced myself that it made me less hungry. It fulfilled my hunger, I told my worried parents. After meals, I feared sitting down. Because food was immediately turning into fat cells and staying at my waist. Oh the misinformation I led myself to believe... I started to fear eating. Wondering

⁹⁴ *Lyrics from "Creep", Radiohead*

why do humans have to eat to survive. What is the point? It was evident. My thinking was skewed. This pursuit of a healthy diet was no longer healthy. It became quite meticulous and ill-informed. I willed myself into starving, thinking I have reduced my complicated life into one simple issue – weight. Soon this developed into what I learned to be anorexia. It took on a life of its own.

Extreme Limiting

I enjoyed every minute on the tennis court. It was to the extreme though. I played five hours a day. Every day. I began right after school, ate an apple as pregame snack, and sweated nonstop in the tropical island humidity until the sky grew dark. It would be eight or nine when I got picked up. Chasing after the ball was how I run away from my problems. The harsh reality of societal pressure and cultural standards of the correct body type. Whacking the ball with all my might made it seem as if all my stress exploded away upon contact. It was my stress relief. It was my safe haven. It was my escape. This amount of extraneous exercise exhausted my limited energy reserve. I willed myself to it. I would not cut back. This depletion was yet another way for me to shut myself off from my problems. There were simply no energy left at the end of the day to think about the challenges at school, home, and deep within.

With all the energy output, I allowed myself that one apple, and that apple only. It was not enough. Any person in their right mind would know that. I was not in the right mind. After five hours of extraneous exercise, I allowed myself to eat nothing. Nothing. Not a thing. Why? Was I not hungry? Oh I was, but this arbitrary hour of being *too late* to eat was occupying my mind. I prohibited myself to eat after 8pm believing that anything I ingested from then on would build up immediately as pure fat on my body,

because it is winding down for the evening. Go figure. This sounds ridiculous as I recall the experience now, but then, it was the absolute truth. It dictated my life. I came back from five hours of tennis, joined the family at the dinner table, smelled the delicious nourishing dishes, and allowed myself to only drink water.

My system desperately needed replenishment. I convinced myself I was not hungry. I filled myself up with water and only water, while watching my family indulge in delicacies that I loved. My parents were of course concerned with me not eating. They wanted me to be nourished and eat the healthy foods made available to me. I downplayed the situation and suggested I pack dinner for lunch the next day. Convincing myself that this way, I would still be getting the same nutrients. Who am I kidding? Such flawed thinking, yet I was firm and principled. My parents were worried. They feared that I was not getting the nutrients I needed. They were right.

From continuously depleting myself of essential minerals and proteins, I started losing hair by the handful. It scared me in the shower. I was thinking about food all the time, daydreaming what I would eat if I could let myself eat. When I was too hungry to sleep, I convinced myself that more water would tide me over until morning. I planned out breakfast, dreamed of eating it while I slept, and looked forward to waking up so I could finally eat. I suppressed my desire for food and became weighted down by the tediousness that I was putting myself through. I even asked my father one day why it was necessary for humans to eat. I lost the enjoyment in eating. It was no longer a joyous occasion. It was burdensome and tearing at my psyche. The initial cause and drive to be healthy was not healthy anymore. My relationship with food changed. I became

consumed by the thought of eating and not eating. It ruled my world. It dominated everything. It controlled my life.

Other Side of the Spectrum: Bulimia

Surrounded by an abundance of food, I can only starve myself for so long. My rigid obsession and extreme strict relationship with food changed again. This time, the spirit of self-discipline was too tiring to sustain. I was messing with basic biological needs. The pendulum swung to the polar opposite. After starving my body for so long, especially after intense workout such as tennis, my body snapped. I wanted food. I needed food. I must have food. My body kicked into survival mode. The desire to eat food is such a basic biological need but I felt guilty for wanting it. I felt ashamed that I could not control myself. That wanting to eat food was a sign of losing control. I felt embarrassed that I wasn't more disciplined. I told myself that I shouldn't, but I couldn't help it. My body's will to survive trumped my ill-informed beliefs. My mind was in conflict with my body. I felt out of control. I felt guilty for eating. So I ate - and purged it all up after. I became bulimic.

I gave in to my cravings for nutrients that I have been depleting my body. I fell into a trance of binge episodes where I lost control and had the urge to inhale everything around me for the sole purpose that I could throw it all back up. I binged until my stomach felt like it will burst so that it was easier to purge. I brainwashed myself and used food as a drug that medicated away my emotional pain⁹⁵. People betrayed and hurt me, but food was ever faithful. I binged when I was anxious, when I was tired, when I

⁹⁵ Reviving Ophelia, Chapter 9.

was hurt and confused, and when I felt lonely. The eating felt momentarily satisfying until the overwhelming guilt of indulgence engulfed me - ensuing me to throw up. This binge and purge was how I dealt with my psychic pain of emotional trauma, family dynamics, social complications, and bullies at school. It was a vicious cycle.

When the cultures in which I live in develop a standard of beauty that I cannot obtain by being healthy, I developed unhealthy habits to meet the unnatural thinness.⁹⁶ At first, it was periodically, only a couple times a month. I would do it during lunch break, in between basketball and volleyball practices, and during nightly musical rehearsals. Especially after the coach ordered pizza as our staff dinner. I would feel extra guilty. Pizza, after all, was *not* on my healthy food list at the time. It did not take long before this binge and purge quickly grew exponentially from once a week, twice a week, to three times a day. I started making more excuses to visit the bathroom and taking a long shower after meals. I made guilt trips to the resort bathrooms after eating out with family on the weekends. I would let the shower run so that I could cover up the sound of me purging in the close quarters of our home. Binging and purging dominated my life. It was all I could think about. It consumed my mind. It controlled my every move.

Downward Spiral

After seasons of frequent binging and purging, my body became weak and torn both inside and out. From the force of repeated purging, my body started rejecting my purging. It stopped allowing me to throw up as easily. It kicked into survival mode, protecting me from tearing myself up. But I did not listen. In order to get the food out of

⁹⁶ Reviving Ophelia, Chapter 9.

me, I had to be extra rough with my system. The pain was, eventually, unbearable to the point that I would be in tears crying as I forced myself to throw up. Sometimes I choked, but still continued. My esophagus was burning from repeated erosion of stomach acid. I wrote in my journal how I wish I could invent a machine that would dig a hole through my stomach to vacuum out food without me having to forcefully purge. It was so painful to throw up, but I willed myself to do it. Over and over. I had to. I needed to. How else would I be in control? I was in control. I thought. Until it started running the show.

My electrolytes were completely off balance. I had no energy during regular sports practices. My throat burned during every rehearsal. I started missing my periods. Digesting food was hard. I lost control of certain muscles in my body. I asked for help but simultaneously pushed it away. I solicited my sister to help me stop eating when I would be headed into binge because I wanted to stop. I just could not do it myself. When she extended the gentle reminders, however, I was not receptive, and even defensive at times. My inconsistency added to the internal conflict and emotional pain. I was now being a bad sister, involving her and rejecting her help. I felt shame.

The addiction of bulimia was hard to break. Fighting the urge to binge and purge required enormous willpower. It is said to be as hard as fighting the urge for drugs.⁹⁷ It required incredible self-discipline and pain tolerance. All the damage I had caused from my self-harm were permanent. I was terrified that my stomach acid was eroding away the enamel of my teeth, which I knew would be irreversible. I did not know what to do. I panicked. Eventually, the anxiety and depression ate away at my core. I broke down into

⁹⁷ Reviving Ophelia, Chapter 9.

tears revealing my secret addiction for the past two years to my family. I had hit the bottom of this downward spiral.

How I Am Thriving

*A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.
~ James Keller*

Eating disorders often revolve around topics of body image and societal pressures. While these are real issues that need to be addressed, other commonalities among eating disorders are the issues of addiction and control⁹⁸. Whether you grew up in a highly rigid, rule-ridden environment, or in an unstable environment where love, affection and support were sporadic and unpredictable, you lacked control. If every aspect of your life seemed completely out of your control, individuals often turn to controlling the only thing they feel they could - their own body.

In this scenario, Thriving is certainly not a place I started at. Thriving is a process we engage in, juggle with, and reflect on. Thriving is a mental practice, a discipline, a cultivation, a work in progress. Thriving is not a place we arrive. We might have an element of our lives that we are currently thriving in, but that does not negate other aspects of our lives that we are still striving towards and for. It is like balance. Balance is not a destination you arrive at and are done with. Balancing and thriving are both states in which you actively maintain, foster, and achieve. It starts with Surviving, continues with Striving, and flourishes with Thriving.

Surviving was me getting over the hump of each binge and purge cycle. I was functioning. I met daily basic needs of school, coursework, and sports practice. I was not

⁹⁸ Jantz, D. G. (2014, June 30). Eating Disorders: Addicted to Control. Retrieved from <https://www.caringonline.com/eating-disorders-addicted-to-control/>

eliminated by the extreme limiting or binging purging cycle. I kept going. I stayed afloat. I did not let the experience drown me out. My physical body rebuilt, regenerated, and hung in there. But I was stuck in the cycle of guilt, shame, pain, and exhaustion. I remained alive and in existence⁹⁹, but was continuously living through hardship and adversity¹⁰⁰.

