Dear Diary,

**Part I:** Processing relationship stuff

**Part II:** Processing Eric’s cancer

## Part I:

As a part of my therapy, I have been working through the ending of Dylan and my relationship. Part of that is to journal through some prompts that Lori, my therapist, gave me in order to process… so without further ado, here is that processing:

**Questions:**

How do you feel after hanging out with your former partner?

Do you like how you act when you're around them?

Do you need to psych yourself up to hang out with them?

How is the balance in the relationship? (i.e. Either they don't reciprocate your effort or vice versa).

Do you respect them?

Do you ever feel pressured or "guilt tripped" by them?

How often do you argue/have conflict?

***How do you feel after hanging out with your former partner?***

While Dylan and I were dating, when I would finish hanging out with him, I think towards the beginning of our relationship I felt a little bit of relief at having some time to myself, but also anxiety about all of the things that I had to catch up on, mostly in terms of making connections with my roommates and friends in my life. After a while though, I started to feel a bit anxious being away from him… which gave me an indication that I was becoming codependent with him, and that stressed me out. I will say though, that a lot of the time when I was done hanging out with him, I would feel really rejuvenated. Spending time with him was often very calming and fun and comforting…

Now that we have broken up, after spending time with him I often feel confused. Usually though it’s because I am worried that he isn’t going to be able to get over me if we spend time together and especially if we are doing anything physical together. It makes me worry if I am making a wrong choice and sacrificing healing over short-term pleasure.

***Do you like how you act when you're around them?***

During the relationship, I didn’t like how I acted around Dylan sometimes. I felt like I was angrier and more judgemental and also that I was complaining more often or asking for support more often than I needed to, just because I knew that I had him to lean on. It definitely felt like I was becoming smaller than I wanted to be, to make space for him or to be an identity that didn’t feel right for me. This wasn’t always though. There were also a lot of amazing moments where I really liked how I acted. But towards the end, I think I felt like I was lying to myself and him so much that the only thing I could do was to ignore and numb everything out, which led to a lot of drug use with him and I felt like I wasn’t taking care of myself because I was being so inauthentic, and that wasn’t good. I feel like I am much more myself around him *now* when I see him, now that we aren’t dating.

***Do you need to psych yourself up to hang out with them?***

I never needed to do this unless I knew that Dylan was having a rough day mentally, which was more the first ¾ of our relationship. Those days were *rough*. I definitely felt like even if I was taking super good care of myself and feeling on top of the world, I had to match his energy or use all of my own energy to try to make him happy and to lift him up. That sucked the life out of me a lot and I had to mentally and emotionally prep for that. Some days when I hadn’t talked to him, I would prepare myself for the worst just in case it was a bad day, because it was so hit or miss and often impossible to predict :( Towards the end of our relationship, I think I had to psych myself up a little bit in order to try to live fully into the present and to stop thinking so much about the future and to ignore the fact that I knew I wanted the relationship to be over… But I would say for the most part, with those exceptions, I didn’t feel like I had to psych myself up for anything else. When it was good, it was *really* good.

***How is the balance in the relationship? (i.e. Either they don't reciprocate your effort or vice versa).***

I think for a long time at the beginning of our relationship I didn’t reciprocate Dylan’s effort. In part because I wasn’t living into the relationship fully because I still wasn’t sure if I wanted to be in it. Then after going to therapy for a while and recognizing that I was deciding and making a deliberate choice to be in it, I think it felt like he wasn’t reciprocating my efforts when I had to take care of him through the holidays. Then, in the last few months I think that Dylan probably put more work into the relationship than I did, mostly because I had already decided that it was going to end.

