

I was always a bouncing baby boy.

Well, not in the sense that I was happy and energetic. Rather, I had a tic. I would constantly jump up and down whenever I thought about something that excited or upset me. Adults found it endearing and cute, then strange and quirky, and eventually they sent me to a therapist, and then a psychiatrist. I took medicine that was supposed to solve the problem, and talked to a lady who nodded and smiled a lot, but neither really helped. Help came in the form of a trampoline about 3 feet tall and 8 feet wide. The magic I felt as a ten year old bouncing on it was like I was flying. Every day, after school, I'd jump on the trampoline and watch my worries melt away as I enjoyed bouncing up and down.

Years passed, and the trampoline got more worn from use until I was in eighth grade. I remember March 17 very clearly that year. Having heard the news that school was shutting down for two weeks, I was excited. I was no longer bouncing up and down, thanks to my trampoline, but I still had minor tics that made people side eye me funny. It made me feel awful, like they were judging everything about me just by watching me do strange motions with my fingers. I hid hobbies I thought to be strange or weird, and always pretended to be on top of pop culture. At least I would no longer do a tic when I felt anxious. I realized that for sure after I overheard someone say, "You know that this might not be a good thing, right? I mean, what if this disease is dangerous?"

I didn't have a tic for the rest of that day.

They were right- two weeks turned into three, then a month, and before I knew it, the world was on lockdown. Online classes began, and I suddenly found my trampoline no longer to be as effective as it used to be. That scared me. Why wouldn't my worries go away? Why do I constantly feel scared even if no one is watching me?

My dad, a filmmaker working abroad in Canada, asked us to come up for just a few days. I agreed, hoping to see my trampoline as soon as possible again.

The week-long quarantine felt like an eternity. The house we stayed in was gigantic, but my bed was a pitifully small bunk. I remember hitting my head against the ceiling every time I woke up, and my brother admonishing me for being so upset about being in such a huge house. (He had a queen sized bed, of course.)

After that week ended, my dad floated the idea of staying up there until the pandemic ended. My family agreed, and I was forced to as well. I mean, what was I supposed to say? "I need my trampoline?"

I didn't want anyone to think I was abnormal or had special needs. I just prayed that everything would be over soon.

I spent eight months in Canada.

My online classes weren't very hard, but I wasn't doing well at them anyways. I would constantly break down crying over inconsequential things. I was in nice houses in great neighborhoods, but I always felt unsatisfied. My family was constantly asking me to come with them to do things and I had bad attitudes during it. Eventually my dad snapped and asked me, "Why do you come if you're just going to make us miserable?"

What could I say? That I didn't want people to think I was abnormal, and so I went and did things I thought were normal even if I didn't want to?

Ridiculous. That would be admitting that I had a problem. I can't do that. What if they put me back in the special ed room with the smelly kid who was drooling and the wiry hyper kid who was always laughing?

No, of course not.

Looking back, it becomes easy to pinpoint what I was feeling, but then I was 14 and confused. I felt like everyone hated me and I couldn't figure out why.

I went into my sophomore year of high school— my first year in person— feeling that same way. And it was miserable. I've blocked most of it out of my mind. Probably for the better. I finally had my trampoline back, but I rarely used it. I was ashamed that I had to rely on something like it.

Then, I had a transformative moment. One day, in the middle of lunch, I met a person who I hadn't known since eighth grade. Their backpack was covered in cats, and when I asked them what it was, they quietly told me it was from a book series about cats with magic powers, and showed me their art from it, while asking me if I thought it was weird.

I remember the mix of emotions I felt then. Most clearly, it was jealousy. This person had to be made fun of, right? I can't be seen associating with them.

But a single clear thought shot through all the negativity, and it said—

I want to be like them.

I want to have my insecurities out in the open and comfortable with them. I want to be happy with who I am.

So I told them I didn't think it was weird. I thought it looked good, in fact.

It's not wrong to want to change. Everyone has things they don't like about themselves. But accepting those problems is the first step towards changing for the better. And depriving yourself of things you like to do just because you're worried about how it looks to other people is definitely not how to do things.

That day, when I went home, I used my trampoline again.

It was like I was using it for the first time again.