Striving beyond Surviving was me breaking the cycle of secrecy and revealing it to my family. Aiming to get through the issue instead of just getting by. I sought out counseling, talked about my perfectionist tendencies, and became more aware of how stress affects my psyche. It was about becoming a better version of myself instead of just overcoming each binge urge. I learned that my eating disorder was a symptom of all the emotional trauma and anxiety in my life. Anxiety is the mark of spiritual insecurity¹⁰¹. I practiced ways to manage, sooth, and breathe through that insecurity. Striving is focusing in on our revival, the return to consciousness of life and become active or flourishing again¹⁰². It is healing ourselves. Making way to recover, transcend, and evolve.

The Striving road is a long and tricky one. The health effects were long term and followed me around for years after. Working through relapses in my college days created additional stress but were opportunities for me to become more self-aware. I focused inward, honed in on my self preservation, and learned to manage my inner world - powerful thoughts and emotions. Taking care of basic needs can go a long way, I discovered. It is never a good idea to get over-tired, over-hungry, or over-stressed -

⁹⁹ “Definition of SURVIVE,” Merriam Webster Dictionary.

¹⁰⁰ “What does survive mean?,” Definitions.net.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Merton

¹⁰² “Definition of REVIVE,” Merriam Webster Dictionary

especially a combination of them. I became more knowledgeable of myself, and therefore, more skilled at navigating how I processed and interacted with the external world. I slowly battled my addiction, one self insight at a time. My relationship with food gradually recalibrated half a decade later.

Over the years, I focused on building my habits and routines. I gradually found my way to fuel, align, and recharge. Food was no longer a crutch to my life uncertainties. I used to comfort my insecurities that way, but no more. It is not an element in life that I rendered perfectionist control. I became the version of myself that exhibited confidence, certainty, and steadiness. I, for the first time in my life, had a sense of who I am. I felt grounded in who I was and who I was becoming. There was a sense of level headedness. My eating disorder made me stronger, more experienced, and more capable of tuning into myself. I was finally listening to my needs, my thoughts, and my emotions, instead of shutting them out. I no longer turned away from myself. I turned toward myself with greater consistency. I focused on building my daily routine of self-care, self-accountability, and strived towards Thriving.

Fast forward to a decade later, my relationship with food is the healthiest that it has ever been. I weigh in heavier than ever, but I am the healthiest, happiest, and most grounded in my life. I am conscious. I listen to my body. I tune in. I check in.

Thriving is when our system of small success actions have become automated habits. I make good judgements and healthy decisions. No food is off limits. I pay attention to nourishment. Our bodies signal for healthy nutritious natural options when in equilibrium. I trust my intuition and believe in my instincts. I give my body what it needs. Carbs are not bad. Eating fat does not make you fat. Healthy fat is essential to our

wellness. Sugar is the thing to pay attention to. It is not about calories in and calories out. It was never about that. I no longer weigh myself. Not out of avoidance, but it became obsolete. Weight has become an arbitrary number, no longer dominating my life. My strength, vitality, and physique is more important and complex than a number on a scale.

Thriving is when pieces in our life fit together nicely like meant-to-be puzzle pieces. I am lucky to have a partner that also greatly values health and nutrition. We prioritize eating whole and wild, educate ourselves on food science and nutrition, and enhance our knowledge with current research and personal experimentation. As a team, we make healthy choices to nourish our mind and body. Together, our focus moves from self preservation to elevating others. We have the capacity to think of others' success and are empowered to share our food knowledge with others. I am not shy to openly share and disclose my journey through eating disorders. Together, we are inspired to create educational programs and food products that will enhance other's nutritional wellness, relationship with food, and ultimately relationship with themselves.

When we are able to learn about how to self heal and share that wisdom with others – that is a part of thriving. Thriving does not default to guaranteed empowerment but leads us down a path that has the potential to. In that sphere, we feel rewarded and fulfilled with what we are learning, practicing, and doing. We have the time, energy, and desire to inspire others. We enter the phase that is beyond our own self. We aim to pass it forward and share with others. I share my learning with others. My stories teach others. My advice is solicited. I am asked to be a sounding board. Others inquire for me to be their thinking partner. My counsel is sought. I help others develop and find their best

selves. I ask questions to evoke reflection of one's meaning in life. My knowledge is passed forward and my experiences coach others.

As I thrive in my relationship with food, my energy no longer feels nervous, anxious, or uncertain around eating. Wondering how I would manage, cope, or remain disciplined. My energy has transformed to being relaxed, confident, and open to my body's feedback on what it needs. It is a much more grounding and welcoming vibe, coming from a place of abundance instead of scarcity. I overcame the hurdles, became better versions of myself, and now have the confidence in my equilibrium around food. I trust my intuition and believe my instincts to guide me. I am empowered to share the wisdom gained on this turbulent journey to help others navigate beyond Survival, Striving, and Thrive.

Chapter Summary

*There is nothing we human beings like more than to
contribute to one another's wellbeing.
Marshall Rosenberg*

Why is resilience important? Resilience helps us feel the range of emotions and experience what it means to be human. Resilience helps us learn from each obstacle and grow with each challenge. Resilience makes us whole, complete, and able to compete for success. Resilience is our instinctual survival tactics, keeping us afloat in the darkest times. Resilience helps us come out of heartaches - to love, get hurt, and have the strength and courage to love again. Resilience helps us adapt so we can survive the chaos, strive to become better, and thrive to empower others.

With resilience we are able to bounce back and establish new equilibrium in the midst of inevitable adversity. Those struggles are only temporary. Without resilience, we

get stuck feeling down, overwhelmed, and lost. We lament our life circumstances, pity our conditions, and hold onto the negatives, unable to see the cherishable little things. Without resilience, we are afraid to be alone, terrified of the company we keep when we are with ourselves. We betray the promises we make to ourselves. We fear not being needed. We fear emotions. We fear ourselves. We worry if we are not perfect, and we do not have it all together all the time, that we are not worthy of love and belonging¹⁰³. Without resilience, we do not know our worth and we do not believe in our worth.

Gleaning value from all my life's lessons, I strengthened my resilience muscle. This special set of skills I have acquired for a very long time was how I was able to handle my father's sudden death a month before my wedding. This was the special set of skills that helped me to stay afloat, be level-headed, and keep grounded facing the most difficult adversity I have yet to encounter. Managing unexpected funeral logistics during a month leading up to what was anticipated to be a happy time certainly was not easy. It still is not easy. But after all the years of training, my resilience muscle was able to handle this unforeseen tragic circumstance.

This is not to say I navigated every aspect of that five weeks back in Saipan with excellence or up to my own highest standards. My father's sudden passing unveiled years of underlying family dysfunction and what still lies as deep demons inside me. Everyone's emotions were heightened. Everyone's demons surfaced. Everyone had less patience for themselves and others. It was not the easiest to traverse because "if we have unprocessed trauma, being misunderstood literally feels like abandonment. And rejection.

¹⁰³ "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead: Brené Brown

Emotions like fear come up that send us in shame spirals. Our ego becomes defensive. It over-explains. It defaults into its favorite mode: judgement.¹⁰⁴ As I reflect on what aspects I could have handled better or can improve upon, I am reminded how important it is for each one of us to do the work to heal our inner selves.

Through each of my turbulent journeys in my time in American education, resilience has brought me back to life following my most difficult times. Having resilience not only helps us bounce back but elevates our lives. It certainly takes more intentionality, effort, and investment to grow beyond survival, but we come out the other side transformed. We become more grounded, secure, and capable to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives as we are better equipped to face life's inevitable adversities. Resilience enables us to Survive, Strive, and Thrive in life as better people, educators, and leaders.

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

CHAPTER 5: HOW TO CULTIVATE RESILIENCE

Now what? Resilience is a skill you can cultivate, but how do we do it? I humbly share three principles that are fundamental to my resilience as well as my personal toolbox for cultivating and maintaining my mental, emotional, and physical wellness. The head, heart, and body. The toolbox is comprised of a series of practical tips that will help you strengthen your resilience muscle. These simple habits are small actions with big impact. They have transformed my life for the better and I continue to utilize them to replenish and rejuvenate. They help me achieve and actualize a better sense of groundedness, empowerment, and advocacy in life. I hope they will inspire the same for you.

5.1 Fundamental Principles

*I do not have to be great to start,
but I have to start to be great.
~ Zig Ziglar*

The ability to bounce back connotes evolutionary power and survival traits. According to many experts¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶, resilience is quite common, and people are very capable of learning the skills that it takes to become more resilient¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸. The three fundamental principles that I have boiled down from my 22 years in American education are gratitude attitude, growth mindset, and inner healing. They have paved the way for my resilience. They are the foundations. They are the common denominator. They are the prerequisite to any other tips of resilience I may offer. These three fundamental principles are like the

¹⁰⁵ Rendon, 2015

¹⁰⁶ Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998

¹⁰⁷ Joseph, 2013

¹⁰⁸ Dweck, C. S. (2007). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Reprint, Updated edition). New York: Ballantine Books.

air, water, and sunlight for a plant to survive, strive, and thrive. The practical strategies I offer are fertilizer that enhances their growth. Without these fundamental principles, even the best fertilizers will not will not help reach the highest potential. You do not have to master these principles before moving on to the everyday tips, but keep in mind that these are fundamental to each of the mental clarity, emotional groundedness, and physical wellness sections below.