***Do you respect them?***

To be totally honest, there were a lot of times during the relationship that I didn’t. The way that he can’t clean his space or keep it clean made me think of him like a child a lot. It made me really frustrated that he couldn’t just take care of himself or his space and made me feel like he was an infant or immature. Also, the way that he obviously lied to himself about being over his ex-wife and having processed the ending of that relationship made me think of him as immature too. And then the way that he went about trying to get his career in-line and taking out his frustrations on my own career success made me disrespect him too. With his mental health, that never made me disrespect him, though the way that he leaned on me for it at the beginning of our relationship was definitely not mature or healthy, and so it might have subconsciously made me disrespect him a little bit. Also his inability to make community either with his family or with friends made me lose a little bit of respect for him too. Not because of them, but because of his inability to try to make stuff happen and for giving up. Also his lack of self control when it came to ordering food constantly and not making food for himself, or not being able to take care of Basil fully on his own for a while. OH and I think the thing I have disrespected the most about him is the way that he handles money!! Even this morning I was thinking about this. The fact that he literally was so upset and stressed about money for moving and yet still didn’t put in any effort to find someone for the month of May for his new apartment and lost almost $2000 on that, and then is spending a bunch of money buying brand new stuff and furniture for his new apartment… it just frustrates me that he is so immature about the way that he budgets and spends his money and how he still relies heavily on his mom to pick up the pieces, when he could have easily saved up so much money so far, and could easily be not spending money right now but still is… that has made me disrespect him a bit too.

I think after writing this all out I am realizing that played a HUGE role in my inability to see a long-term future with him. I really didn’t respect him in a lot of ways :(

It’s shitty to say and shitty to think about, but I do think this is my honest truth. To be fair, I did respect him in a lot of ways too, especially in how he shows up for me and for others and how he tries really hard to grow and be better when someone who *he* respects calls him out and opens his eyes to any of the things I mentioned before. But yeah, this was definitely a problem in our relationship and probably manifested its way into a lot of our interactions and his confidence and the way that he assumed I thought of him too.

***Do you ever feel pressured or "guilt tripped" by them?***

I definitely have felt manipulated by Dylan… if that is the same thing as pressured or guilt tripped? He **constantly** asked for me to repeat stuff that *he* would say, just to make himself feel better like “Do you love me?” or “Tell me we’re going to be okay” or “Can you say you are happy to be with me?” etc.. and he would get upset when I wouldn’t repeat that stuff back to him, even though he knew I was just telling him what he wanted to hear sometimes. I also felt pretty pressured and guilt tripped by him the several times I tried to break up with him. I think that he was the one who was heavily driving the ‘let’s work on this’ front, and I was just along for the ride. He was very good at getting me to agree that it was worth it for us to keep working towards a future and to affirm to him that I saw a future in this and that I was happy in this… and I think that having me repeat those things to him out loud regularly might have messed with my head a little bit, because it might have made me start to believe the reality that *he* wanted, while ignoring the reality that I knew I wanted in my own head… making me feel like a liar and confused about what I really wanted :(

***How often do you argue/have conflict?***

OMG. So fucking much. We argued ALL the time. To be fair, we were very very good at working through problems and very good at resolving fights and fighting maturely a lot of the time. But wow, we fought a lot. We even had to have a fight counter on my phone. We discovered there were really only like 6 or 7 topics that we fought about on a regular basis, but those topics were brought up ALL THE TIME! Especially since Dylan was trying too hard to pin me down and I was trying so hard to avoid that reality, there were a lot of extreme incompatibilities between us that we knew about at the beginning of our relationship that we tried to ignore that came up in different ways throughout the relationship and generally resulted in a fight.

***Overall***

Overall I would say that all of the things I wrote about today I already knew, though I don’t think I’ve ever “vocalized” the stuff about disrespect. This being said, there were so many parts of the relationship that I loved and also so many times when these bad times ^^ that I outlined didn’t apply because we were doing *good*, but unfortunately, things weren’t always good, and that led to where I am today… now I’ll see what happens in therapy next!

## Part II: Eric’s Cancer

Gah, I’ve been dreading trying to write about this because I’ve been feeling so much anxiety about this topic in general.

