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Personal Essay

A few years back I was in London at a café. I had used the restroom before leaving and scribbled on the bathroom stall was a quote that goes as so: “What you allow, is what will continue.” Something found on a dingy bathroom on the door usually strikes me as pointless, but for some reason that quote really resonated with me.

I was 19 at the time. I was in a relationship that was not good for me. In that, I lost touch with who I was: physically, mentally, and emotionally. I had lost an unhealthy amount of weight. I was separated from my family and friendships. The things I did that brought me joy, I was no longer doing. I was lacking every day motivation and stability. Everything I did was for the person I was with. They said jump, I jumped. That type of thing. I was in a downward spiral in the worst way, yet I knew exactly why all of it was happening. For whatever reason, all that time, I never did anything about it. I was static, for three years. I just stayed.

That March, my brother was stationed in the UK and told me to come visit for a while. “Studying abroad” had a really nice ring to it. More so, I wanted to just escape the day to day reality I was faced with. On the trip, about two weeks in was when I came across the quote in the café. Immediately it engraved itself in my mind. Immediately it opened my eyes. I realized that while I had spent so much time blaming the person I was with for what was going on, that I was just as much at fault for allowing it to happen. I realized for starters, that staying in the relationship-regardless of what I did or hoped- was never going to make that person change who they are. It was only hurting me more and more. I was exhausting my own health in trying to

change someone else, I forgot about myself. It took that quote to put that into perspective for me. Such a random place and thing to come across but it really taught me in that moment that the most important person in my life, is me. With that, I am in control. In control of what hurts me, who hurts me, how things impact my life, and how to change it.

I knew when I left for the trip that things needed to change. After the epiphany from the quote, I made a promise to myself that once I made it back home I was going to start putting myself first. My relationship ended, by choice through me. I started visiting my family more and rebuilding friendships. I was finally in a state of health physically and mentally. The emotional part took a little longer, but it blossomed, too. While I know this all sounds stupid, looking back I should have never let anything progress as far as it did in the first place. But it happens. And it's something that has taught me a lot. In line with the quote, it taught me to take care of me. In all relationships and on all levels of life. And more so- on a different note- it taught me that it is okay to say no to things for the sake of myself. It's okay to not go out partying or drinking with friends because I'm too tired or need to study for that test. It's okay to miss class because someone I'm close to really needs my company. Or just because I want a day to myself. Or say no to something simply for the fact that I don't want to do it. Whatever the case may be. It's okay to be selfish with myself. The relationship alone is an experience that taught me something in itself on how I should be treated and red flags to avoid. But the quote is what opened my eyes. Allowing someone to control my life is not a good way to live. But if I allowed it, it is what would continue. Sounds simple, but sometimes it's really not that easy to follow. And the quote was like a giant flashing sign telling me to stop being such an idiot and get a hold of life and myself.

While I know this is a rather personal story, it is one of the most significant lessons I have learned in my life. No, I didn't need a quote to know that the relationship I was in wasn't any good. I knew it. I believe I just hoped they would change. (adolescent, silly teenage girl).

Eventually I would like to think that I would have got the sense to leave regardless. But I would never take it back. Not a single day of it. I grew as a person and have a much better understanding of how things should be. For something so small, it brought so much balance in my life. From the time I saw the quote, to current day. It's a motto I will follow for the rest of my life. I am not a tree, I am not stuck in the ground and rooted to one spot forever. If I don't like what is happening in my life, I just need to move. It's that easy.

Moral of the story: Always read the graffiti in the bathroom, it could change your life.