Gratitude Attitude

“快樂不是因為擁有的多，而是因為計較的少。”
[Joyfulness is not about owning, obtaining, or possessing more, but about comparing and envying less.] Chinese Proverb

In life, we become what we think. We attract what we feel. We create what we imagine¹⁰⁹. Therefore it is crucial for us to maintain an attitude of gratitude. Focusing on the good cultivates the good. Focusing on what you appreciate brings more of what you appreciate. Imagine a day where you only have what you were grateful yesterday. I bet we will find a lot more to be grateful for. Gratitude cultivates an energy that focuses on what we have and what is good in our lives. I note it in my mind, speak it to my partner, write it in my journal, and capture it with my phone. Find a way that works for you. Anything that brings your attention to gratitude each day. This manifests abundance in your life.

Growth Mindset

*Difficulties are opportunities to better things;
they are stepping-stones to greater experience.*
~ Brian Adams

¹⁰⁹ Buddha

A mindset, according to psychologist Carol Dweck, is a self-perception or “self-theory” that people hold about themselves. People can be aware or unaware of their mindsets, according to Dweck, but their mindset can have a profound effect on learning achievement, skill acquisition, personal relationships, professional success, and many other dimensions of life¹¹⁰. I believe that my skills can be developed through dedication and hard work. I believe I can learn and accomplish things I set my mind to. I believe things do not happen for a reason. I believe we make meaning out of the things that happen. They are opportunities to practice, learn, and strengthen our resilience.

Resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties. People who possess this resilience do not see life through rose-colored lenses. They understand that setbacks happen and that sometimes life is hard and painful. They still experience the emotional pain, grief, and sense of loss that comes after a tragedy, but their mental outlook allows them to work through such feelings and recover¹¹¹.

Practice seeing challenges and obstacles as opportunities to improve your skills. Tying in the gratitude mindset, silver lining perspective, and looking at things on the bright side, you cultivate a world of possibilities that are open to you. My mom always said luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. Your mindset determines how prepared you are when adversity shows up. Build that strong foundation with the bricks that life throws you. You are not a victim. Have an appreciative and inquisitive mindset. Be open to new ideas and exchange of thoughts. You get what you focus on. Cultivate your mind. Believe you can, then you can.

¹¹⁰ Dweck, C. S. (2007). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Reprint, Updated edition). New York: Ballantine Books.

¹¹¹ Cherry, 2018

Inner Healing

*There is only one journey: going inside yourself.*¹¹²

My growth mindset and attitude have always led me to be interested in learning more about myself. I want to know what triggers me, what frustrates me, what confuses me, and what calms me. This inner healing aspect of my resilience cultivation rose as a priority after my father's tragic sudden passing. His passing was an awakening and turning point in many ways. It unveiled years of underlying family dysfunction that no one talked about. It revealed the inner traumas I have yet to work on. It is vital for each one of us to work on our inner healing. Because if not, we as "adults are just wounded children who have aged."¹¹³

Our best life, according to psychologist Nicole LePera, is buried under programmed conditioning. We cannot create a different future until we release our past. Most of us learned subconsciously that love is conditional and uncertain as a child¹¹⁴. It came with a mixture of your parents' confusion, fears, anger, sadness, and other emotions and creates an insecure attachment. This follows us through life and we get stuck in a reactive insecure cycle as adults. We all have childhood *stuff* we have not unpacked. This does not mean we had a *bad* childhood or *bad* parents.

"Unconscious parents by nature will cause pain in their children without even knowing it. At the same time they can fiercely love their children and want what's best for them. An unconscious parent views a child as an extension of self, rather than an autonomous human being. They know no other modeling. So, they unintentionally project their own unresolved childhood experiences. The message to the child becomes: to receive love I must repress parts of self and over express

¹¹² Rainer Maria Rilke, Poet and novelist

¹¹³ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

¹¹⁴ 6 Secrets For Harnessing The Power Of Love. (2014, June 6). Retrieved from YourTango website: <https://www.yourtango.com/experts/carista-luminare-ph-d-lion-goodman/the-power-of-love>

other parts of self. It can manifest as overachieving, people pleasing, being 'the rock,' the funny/happy person, and other adaptive behavior. The authentic self splits into a new identity.

Childhood trauma can look like us not being seen or heard, having a parent who unconsciously 'molds' or 'shapes' us from a place of their own unhealed trauma, having a parent who vicariously lives through a child, being told that certain emotions makes you weak or undesirable, having a parent who focuses on overcompensating for things that were lacking in their own childhood, having a parent who denies your reality, having a parent who focuses heavily on appearance, being an emotional support for parents, or having a parent who cannot regulate their own emotions.

We are all wounded children. We're all wrapped so tightly in our conditioning. To create a future self, we must go to the past and heal that child. The child who wasn't fully expressed. Who wasn't seen, heard, and validated. Our inner child is the pain part of us we've carried since childhood. It's the lens of how we perceive the world and the people in it. The subconscious will repeat relationship cycles we saw in childhood our entire adult lives until we heal. As adults we have an opportunity to heal. Without healing, we're chained to our past. Lost in a cycle we didn't create. We'll carry our pain into every situation we enter. We'll hurt other people. We hurt ourselves. It is through creating habits and cultivating discipline that we leave the subconscious mind in order to create a new version of self¹⁵."

I found tremendous rewards from simply acknowledging and accepting that I have repressed parts of myself that I cannot see because my ego works tirelessly to defend me from it. It takes time, effort, intentionality, and consciousness. It takes courage to witness our darkest side. It is learning about myself and my past, see how I was influenced, observe how I am still triggered. I have always wanted a manual to myself. Taking notes on my transference¹⁶ helps create that manual. Understanding myself on a deeper level gave me a sense of advocacy. I do not have to be saved by others but I can

¹⁵ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

¹⁶ A Client's Guide to Transference. (n.d.). Retrieved from Psychology Today website: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-therapy/201206/clients-guide-transference>

practice troubleshooting myself. I can respond proactively to challenges, face my fears, and not stand in the way of my own sunshine.

Our brain, however, has neuroplasticity and it can be rewired. Learn to reprogram your brain for security, and you can create relationships that gets better and better with time¹¹⁷. According to Dr. Nicole LePera, “your persona, Latin word for mask, is being observed in order to be released. It feels like being a child. Being naked. It feels terrifying before it feels like freedom.” Working on my inner healing has been a transformative and liberating process for me. I hope the same for you.

*You do not have to carry the guilt
your parents' try to place on you
for needing space to heal.
And that
doesn't make you a bad person.
~ Thais Sky*

5.2 Practical Toolbox

*Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap,
but by the seeds you plant.
~ Robert Louis Stevenson*

*Consciously create habits because habits
unconsciously dictate your life.
~ Anonymous*

Resilience is a muscle you can train and a skill you can cultivate. I share with you here, my personal toolbox for cultivating and maintaining my mental, emotional, and physical resilience. Each section presents eight small, daily, practical tips that will help you increase your resilience quotient. I find it is much more effective to use every small opportunity for personal growth than to attempt them in big strides. These simple habits

¹¹⁷ 6 Secrets For Harnessing The Power Of Love. (2014, June 6). Retrieved from YourTango website: <https://www.yourtango.com/experts/carista-luminare-ph-d-lion-goodman/the-power-of-love>

that are small actions with big impact. They have transformed my life for the better and I continue to utilize them to replenish and rejuvenate. These techniques have helped me achieve and actualize a better sense of groundedness, empowerment, and advocacy in life. I hope they will inspire the same for you.

Mental Clarity

Mental clarity involves our perspective, thought process, creativity, original thinking, critical examination, logic, mindset, mental sharpness, clarity, ethics, anxiety, worry, sense of right and wrong, mind, spirit, and our intellectual and mental health.

1. Center with Daily Positive Affirmations

*Reality is created by the mind.
We can change our reality
by changing our mind.
~ Plato*

Have you been walking down the street and notice yourself humming a song you did not even realize you have heard, but now it is stuck in your head? Our mind is absorbent, even when we are not conscious in what it is taking in. Given that my mind has a tendency to play on repeat what resonates or what it hears last, I wanted to give myself something positive to repeat back to myself. When my whole life was in limbo dealing with visa issues, I started collecting a list of 35 affirmations I would read out loud to myself each morning. They are phrases like:

“I wake up today with strength my heart and clarity in my mind.”

“I am courageous and I stand up for myself.”

“I forgive those who have harmed me in my past and peacefully detach from them.”

“I base my happiness on my own accomplishments and the blessings I’ve been given.”

“Everything that is happening now is happening for my ultimate good.”

“I am at peace with all that has happened, is happening, and will happen.”

I play it on my phone using auto speak and listen and repeat while I go through my morning routine. It is something small that I incorporate into my morning routine, but it has a big impact on my mental clarity and wellbeing. These small phrases begin to take root, be internalized, and focus my mind on the things I appreciate and want to manifest. During my pregnancy, I played a track of 28 positive affirmations for pregnancy that I listened to every night before sleep to reprogram how my subconscious thinks and feels about pregnancy. There are benefits to saying and listening to positive affirmations daily, but if you can only do it on selective days, that is still better than none.

The important thing is to recognize the power of our internal dialogue, and how we can level up the internal tape we put on repeat. You can write your own affirmations - manifest how you would like to feel and who you would like to become. Be selective with your input. We become what we feed our mind.

