


To February Me from November Me;
How After 19 Years, It Took Me 9 Months to See Myself as A
Friend & Not an Enemy.




As I try another attempt to type out the words of how I felt nine months ago, I find myself in floods of tears; I'm sad for the version of myself who sat shaking in the counselling waiting room, scared for what was to happen next & partially angry at herself for being there in the first place. Now, nine months later, I wish so much I could go back & hold her hand & tell her how better her life is going to be, how she's going to start living for what feels like the first time in so long. I want to go back & say to the girl in the waiting room how strong she is for taking the steps to talk to someone; I want to tell her she's not a fool for thinking she's bothering someone or wasting their time. I want to tell her (even though I know she will not believe me) that it does get better & *she* gets better.

When I experienced 'low-lows' in the past, I never knew what the causes were; it almost felt like a came out of nowhere. In January of this year I remember tidying my wardrobe, taking out old clothes that had even older memories & as well as this I was messaging my boyfriend since we were planning to go away for summer on a holiday. Out of thin air, it was like this heavy, dark cloud surrounded me & my head.




All I could think about was everything I was doing wrong or have done wrong or even what I will do that will just turn out wrong. The next day in a lecture hall of 200 students, I felt like I was alone, in a small box. It felt like if I simply disappeared, no one would notice, it would just be the empty box in which I was once incased in. After being in a relationship for over a year with my partner, I was scared to tell him how I felt - for our entire relationship I had been this happy, bubbly person who never had a negative thought in her head. I had told him about my past of having lows out of the blue so it would not be completely unknown to him. But as quickly as the dark cloud came in my head, this thought of doubt appeared too. The thought of doubt that even though he tells me every day he loves me, & he cares for me, what if... what if I tell him & he does not care. What if, this is a problem that he does not want to bother with, & he does not want to bother with me- what if *I am* the bother.

I kept replaying all the times I could have been a pain or an annoyance to him in my head. I thought about how I must have annoyed him when I was late leaving my house the week prior, or how stupid I was for saying I didn't like the hotel we were booking for our holiday. The more & more thoughts that came into my head the more it felt like the box would get smaller, until one day I just felt suffocated. I told him that day how I was feeling... & although it took him a while to come to terms with dealing with what the doctor labeled a "depressive episode", he held me & he said I should talk to someone & that it broke his heart to see me this way. Looking back for that minute it felt like there was no box, just us. I started counselling in early February of 2020, which was something I never thought I was going to be strong enough to give a go; even before I started seeing my counsellor, my head convinced me it was like the last resort. I remember thinking '*if this didn't work out, nothing's going to work out*'.




With no prior experience of counselling a part of me thought I could just ask every question & I would be given a straight answer; like how I could know what to do with this dark cloud over me, how I could fix myself for my boyfriend & how I could be better. After my first session I realized I was not going to come out with all the answers, it was not as simple as asking “can you fix me?” & being told “yes” or “no”. Instead, even though I came out with a tear stained face, I came out feeling lighter. Like a little bit of the cloud was gone, as if a part of it washed away with the tears. It was not an hour of me pouring out all my problems & getting the secret answers of how to sort them all, it was my counsellor & I going little by little through what was going on in my head. I want to go back in time to the girl who sat in front of the counsellor, as she held on to her tissue for dear life, I want to tell her counselling wasn't going to *tell* her how to be better & most importantly it was not going to fix her *for her boyfriend*. Counselling was going to guide her how to be her best self, her happiest self & it was going to aid her to get better for her, & no one else.

I have come to learn that for me counselling was not being told right from wrong by someone else; it was reflecting on my past but not letting it dictate my future. From one of my early sessions I had realized from a young age I taught myself the best thing I could be was whatever my significant other needed me to be. I convinced myself I was only good if I was good for my partner. It was something I carried through my teenage years even into my current relationship. It was not always something noticeable, it could be evident in small things. Like worrying over how my hair looked, if my partner at the time like my hair curly or straight & without noticing I would do my hair in that way that they preferred. Reflecting with my counsellor it made me realize it was evident in larger parts of my relationship as well.




It was like I taught myself I could not disagree with my partner or it would make me a bad person. Looking back now I can see that my 'low-low' was not caused by emptying my wardrobe, but rather something switched in my head in the moment I disagreed with my boyfriend; when planning what hotel we would stay in for our holiday. It is something so little, but in my head, there was like a snap, for one of the first times I chose to not agree with what my boyfriend had said. I have always seen myself as a very caring person as someone who is friendly to all, but I have come to realize there is one person I never saw as a friend... myself. I used to think there was different rules for other people than to me; other people shouldn't feel bad about themselves or put themselves down, but I told myself I deserved all my negativity, I wasn't good enough for others or relationships or even myself. I was always a few steps behind where I should have been, I was the biggest enemy.

I think about how I treated myself 9 months ago, it is something I find so hard to even imagine now. I do not know how I did it, how any problem I came across little or small I always put the blame on myself & hated myself for it. I convinced myself I was always the worst version of myself, there was nothing that could change, that it was set in stone. One session led to another and to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic & the closure of college; I had my last in person counselling session, the day colleges closed. Heading into that session, I was so much calmer than my first one but looking back now I was still so nervous, still had so much growing to do. Thanks to my counsellor it was like I had found the roots of everything that was stopping me from going forward, but I still needed help on finding how to go forward without looking back. With COVID-19 at large, my sessions moved on to video chat which I was beyond grateful for; I began making the little steps towards growth.