2. Understand Your Flow

*All the resources we need are in the mind.*¹¹⁸

Are you a clear thinker that is data driven and a logical problem solver? Or, are you an imaginative and intuitive thinker that has a vision and enjoys the unusual? Are you a practical thinker that likes guidelines, predictability, and are cautious of new ideas? Or would you say you are relational, empathetic, socially aware, and intuitive about people?¹¹⁹ I bet you see part of yourself in all of these. We all have our default way of thinking and behaving. These preferences are natural. It is important for us to identify and be aware of how we function best. It helps enhance mental clarity by avoiding confusion,

¹¹⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, Twenty-sixth president of the United States.

¹¹⁹ Browning, G. (2005). *Emergenetics (R): Tap Into the New Science of Success* (First Edition edition). New York: HarperBusiness.

wondering why certain information are harder for us to digest than others, unnecessary struggles around interpersonal dynamics, and eliminate internal conflict of self doubt that something is deeply wrong with us.

Do you learn best from mental analysis? By experimenting? By doing it yourself and having hands on practice? Or when it is from and with others? There are a variety of self-assessment tools out there that can guide you in this process - whether it is personality types¹²⁰, how we fascinate¹²¹, how we take in information, how we think, how we learn, and how we behave¹²². From knowing our style, preferences, and tendencies, we can clearly articulate our strengths, advocate for ourselves, and position ourselves in the best way. Explore one at a time. Learn more about yourself. Have fun. The better you understand what makes you tick and how you relate to others, the more you will benefit from this knowledge in your everyday life. The more you know of how you work, how you function, and how you behave, the more mental clarity and groundedness you will experience.

3. Aim for Progress Not Perfection

Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, life's hard.
~ John Bytheway

¹²⁰ The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment is a psychometric questionnaire designed to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. Evaluated on a spectrum, these preferences are represented in four dichotomies of: Extraversion (E)/Introversion (I), Sensing(S)/Intuition(I), Thinking(T)/Feeling(F), and Judgment(J)/Perception(P). For more information, see <http://www.myersbriggs.org>.

¹²¹ Hogshead, S. (2014). *How the World Sees You: Discover Your Highest Value Through the Science of Fascination: Sally Hogshead*. HarperBusiness.

¹²² Browning, G. (2005). *Emergenetics (R): Tap Into the New Science of Success* (First Edition edition). New York: HarperBusiness.

Many projects in life such as finishing a degree, writing a book, planning what life is like after the sudden passing of a family member, or getting ready for a baby can seem daunting and overwhelming in certain moments. It makes the task seem unfathomable. Focusing on the small steps that I can inch away each day makes it more doable. For my mental wellness, I remind myself daily to aim for progress and not perfection, in all aspects of my life. Or else, the perfectionist side of me can completely consume the process, beat myself up for not reaching unrealistic outcomes, put pressure on myself, paralyze motivation, and stall progress. And when it comes to mental clarity, there is only so much focus time our brains have each day.

Balance out your time. Manage your energy. Literally give yourself a physical break so you can rejuvenate your mental clarity. We all are doing the best we can with what we have got in each moment. The same focus goes for physical progress such as strengthening a muscle, increasing lung capacity, or training for endurance. Progress is the aim. Over time, you will get better. That is the power of habits. Remember, a journey of 1,000 miles must begin with one step,¹²³ Each day, focus on the small steps. They add up to big journeys.

4. Build in a Movement Habit

*True power is the ability to master your greatest asset:
your attention.
~ Dr. Nicole LePera*

Sometimes people think in order to get a lot done, they must clear their calendar and dedicate the whole day to that important project. For some physical project that makes sense, but when it comes to projects that require mental clarity, capacity, and

¹²³ Ancient Chinese Proverb

energy, it is a different ballgame. In my experience of tackling big writing projects such as a book or dissertation, my brain can only focus on something for so long before it needs a recharge. Knowing that a task will expand to the time allotted¹²⁴, it is much more effective for me to write in short spurts than to budget the whole day. I also find it effective to work in between two scheduled events, such as a before a yoga class or lunch commitment because it holds me accountable against the clock.

Sometimes it may seem like a catch-22. If cutting down trees is a metaphor for writing, then the struggle becomes that I cannot stop to sharpen my saw because I have got too much trees to chop down, but I cannot work as efficiently if I do not stop to sharpen my saw. It may seem counterintuitive to stop writing the dissertation and go get a snack at the grocery store, but that may be the best thing I can do to recharge my mental batteries and increase my mental clarity.

Most of us work in sedentary environments in front of a desk or computer. It is important to build in a movement habit that gets the blood flowing, carrying that fresh oxygen to our brain - that helps stimulate mental clarity. Whether it be a walk around the block, doing headstands, set an alarm to remind you to get up and move every hour, or drink water while you work so you have to get up and go pee. These are all the things I have done while working on big writing projects. Find a system that works for you. Build a movement habit. Keep the oxygen flowing to enhance your mental clarity.

5. Spend Time Alone

*When you realize there is nothing lacking,
the whole world belongs to you.
~ Lao Tzu*

¹²⁴ Parkinson's Law

There is a big difference between being alone and feeling lonely. One comes from a place of scarcity and neediness. The other stems from an abundance and empowering place. You can choose to be alone without feeling lonely. Intentional quality solitude can feel rejuvenating, grounding, and revitalizing. You can feel completely comfortable, at peace, relaxed, reflective, serene, and at ease.

On the contrary, you can feel the most lonely while in the middle of a huge crowd. It is important to understand that our feeling of loneliness is not directly correlated with being with others. It is a reflection of our inner state - our insecurities and dependencies. In this stage and age of constant distraction from technology and communication on social media, it may seem strange to consider the concept of being alone. Yet, it is more important than ever that we practice being alone with our mind, heart, thoughts, and feelings. It is important to practice being with ourselves. Giving our brain and attention a chance to pause, rest, and rejuvenate promotes our mental vitality. It improves concentration, increases productivity, enhances our self-awareness, deepens our reflection, elevates our problem solving capacity, and strengthen our relationships with others¹²⁵.

There is an art to enjoying the company we keep when we are with ourselves. To recognize and comprehend the power of being alone without feeling lonely, practice being with ourselves. Whether it is meditation to observe your thoughts, stretch and breathe as you tune into your body, sitting next to a tree or flower and observe it, or sipping on your favorite beverage without any distraction - start small. Start where you

¹²⁵ 6 Reasons You Should Spend More Time Alone. (n.d.). Retrieved from Psychology Today

feel it can be easily incorporated into your day to day. It may be focusing on tasting your lunch, going for a walk around the block without your phone, or observing the sunset quietly. Lift your heads from your devices more often. Notice the difference. Our intuition is strong. Listen to it. To enhance mental clarity, it is essential to like to company we keep when we are alone. Let us practice being mindful and not mind-full. Spend time in silence without distraction every day to master your mental and emotional energy. Advocate for alone time. Take alone time. Enjoy alone time.

6. Let Go of Things Outside Your Control

Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at will change.¹²⁶

In moments of highest anxiety that overwhelms me, because no one is exempt from that human emotion and we all feel that at some point, I go to my “2019 On Mind” list. This is a place where I go and write down all that is currently on my mind - tasks I need to do, things I need to think about, decisions I need to make, worries I have to ponder on, frustrations I have to mull over, whatever it is that is consuming my mind and energy at that time. This serves multiple functions.

First, it helps me purge everything that is swirling inside. This gives me a place to hold or park all these floating pieces, metaphorically, giving my mind a chance to rest and not go in overdrive, like transferring files to an external hard drive in order to create more memory space. Secondly, after I have jotted down the extensive list on my mind, seeing I have 68 items which are pending, to-dos, issues, decisions, worries, or things in limbo, validates my moments of anxiousness and overwhelm. I feel relieved knowing that

¹²⁶ Dyer, Wayne W. *The Power of Intention: learning to Co-create Your World Your Way*. Hay House, Inc., 2010, 185.

my feelings are legitimate and reasonable - qualities I am working on to believe my emotions by default. Third, it helps me clarify my thoughts. Having written it all down, I synthesize it into themes I am hearing myself say. This may be a short list of 20 items that clearly identifies the issue and why I may be feeling down or overwhelmed. This again helps validate my inner state and clarifies my internal dialogue for myself.

After I have purged all my thoughts and synthesized them, I ask myself the question, “What is something from above list that I can do something about right now?” I review the list of 20 summary points and write down my responses. This may result in a short list of three actionable items I can do something about right now, and those are the things that I go do something about. This process helps me regulate my emotions, manage my time, and focuses my precious energy on things within my control - letting go of the things outside my control. It is a liberating feeling and relieving experience, the freedom that you will feel when you lighten the load.

7. Unplug and Visualize What You Desire

There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you, and you don't know how or why.”¹²⁷

One day I left my phone at home by accident when headed to work. It became one of the most mindful and in-the-moment days I have had in a long while. I did not feel the need to be hyper organized jotting down to-do items that popped in my mind. I did not incessantly check my schedule for what is next on the agenda. Instead, I enjoyed being in the moment with each meeting, each person, and each task. I faced my fear of social awkwardness and shifted my tendency of hiding behind the phone to actively engaging in

¹²⁷ Albert Einstein, Physicist and Nobel laureate

human connection. I looked out the window on the shuttle to work, closed my eyes and reflect on the day, and gained new insight to framing my dissertation. I enjoyed taking in my surroundings without feeling the need to document it with photos or videos. I stopped in my tracks, paused to remember I do not have my camera phone, then savor the moment by taking in the beauty with my eyes.

Our presence has power. Being in the moment heals. This is something that is intuitive to all of us but easy to forget in this age of modern technology. Designate a time in your day to unplug. It can be as short or as long as you desire. Practice being with yourself without distraction. Mindfulness is mental fitness for awareness. While you unplug, it is the perfect opportunity to visualize your desired outcome in life. Our brain is more powerful than we may comprehend. Imagine a clean desk before you clean your desk, and you might just find that you have that much more drive to execute the plan you have worked out in your mind. There is power in visualization. Imagine what you want. See what you want. Our powerful brain will work to fill in the gap.

8. Take Personal Accountability

*You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind,
but you can change yourself.*¹²⁸

In healing ourselves and finding our way to mental clarity, we must take personal responsibility in our lives - how we feel, what we do, but starting with what and how we think. Blame is simply the discharging of discomfort and pain¹²⁹ and blaming others is

¹²⁸ Jim Rohn, America's foremost business philosopher

¹²⁹ The RSA. (n.d.). *Brené Brown on Blame*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZWf2_2L2v8

the quickest way to give up our power¹³⁰. We are in control of our lives. We manifest the kind of day we have, how we feel, and how we respond to external factors. It is much easier to blame others for the shortcomings in our lives. It is much harder to take ownership and accountability for our actions. But that is why once you do, there is a tremendous sense of liberation.

Everything I experience today is the result of choices I have made in the past. I have control over the thoughts I think, the words that I speak, the image I visualize, the emotions I feel, and the actions I take.¹³¹ If I do not like what I am experiencing or producing, I can change my responses. I can change how I proceed with my thoughts, change what I speak about, change who I surround myself with, change the knowledge source I tune into, change what I allow myself to be impacted and influenced, and change my reaction and decision to events. Ninety-nine percent of all failures come from people who have a habit of making excuses.¹³² No more excuses.

Accountability is an on-going process. Each day, keep a promise to yourself. No matter how small. Watch your confidence grow in being accountable to yourself. You start showing up in your life as an active participant instead of a passive spectator. Instead of the usual blaming that keeps us stuck in the same place we have always been, opt for accountability. As we heal our mind from blame and recondition our minds to move away from discharging discomfort, we start gaining a sense of ownership of our

¹³⁰ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

¹³¹ Canfield, 9.

¹³² George Washington Carver – Chemist who discovered over 325 uses for the peanut

lives. From the semblance of control we get from blaming, personal accountability actually moves us towards feeling a greater sense of empowerment in our lives.

Emotional Groundedness

Emotional groundedness involves our spectrum of feelings, trauma, healing, self worth, self love, emotional health, expressiveness, community, sense of belonging, heart, love, intimacy, attachment, and connectedness.

1. Respond vs. React

What others do may be a stimulus of our feelings, but not the cause.”¹³³

Remember you are in control of your emotions. No one can make you feel a certain way without your consent. *At the core of emotional resilience is mastery of one's own emotional state. Understating your own energy allows you to have confidence. An inner knowing that you can handle what life brings to you. At the core of lack of emotional resilience is lack of confidence. This is typically after years of self-betrayal. That's why habits are so important. By creating habits, you begin the process of keeping promises to self. This heals. Embrace discomfort as a core part of growth. Accept criticism as feedback not absolute truth. Become conscious to your unconscious habits, thoughts, and behaviors¹³⁴.*

Remember what others say or do is a reflection of them. What we say or do is a reflection of us. Do not take things personally. Focus on how we respond to others instead of being wrapped up in reacting to others' influence. Never regret being a good

¹³³ Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., Author of Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

¹³⁴ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

person, to the wrong people. Your behavior says everything about you, and their behavior says enough about them¹³⁵. We also cannot control how other people receive our energy. Anything we say or do gets filtered through the lens of whatever personal stuff they are going through at the moment, which is not about you. Just keep doing your thing with as much integrity as possible¹³⁶.

2. Advocate for Self

*A woman cannot be comfortable
without her own approval.
~ Mark Twain*

I am courageous and I stand up for myself. That is one of the 35 affirmations that I repeat to myself. Having a sense of advocacy was not something I grew up with. In a collectivist culture, that can be seen as being selfish, self centered, and rude. Goodness forbid that you are a rude Asian girl. Advocating for myself is something I had to learn later on in life to survive and something I am still practicing. I had to exercise my advocating muscle after my dad's sudden passing. I did not have time to grieve and certainly felt the weight on my mental and emotional health. I had to come to the realization that I was worthy of me advocating for some leave time from work so that I could take a break from decades of over functioning.

At the core of advocating for ourselves is knowing and believing we are worth it. We are worth being disagreeable. We are worth speaking up for. We are worth being heard. I use to speak in questions always defaulting to others' opinions and wishes because deep down, I did not believe my desires were worthy. Now, I know better to

¹³⁵ Anonymous

¹³⁶ Nanea Hoffman

speak in statements, such as, I want to... I would like to... I am ready for... et cetera.

Then, follow it up with a question of soliciting other people's input. There is a difference between advocating for self and being dominating or overpowering.

Advocating for yourself is simply having the confidence to speak your truth.

Putting forth my preferences and desires allow others to see me for who I am. Advocating for ourselves is risking being judged by others but still deciding to show up for our authentic self. After navigating the U.S. alone and coming into myself a little more after these decades, I have become a more confident and self-assured individual. I no longer seek external validation but my guided by my internal compass. We are worth it.

3. Set Boundaries

*You don't have to let yourself be terrorized
by other people's expectations of you.¹³⁷*

This is a big one. Setting boundaries ties into advocating for yourself because people may not understand your boundary or they may not respect the boundaries you have set. Take being pregnant for example. There are wondering hands that reach to touch my belly throughout the pregnancy but especially when the bump gets bigger in the third trimester. At first I let it go, making up excuses for the person and explain away that they did not mean any harm. But, then I realized that I was betraying myself. I was sacrificing my self respect in order to keep the peace and others happy. I was not honoring my personal line of acceptance - what I will and will not accept. I felt disrespected, annoyed, and agitated. The feeling of being violated continued for hours after the unwanted touching.

¹³⁷ Sue Patton Thoele, Author of *The Courage to Be Yourself*

Growing up in a societal and family culture where my personal boundaries are constantly violated, drawing boundaries was unfamiliar and scary at first. I worried how others would respond to be drawing a boundary. I witnessed how others are confused by me *changing the rules*. I experienced others not respect my boundaries. Like most of us, I was raised in a home where drawing healthy boundaries are not practiced or I was not role modeled boundaries in childhood. I did not know where to begin and how to set boundaries. I feared the guilt and shame that would surface when other people react to my boundaries. This, however, indicated to me just how important it is to establish boundaries.

Setting boundaries and advocating for our boundaries is a practice. Begin small. Practice saying no without explanation. Such as people touching my pregnant belly. Before practicing, I would fake discomfort, make up a reason, or explain why I do not like being touched. Now I can advocate for my boundaries and say, “no, please don’t touch.” I find practicing boundary setting with strangers is much easier than acquaintances or friends, because there are more emotions at stake. Use interactions with strangers who do not push our emotionally reactive button to begin practicing advocating for our boundaries. Some things to keep in mind with setting boundaries:

1. *At the root of unhealthy family dynamics are blurred boundaries.*
2. *The best way to speak a boundary is in a non-emotionally reactive state.*
3. *An emotionally healthy person will always respect a boundary.*
4. *You are not responsible for the emotional response of another person.*
5. *We can’t stop others from crossing our boundaries, but we can choose our response.*

6. *Silence sends a message.*
7. *You have a right to say no or change your mind.*
8. *A person's reaction to a boundary has nothing to do with you and everything to do with their internal environment.*
9. *It's unfair to expect someone who has no boundaries in their own life to understand your own*
10. *Just because you set a boundary does not mean people will respect it. It is up to you to hold the boundary regardless of the other person's behavior.*
11. *Common responses to boundaries are: Who do you think you are? You've changed. Oh, so you're holier than thou? You're selfish. You're being ridiculous.*
12. *A person who does not have healthy boundaries in their own life will respond with anger or despair. This could be a snarky comment, or something to make the person feel guilty. A response to a boundary gives important feedback. A negative response to a boundary is reinforcement of how much it's needed¹³⁸.*

As part of my healing journey, I have now come to terms with that:

I can understand someone's behavior and set a boundary at the same time.

I can know why someone acts a certain way and set a boundary at the same time.

I can have empathy and compassion and set a boundary at the same time.

I can honor someone's experience and set a boundary at the same time.

¹³⁸ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

*I can care about someone deeply and set a boundary at the same time.*¹³⁹

Empathy without boundaries is self destruction¹⁴⁰. Setting a boundary does not mean I do not care about them any more. Setting a boundary means I now care about myself too.