During my sessions, my counsellor would demonstrate little methods of dealing with those negative thoughts that came to my head. One that really stands out to me was when I had negative thoughts about how I looked or how I did things. The method was to picture all the negative words I thought about myself in front of me & slowly squish them into a tiny ball, until they were just gibberish. On some days during lockdown I tried my best to give it a go; some days it worked & some the days it didn't, I ended up making myself laugh picturing what I was doing & how it would look to the outside world. A girl squishing imaginary words into a pile till they were... well, imaginary. I would be lying if I said every time I did it, it was easy. There were some days I would squish these imaginary words & then when it came to replacing with something nice, I could not.

There would be days I would avoid the mirror just so I didn't have to label those negative thoughts, so I didn't have to switch the words, so I didn't have to replace it with a compliment. Overtime I would make myself do it. I began little, on the good days where I would feel happier with myself, I was easier to do. There were days that my 'happy percentage' would be lower, but I would try the method of squishing the words, just to get it just a bit higher. Nowadays I do it without noticing. The second I feel me thinking negative of myself, I see the word, I squish it, I replace it with something that makes me feel happy, & I move on. It is something so little, yet it was such a big step for me to take. Some of the other things I learned through counselling sounds like things people should already know how to do or how to handle, for instance I learned how to deal with arguments. It sounds like a simple thing for people; you fight, you make up, you move on. But for me on my past my arguments went like mild fighting then I would become too submissive to stand with my point, we would move on & then the argument would become their distant memory but would haunt me in my head.




I learned how to be assertive when it came to disagreements with my boyfriend & with other people as well. I learned that I needed to state how I saw the situation, say how the situation would make me feel, & then explain how I think this situation could be mended or how to find a compromise. As lockdown continued to go on & on, I was able to use these steps which not only aided with arguments I had with my boyfriend specifically but helped developed our communication within our relationship. As I have admitted, my path from January to now was not a constant incline of becoming better. As the first lockdown was lifted, I spent time with my counsellor, reviewing that relationships were not one sided & where one person cannot be right all the time. As hard as this lesson was for me to learn, it was also something that my boyfriend had to learn. For all of our relationship, I had always leaned to his choice, I always made sure he was happy; I want to be clear that my boyfriend didn't always 'demand' his way, rather when we began our relationship I always believed that my significant others opinion was above all else, so it sorts of became incorporated in our relationship.

As the lockdown was being lifted, I began being more assertive in our relationship; I began to voice my own opinions & allow myself to be an equal part in the relationship. I will admit it did cause tension within our relationship as well as the fact we had not seen each other in person in almost two months or come in contact with each other in almost three. Contact was a big deal to me nine months ago; as someone who felt like they always wanted their partner's approval, when words were left unsaid, contact filled that gap for me. When I saw my boyfriend for the first time in two months (with social distancing) it felt like my head & my heart went into overdrive.



There was two parts of me & they were so split down the middle; one side just wanted to hold him & be in his arms as I hoped he would tell me everything is ok & to get that sense of approval from him. But then there was this new part of me, this part of me that was growing & learning to be my own person, the side that does not need someone else to function, to exist. It was conflicting & for the first time in months I found myself thinking like the girl in the counselling waiting room. I felt like I needed someone to tell me was it right to be in this relationship? Was I going to be able to grow if me & my boyfriend had spent over a year set in my old ways? It wasn't easy, it was really hard in fact, but we talked it out & we decided at the end of the day we both care for & love each other so much that he was willing to change if it was for the better of our relationship & if it was the best thing for me.

We have been together almost two years now I feel like I am the most me version of me I have been our entire relationship. I continued to grow with my counsellor throughout the end of the school year & into the summer; after finishing my first year of college I began an internship in a career I hope to work in in the future. My counsellor & I worked on how I viewed myself not only at the present, but in the past, which leads me to what I think is one of my biggest achievements to date. The day I realized I stopped viewing myself as my own enemy. When it came to dealing with problems or situations I was faced with instead of placing the blame on myself & instead of giving out to myself for things that were out of my control, I treated myself like my friend. For the first time in what feels like my entire life, I put myself in the rules that I had for my friends & not the set rules I had for myself. The moment I began treating myself like my own friend felt like the first time I truly believed in myself & loved who I was, inside & out.



My head didn't know any other way to treat myself other than as the worst of the worst & now when I think of myself, I don't feel hate or feel not worth it; I feel so proud of the person I become not only in the past year but day by day. I am still growing, I am still becoming the happiest version of myself that I can be, & I know that takes time, I know now it does not happen in just one counselling session. The journey I've been on the past nine months has made me so proud of the person I've become but I also know I wouldn't have even gone on this journey if it wasn't for my counsellor. From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for making me proud of myself, for showing me I can love myself & for being the reason I am still here today. There are not enough words in my vocabulary to tell you how grateful I am for your support, but I want to thank you wholeheartedly.

So, if I had to go back to the girl in the counselling waiting room & I asked her what her biggest problem is right now, I know what her answer would be. She would say she does not know if she is going to get through today. If you asked me in current time what is my biggest problem right now, I would say... maybe I'm a bit worried I've written too many words or maybe I'm worried I'll burn the pasta when I cook dinner tonight... I am so proud of the girl in the counselling waiting room. She may have thought she could do nothing right, that she is too submissive & not brave but I've taken so many steps over the past number of months to be the person I am today & to me she is so incredibly brave for taking the first step.

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