4. Name Feelings

*Half of our mistakes in life
arise from feeling where we ought to think,
and thinking where we ought to feel.
~ John Churton Collins*

Whether it is in the category of sad, glad, mad, or fear, there is grounding in recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting our emotions. Once we can name them and face them, we can work through them. Permit strong emotions to take place. Feel the fear in its entirety. Allocate time for them. Once, feel it all the way. It is cathartic, and it becomes easier to let go. Allow tearful, frustrating, angering, upsetting, disappointing, and frightful moments to take place and be present. Practice naming them. Give voice to them. There is nothing shameful about feeling our range of emotions. Experiencing the range of emotions is the human condition. Just because we feel these emotions once in a while, it does not mean we are defined by them.

There is no time frame to our emotions. They surface like ocean waves and is not to be contained or controlled. I learned it the hard way when I designated a day for myself to move through the five stages of grief after the termination of a long term relationship. It was naïve of me to think I could control, monitor, or regulate my emotions

¹³⁹ Lisa Olivera (@lisaoliveratherapy) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved June 29, 2019, from <https://www.instagram.com/lisaoliveratherapy/>

¹⁴⁰ Silvy Khoucasian

like monitoring a cake being baked in the oven. I let myself experience the stages of grief and thought that was the end of it. But, gosh was I wrong. I was not being completely honest with myself. I wanted to be feeling better already. I was not patient enough. The more I tried to deny, refuse, decline, mask, and suppress my very valid emotions, the more stuck I became in them. It is a vicious cycle.

The process of recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting helped me get unstuck. By accepting the reality of our range of emotions, we help release them. I had to be radically honest with myself. What were my protection layers, my shield, my masks? What was I hiding from? What was I ashamed to feel? What are my coping mechanisms? What was I feeling insecure about? What emotions was I trying to numb? Self awareness and introspection is key. We have to be honest with ourselves to create conscious awareness of our own emotional state¹⁴¹. This is the way to gain clarity, self knowledge, and emotional grounding. What we accept and name, we release.

5. Give What You Crave

If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room¹⁴²

This is another thing I have been practicing since my time in school. Whenever I experienced a stressful moment and find myself wanting reassurance, I text out the encouragement and affirmation I desired. Not sure what inspired me to begin doing this, but I experienced profound rewards. I, not only, processed my feelings independently and supported myself, but tuned my attention and energy to crafting words of affirmation.

¹⁴¹ Dr. Nicole LePera (@the.holistic.psychologist) • Instagram photos and videos. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/the.holistic.psychologist/>

¹⁴² Anita Roddick, Founder of the Body Shop

They are usually maxims like, short kinetic lines that sparks inspiration and grounding. I would go through my contact list and send this to friends and acquaintances alike. Everyone can use a little midday pick me up. Who would not like the opportunity to pause and take a deep breath?

The unexpectedly beautiful thing about this practice is that I received positive energy back in abundance. When I sent these affirmations out, I was not expecting anything in return. I was already benefiting from the practice of focusing my attention on gratitude. But, once people received my message, they respond back with such delight and positivity. Feeling that vibrancy, I was filled with more joy and gratitude knowing that I have shared something lovely with others, made their day that much better, created more positivity in this world. This was such an empowering and grounding experience because I witnessed myself processing, feeling, and supporting myself. This became a heart opening, rewarding, and encouraging practice. I hope you get to try it sometime.

6. Know Your Love Languages

*People crave attention and appreciation more than they do bread.
~ Mother Teresa*

We all crave love, we all understand them a little differently. As we are conditioned in childhood, we all have our preferred way of giving and receiving love. This is why when we are sick as adults, some of us see love as being attended to and some see love as being given personal space. It gets confusing quickly if we do not find a way to talk about our native love language. This is where the 5 Love Languages¹⁴³ come in. Learning about and utilizing the languages of words of affirmation, quality time,

¹⁴³ Chapman, Gary. *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Northfield Publishing, 2010.

physical touch, acts of service, and gift receiving has played a big role in my foundation of emotional groundedness.

Understanding our own native language of love helps our emotional fulfillment because we can now advocate for what a style we desire. This is similar to speaking in your native language instead of an acquired language in adulthood that needs translating all the time. It is harder to get into a novel with as much enjoyment when it is your second or third language as compared to your first native tongue. Same thing with love languages. I may be able to cognitively understand my partner is showing me love through a different love language but I may not always *feel* love. Not because I do not appreciate their effort but because it takes an extra step for my brain and heart to translate that love signal.

Knowing and applying the 5 Love Languages adds more emotional groundedness in our relationships. It gives us a simple roadmap on how to show appreciation and engage appropriately. By identifying practical and powerful ways of expressing appreciation and affirmation, simply by using the appropriate love language that the other person can comprehend, I have been able to establish strong quality relationships with people whom I hold near and dear to my heart. Tailoring my appreciation and validation to each person's primary way of interpreting love has transformed our relationship for the better.

It gave me and my partner a common language to discuss how we each have a primary way of expressing and interpreting love. We each possess our own unique qualities. It also helped with learning how to turn towards each other instead of turning

away¹⁴⁴. This greatly enhanced my emotional groundedness because “when we know our partner is emotionally available to us, we can naturally ease off of them and relax¹⁴⁵.”

Humor, laughter, reciprocity, and other virtues¹⁴⁶ can contribute as someone’s love languages. *Love is a verb, and it is a choice you make every day.*¹⁴⁷ Know your own and figure out your loved ones. Show your love in a way it can be understood and received.

7. Recharge on Your Charger

"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same"¹⁴⁸

Similar to how we each have a preferred way of receiving love, we each have a unique way of replenishing our emotional battery. Explore and discover how you recharge specifically. Everyone is different. We each are like a smartphone that needs recharging after expending battery. Like the different versions of smartphones, each device requires a different charging portal, plug, or attachment. Some of us recharge with other people, some of us do so most effectively alone. Some of our batteries recharge from being in nature. Some with music. Some of us recharge with a certain activity or hobby. Some of us with our beloved pets. Find your own way of recharging and replenish often.

Depending on where you have expanded the battery, how much you have left in reserves, it will take different length of time to recharge on the charge before getting to

¹⁴⁴ Turn Towards Instead of Away. (2015, April 1). Retrieved from The Gottman Institute website: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/turn-toward-instead-of-away/>

¹⁴⁵ Silvy Khoucasian

¹⁴⁶ McCarty, Marietta. *How Philosophy Can Save Your Life: 10 Ideas That Matter Most*. New York: Penguin Group, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Gary Chapman, author of the Five Love Languages

¹⁴⁸ Nelson Mandela

full. Burn out is when the phone is depleted of juice, blacks out, and no longer functioning. Many of us have experienced that sudden unexpected shut off when we have literally used all of our emotional energy until it is out of battery. It is a different story than a phone that is at 80% battery and you put it on the charger for an hour to get it up to 100%. We do not expect a phone that has been depleted of battery to recharge fully in an hour. It would be unreasonable to expect someone who is low on emotional battery to bounce back from it quickly with one sick or personal day or after a short vacation. It takes time.

When we have reached the stage of burnout, where the phone has shut off, it takes an extra long time to revive our emotional groundedness. It is crucial to not wait to put ourselves on the charger until we hit dangerously close to rock bottom. Understand how you recharge. Do so often. It is much easier to keep ourselves charged than to wait for the low battery signal. By us actively maintaining our emotional groundedness, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. How do you regain your emotional groundedness? Find your outlet and recharge.

8. Purge & Release

*Everyone is born a genius, but
the process of living de-geniuses them.
~ Buckminster Fuller*

In order for us to maintain emotional groundedness, we must learn to purge emotions and recover from emotional experiences. This is how we gain equilibrium. Like any high functioning system, there is a way to let off some steam. Learn to release and practice purging emotions. Whether that is intentionally watching sentimental movies that tugs on your heart strings, videos that makes you cry feeling moved and deeply

touched, or listening to particular songs that brings memories back - find what helps you let off some emotional steam.

Every so often, we all need a release. When I feel that coming, I honor that emotion and designate a time for me to be intentionally vulnerable. Thai life insurance commercials are my go-to's. I have found certain ones triggers my emotions wounds and elevates my healing on family trauma, parental dynamic, making sacrifices, and savoring the moment. What I practice doing is acknowledging those feelings and give them room to exist. I do not always know what to do with them after I left them surface, but I do find that sometimes the most powerful thing I can do is acknowledge. Once I give myself permission to feel the emotions, I feel better.

For you, it does not have to be sappy movies or videos that make you cry. It could be an intense sports match that get your frustration and anger out, or it can be a calm painting session to let your inner entanglement work itself out. Whatever it is you need to work on, find a way to make room for it. Our "intuition isn't mystical."¹⁴⁹ We usually know the answers to our own questions. All the resources we need we are already possess in our inner genius. Now we just have to cultivate and trust in our gut feeling, our sixth sense. We are the expert on our life. We know ourselves better than we think.

Physical Wellness

Physical Wellness involves our strength, endurance, stamina, health, functionality, healing, mobility, freedom, agility, flexibility, capability, nutrition, balance,

¹⁴⁹ Dr. James Watson, Nobel laureate and co-discoverer of DNA

nourishment, exploration, evolutionary benefit, adaptation, survival of the fittest, and natural selection.

1. Sleep Well and Enough

So many people spend their health gaining this wealth, and then have to spend their wealth to regain their health.¹⁵⁰

One of the most fundamental aspects of physical wellness is sleep. My dad always reminded us to 早睡早起, meaning go to bed early wake up early, but also has the implied connotation that a regulated sleep schedule is the way to foster and maintain a healthy foundation. It is fundamental to the Chinese concept of 養身 - cultivate physical wellness.

Get enough quality rest. Our bodies naturally knows how to regenerate and rejuvenate. Get out of its way. Limit the late night technology usage or excessive caffeine that interferes with our body's natural sleep cycle. Create a bedtime routine. Follow your bedtime routine. Cue your body to wind down and rest. Sleep well and enough. You will start noticing the difference. Adjust your habits and timing based on how rested you feel when you wake up. You are productive by being alive, your breathing is productive, dreaming is productive, rest is productive, you do not have to earn the right to rest¹⁵¹.

2. Eat Whole and Wild

*Eat your food as your medicines. Otherwise you have to eat medicines as your food.
~ Mr. Ratan Tata*

¹⁵⁰ Materi, A.J. (n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2011, from <http://www.inspirational-quotes-and-quotations.com/health-quotes.html>

¹⁵¹ The Nap Ministry

Eat natural clean and well. Eat food in its natural form. If it does not grow in nature, be cautious. Read labels. Learn what is in your food. Eliminate the non-real processed foods and food products. Limit caffeine. Be aware of the unnatural, overabundance of sugar in almost all of our foods. Sugary foods that lead to serious health problems are masked as healthy food products. Know how food affects your body. Our body is made of protein. We need protein to replenish. Sugars spike our insulin and leave us feeling more hungry.

Eat whole and wild when you can. Notice the color from farm grown salmon to wild caught salmon. There is a drastic difference. Pay attention the next time you are at a grocery store. Farmed salmon has a carrot color, because they are fed carrots to give them pigmentation. Wild salmon eat fish. I am not advocating eating only wild beef or chicken, but pay attention to what these mass produced farm animals are being fed. Cows are meant to eat grass, not corn, burnt potato chips, or a bad batch of chocolate (which happens in the commodities market), and certainly not other cow by-products.

Stop calorie counting. It is not about that. It was never about that. It is about nourishment, nutrition, and giving our body what it needs and deserves.

3. Pay Attention to Your Elimination

*...a part of you is much smarter than you are.
The wise people regularly consult that smarter part.¹⁵²*

What is coming out is just as important if not more than what is going in. Pay attention to how your body is processing and eliminating waste. The human body is a magnificent and intricate system of brilliance. It is wise beyond our understanding and

¹⁵² Michael J. Gelb, Author of How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci

comprehension. When it signals you pertinent information about your health, do not mute it with drugs. It is worthwhile for you to listen attentively. The ideal elimination occurs daily and without much effort. Our bodies were designed to purge waste effectively and efficiently. If not, there is something that is inhibiting its proper function. Listen to your body. Tune in to the signals that it is giving you every day. It informs you of your digestion, congestion, inflammation, and contamination.

Be aware of your body so you can make informed decisions about what to include and exclude from your diet. Every physical body is different, based on our genetics, exposures, habits, and preconditions. Some bodies react to dairy, wheat, caffeine, and sugar. They get headaches, constipation, bloating, diarrhea, acne, fatigue, insomnia, interrupted sleep, joint pain, muscle aches, inability to concentrate or focus from having these things in their body. Have the awareness to make adjustments. Pay attention to your elimination. It is crucial to your physical wellness.

4. Move Often and Sweat Daily

*Everyone who got to where they are
had to begin where they were.¹⁵³*

Our bodies are meant to move. It is designed to move. It is such a natural concept but I learned it the hard way. Being a student then an office worker, I sat sedentary most of my life. I was in constant discomfort and pain. I saw a chiropractor regularly and got temporary relief. Before I headed to my two week Acroyoga Teacher Training, I scheduled a chiropractor appointment anticipating that I would need it the most when I

¹⁵³ Richard Paul Evans, Best-selling author of The Christmas Box

returned. To my surprise, after two weeks of intense physical movement and training, my body was in the least pain and the best condition I had felt in years. Not sitting at my desk for an extended period of time was key. Daily movement is so important for our health.

Move your body. Your body is designed to move. Our joints are lubricated when we move. The more we stay sedentary, the more stiff we will feel. It is okay if movement was not in your daily habit before. It was not in mine, but we can start small. Walk to get water every hour you sit, drink water while you work so you have to get up and go to the restroom, schedule a walking meeting with a colleague instead of sitting at a desk, set a timer on your phone to stand and stretch every so often. Sweat is our body's way to detox. Let those toxins come out. We all know what to do but the difference lies in what we actually do. You can begin today.

5. Drink Water & Stay Hydrated

*The difference between who you are and who you want to be
is what you do.
~ Bill Phillips*

Drinking water is one of those small acts that has a big impact on our physical wellness. We all know drinking water is good for us but many of us do not actually get enough water each day. Water is life's matter and matrix, mother and medium, there is no life without water¹⁵⁴. Water cleanses our system, replenishes our tissues, helps us think clearly, and stay emotionally balanced. Ever get headaches? Drink water. Feeling fatigued for no reason? Drink water. Cannot get over a cold? Drink water. Craving to eat but you just ate? Drink water. Peeing the color yellow? Drink water. These may all be signs our body is trying to signal us for water. Each cell needs water to function properly.

¹⁵⁴ Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Our nervous system informs us when we need water. A dehydrated nervous system ceases to signal us properly that we need water. It is a vicious cycle. How much water do you drink besides the coffee, juice, and other beverages you consume?

When I first started putting water consumption as a priority, I was strict with myself. I would fill up my daily allotment of water and line them up in the kitchen. This way, I do not have to keep track throughout the day. I just have to finish what I have already set out. I transitioned to listening to my body and consuming proportionally to the activities of the day. When I am out in the sun and exercised, my body needs more water. When I am sitting sedentary inside, my body needs less water. Drinking water eventually became a habit and I no longer have to actively think about it. It is perhaps my strongest habit today and has become second nature. My nervous system is primed to alarm me when I am not getting enough and headed towards dehydration. Be aware of what your body wants, needs, how it functions. Revive your system. Stay hydrated.

6. Laugh Yourself Silly

*The body heals with play, the mind heals with laughter, and the soul heals with joy.
~ Proverb*

Laughing and being goofy does the heart good. Laughing reduces stress hormones, increases good hormones, boosts the immune system, regulates blood pressure, increases blood oxygenation, improves memory, enhances mood, and promotes creativity¹⁵⁵. Who does not want some laughter? Whether it is spending time with your person, watching your favorite show, consuming random funny pet videos, or

¹⁵⁵ Nagdeve, M. (2013, April 25). 10 Impressive Benefits of Laughter. Retrieved from Organic Facts website: <https://www.organicfacts.net/health-benefits/other/health-benefits-of-laughter.html>

reminiscing on those moments that you laughed so hard you almost peed yourself - laugh yourself silly.

You can find laughter in a passion project. What is something you have always wanted to do if you had the time? That time is now. Is it walking with your pet on that trail? Being outside playing ball? Trying out that painting class? Inviting those friends over for game night? Or building that project you bought all the parts for but just did not get to it? Develop what is a fulfilling and rewarding outlet for you body, mind, and heart. Find something that puts you in Flow mode that you do not realize how much time has passed. However laughter happens for you, do that. Frequently.

7. Breathe Deeply

*Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing is my anchor.
~Thich Nhat Hanh*

Breathe intentionally, consciously, and deeply. We take thousands of breaths everyday without thinking. The process of breathing in and out allows fresh oxygen to pass to the blood, as carbon dioxide is removed from the body. Deep breathing, however, is a mindful practice that provides numerous health benefits beyond the standard respiration required to live¹⁵⁶. Your body does not care whether a practice is ancient or modern, secular or religious, proven or unproven. It just wants to experience safety and security¹⁵⁷. Deep breathing relaxes the muscles, improves oxygenation, lowers blood pressure, releases endorphins, and increases detoxification¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁶ Benefits of Deep Breathing. (n.d.). Retrieved from LIVESTRONG.COM website:
<https://www.livestrong.com/article/92264-benefits-deep-breathing/>

¹⁵⁷ Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands

¹⁵⁸ 5 Benefits of Deep Breathing Exercises for Stress + Happiness. (n.d.). Retrieved from
<https://livingthenourishedlife.com/5-ways-youll-benefit-from-daily-deep/>

Always remember to take a deep breathe. The exhale breath is just as important as the inhale breath. Deep breathing helps to decrease stress, anxiety, and depression, strengthen the immune system, increase happiness and optimism, improves sleep and trauma symptoms, and reduces impulsivity, cravings, and addictions¹⁵⁹. It will grant you happier cells, a calmer mood, better circulation, and far greater concentration and clarity. Enough oxygen does everyone good. It is a powerful way to regulate and control our emotions, and creating a more peaceful and productive mind. It can activate our parasympathetic nervous system which helps with resting and digesting¹⁶⁰. Breathing is a natural way for us to create a sense of security and a more peaceful mind heart and body. Breathe deeply.

8. Be

*We are human beings, not human doings.
~ Deepak Chopra*

How often do we just let ourselves be? So much of our day and life is wrapped up in doing - how much we have accomplished, how much we are tackling currently, and how much we will do in the future. “Self-Care is not about what you’re doing, it’s about who you’re BE-ing! It’s not a one time action, it’s a lifestyle¹⁶¹.” My dad always had a saying to keep us grounded in our physical wellness. Whenever I encountered a moment of not knowing what to do with my diet, exercise, or routine, he always reminded me to

¹⁵⁹ Emma Seppala. (2014, February 7). Benefits of Breathing: The Scientific Benefits of Breathing INFOGRAPHIC. Retrieved from Emma Seppälä, Ph.D. website: <https://emmaseppala.com/benefits-breathing-scientific-benefits-breathing-infographic/>

¹⁶⁰ Emma Seppala. (2014, February 7). Benefits of Breathing: The Scientific Benefits of Breathing INFOGRAPHIC. Retrieved from Emma Seppälä, Ph.D. website: <https://emmaseppala.com/benefits-breathing-scientific-benefits-breathing-infographic/>

¹⁶¹ Natasha Lee, Spiritual Midwife

do what is natural. Follow the rhythm of nature, he would say. If it is natural, then it is a good gauge for what our body is meant to do, eat, drink, and move. There is wisdom in our intuition and following our natural instincts.

In our modern society, much emphasis is placed on *doing*. It is externally facing, outwardly looking, and future oriented. It is perceived as superior than *being*, and advocated and pursued more diligently. We want to accomplish more, gain more, and interact more. I remember the days and years where I kept myself unnecessarily busy with meaningless things. It was so that I had the excuse of having no time to face my own demons of social anxiety, awkwardness, and insecurities. It was my sense of inadequacy and unworthiness that I was running away from. I was afraid to face them fearing what I could uncover. I kept myself wrapped up in the *doing* so I did not have time to simply *be*. Not doing was scary for me. My whole worth was wrapped up in being a good daughter, good sister, good student, good athlete, and good presenter. Who would I *be* if I wasn't *doing*? *Being*, on the other hand, is more of a reflective state,

...one of contentment and awareness, and in which one is more inward looking and in that sense, self sufficient. When one feels a heightened sense of being, there is a greater awareness of the present moment, and the person feels anchored in the now.

In a state of being there is stillness and calm, and awareness about the fact that we have a perpetual ability to create more needs, hence be doing all the time. This awareness can help us to step back and become a non-judgmental observer of our intense, sometimes frenzied activity, and the anxious wait for results. We can then become more in tune with our authentic selves and have the necessary detachment to take wise and well thought out decisions. Needs get reduced, the noise gets less, and our harried selves in particular can move towards a more contented life.

*Being brings greater clarity and focus into our life, and makes us more productive. We spend less nervous energy dealing with innumerable wants and distractions, and remain focused in a state of relaxed alertness*¹⁶².

How can we function from a greater sense of *being* while *doing*? We can check in with ourselves. Ask ourselves if all the energy we put into being busy is actually serving us. What part is it serving? Is it our ego? Are we avoiding facing something? Be aware and intentional with what we are doing instead of just *doing*. Spend some quiet reflective time not *doing* and just *be*. Dedicate time to *be* even if it may feel uncomfortable in the beginning. Choosing to function from a state of *being* enables us to find more meaning in our lives and create greater wellbeing. Treasure yourself for being, not doing¹⁶³. When the water is muddied how do you see the bottom? Let it lie still, and then you will¹⁶⁴. When our world is frenzied with *doing* how do we see through clearly? Let ourselves *be*, and then we will.

¹⁶² Power Tool: Being vs. Doing -. (2012, June 6). Retrieved from International Coach Academy website: <https://coachcampus.com/coach-portfolios/power-tools/shobha-naidu-being-vs-doing/>

¹⁶³ Gina Greenlee

¹⁶⁴ Lao Tse

Chapter Summary

*We cannot teach people anything.
We can only help them discover it within themselves.*
~ Galileo Galilei

How do we cultivate resilience? The ability to bounce back connotes evolutionary power and survival traits. According to many experts, resilience is quite common, and people are very capable of learning the skills that it takes to become more resilient. The three fundamental principles that I have boiled down from my 22 years in American education are gratitude attitude, growth mindset, and inner healing. Focus our attitude on what we are grateful for as we get more of what we focus on. Believe you can, then you can. And to create a different future, we must release our past. These three fundamental principles have paved the way for my resilience.

Resilience is a muscle you can train and a skill you can cultivate. I shared my personal toolbox for cultivating and maintaining my mental, emotional, and physical resilience. They help you increase your resilience quotient. I hope from the Mental Clarity section, you gained insight to the power of positive affirmations, aiming for progress, spending time alone, and taking personal accountability. From the Emotional Groundedness toolbox, you took away strategies on how to respond without being emotionally charged, draw healthy boundaries, advocate for yourself, and release your emotional steam. And that the Physical Wellness tips reminded you to listen to yourself more, tune into your body, and pay attention to all the wise signals it sends us each day. All of these small, daily, practical habits help to increase your resilience quotient.

I find it is much more effective to use every small opportunity for personal growth than to attempt them in big strides. These simple habits that are small actions with big

impact. They have transformed my life for the better and I continue to utilize them to replenish and rejuvenate. These techniques have helped me achieve and actualize a better sense of groundedness, empowerment, and advocacy in life. I hope they have inspired the same for you.

CHAPTER 6: UNIQUELY ME, UNIVERSALLY WE

This chapter focuses the attention on the implications of cultivating resilience in the field of higher education and student affairs. How does the concept and practice of cultivating resilience relate to us as educators and leaders? I take the specific and apply it to the universal. How does my unique journey connect to the larger human experience? Points of universalizability will be presented throughout this dissertation, and may be self-evident, but I will make explicit connections on how these “universalizables” positively impact the way we do our work as higher education and student affairs professionals, educators, and leaders.

6.1 How Does It Relate?

*We are already one and we imagine we are not.
And what we have to recover is our original unity.
Whatever we have to be is what we are.
~ Thomas Merton*

How does cultivating resilience relate to us as educators and leaders? What do we do with this information now that we know what Resilience is and why it might be important? How can we ensure our community and future generations be elevated in their position/toolbox of resilience?

We are role models. What we do set an example for others to see and emulate. We teach skill sets for the next generation. These are transferable life skills that can be applied in all aspects of life. They are relatable, applicable, and universal. Encountering challenges in life and finding ways to overcome them is a human experience. We create culture. Our actions facilitate culture. Our examples foster culture. We, as good leaders, lead by example. Not do as I say; but do as I do. We enable others to take care of themselves when we give ourselves the permission to practice cultivating resilience. We

empower others to do the same. We prepare our team, our students, our loved ones for life as we teach them the tools to practice and grow resilient. We trust our students and teams to make sound judgments based on the tools we have provided them.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. You playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine like children do. It's not just in some of us. It's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.¹⁶⁵

Being an educator and leader that is mindful of cultivating resilience in our life, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we build up ourselves; we build up others - our team, our family, our students, our people.

The matter of cultivating resilience is uniquely me and universally we. It is unique to each one of us in the spheres it shows up, but it is the fundamental principles that are universally relatable and similar in concept. It is a lifetime journey. It is not one and done. It is not something to check off the list. Resilience gives people the strength to tackle problems head-on, overcome adversity, and move on with their lives. In the wake of traumas, many individuals demonstrated the behaviors that typify resilience. Not only were they able to remain strong in the face of almost unbearable loss but they were also able to carry on and even offer emotional support to others affected by the same tragedies. Even in the face of events that seem utterly unimaginable, people can marshal the strength to not just survive, but to prosper¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁵ Marianne Williamson, A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles

¹⁶⁶ Cherry, 2018

My personal stories of grief, survival, bullies, healing, belonging, and being in limbo may be relatable to students of color who cannot seem to find a place of belonging in higher education, first generation students who can only exist in survival mode, and queer non-binary identified folks who are experiencing bullies, microaggression, and bias on a daily basis. My experience can also be relatable to low income students¹⁶⁷ who struggle with food insecurity and do not know where their next meal is, international or immigrant students who feel lost in a foreign new world¹⁶⁸, and students with a disability who feel they are stuck in a world that is not designed for them.

Resilience makes us more effective leaders and educators. By finding our own way beyond surviving to striving and thriving, we are more capable to mentor, coach, and guide others. We are more prepared to share advice, be a listening ear, and act as a sounding board. When we have our own oxygen mask on, we can empower others to put on their oxygen mask. When we are thriving ourselves, we can counsel, develop, and pass our learnings forward. Hurt people hurt people. Empowered people empower people. In our empowered selves, we are more capable of working with students instead of doing to or doing for students¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁷ Lubrano, Alfred. *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, white-Collar Dreams*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004.

¹⁶⁸ Mendoza, Louis, and S. Shankar. *Crossing Into America: The New Literature of Immigration*. New York: The New Press, 2003.

¹⁶⁹ Costello, Bob, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel. *The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators*. Bethlehem: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009, 85.

*What we think or what we know or what we believe is, in the end,
of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.
~ John Ruskin*

I hope my three fundamental principles on Resilience and daily practical tips have helped you understand things you may not have realized, allowed you to imagine what you may not have visualized, and prompted you to express what you may not have acted upon. My hope is that it reminded you to release what you may not have needed to guard against, nourish what you may not have absorbed, enhance what you may not have had the chance to practice, and extend the lifelong health benefits you will gain. Resilience amidst adversity is the sine qua non principle for meaningful and effective leadership in education. Cheers to you taking one step closer to cultivating your resilience today.

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