Eric went in for surgery to get his upper back skin and 3 lymph nodes (base of neck, upper-neck/hairline, and armpit) removed in an attempt to get all of the melanoma out of his body and also to test to see if it had spread anywhere else.

We get the results back from the surgery either today or tomorrow and I am squirming waiting to see what they say and **PRAYING** for nothing but good news for Eric.

I’ve been having a *really* hard time with this. My OCD anxiety came back full force as soon as I discovered that Eric had been diagnosed. My brain immediately told me that I couldn’t smoke weed anymore and that I needed to take care of my body and that if I didn’t do everything in my power to take care of my body (mostly in terms of smoking weed) before hearing the results back, that it would be my fault if they came back with bad news.

I told my therapist that I was feeling a newfound motivation to take care of myself after hearing the news about Eric and she hit the nail right on the head -- she asked me if it was a positive motivation or if it felt more like a superstitious anxiety that I needed to do that. I told her it was the 2nd option. She guided me through some exercises to help me through that and to help me reframe in my brain.

One of the things she explained was *cognitive distortions*, and the brain’s ability to pave a well-worn path that isn’t necessarily true or healthy or helpful, but is PERSISTENT**.** I think this is what happened in my brain when I thought that the world was going to end in 2012 or when I thought that the opera house was going to be bombed when I was in high school or after Cheeto died when I *needed* to visit him every night or when I was struggling being on my own in my apartment in SLO and having to look under my bed, or when I was afraid of the dark for several years. I created on accident well-worn pathways in my brain that made me feel like that was the ONLY option and that that was my reality now.

I gave myself a lot of power.

I have also been giving myself a lot of power in this scenario too. By telling myself that Eric’s test results rely entirely on myself, I have been telling myself that I alone control Eric’s fate and that I have the ability to change the universe’s fate. However, that isn’t true.

It kills me to say that, but it isn’t true.

It’s hard for me to admit because I really do believe in karma, I really do. And I do think that what goes around comes around. And I do think that if I am mindful and intentional and taking care of myself that there might be a higher likelihood that I will get good news about Eric.

However, by putting this framing into my mind, that “If I smoke Eric will have bad results and if I refrain from smoking Eric will have good results” places WAY TOO MUCH PRESSURE on me in a scenario where I really have no control.

I think that this might have subconsciously been something that I do as someone who struggles to give up control. I think that I might do it in part because I feel like I need to have control when I am utterly unable to provide any control and when I feel entirely powerless. It is my way of remaining hopeful because it gives me a sense of agency.

And in that way, it can be good to try to find control if it gives me hope and agency and the ability to work through these hard times… However, in general, it isn’t healthy for me and it is something that I need to work through so that I can find healthier coping mechanisms.

The exercises that Lori told me might help involved a 3-4 step process.

1. Naming the pathway in my mind that was coming up. In this scenario, I named it my “2012” brain. The brain that gave me the godlike power to think that my actions can change something that is already happening in the universe, and that if I don’t do those actions, everything will turn to shit.
2. Becoming aware of when that thought or brain pattern comes up. For me, this part was easy. I can tell instantly pretty much every time this thought comes up, which I think is lucky, because it makes the next steps much easier.
3. Find a way to announce what is going on to myself, comedic reframings make it much easier to deal with. For me, the best option for this was to become a radio announcer in my head and say something like “Alrighty folks we have a “2012 brain” coming out in full force today! Jessie is again thinking that she has all the power in the universe to decide what happens to Eric and his cancer! And Jessie, how do you feel about that? Do you have a different reframe that might be better…?” (And then responding in #4 here)
4. Coming up with a reframing. Forming a new pathway in my brain so that every time my “2012 brain” comes into play, I can reframe into something healthier. So for me in this scenario, instead of thinking “If I smoke, Eric will have deadly cancer”, I think “I am grateful that I have an opportunity to be motivated to take care of my body right now. I am especially grateful that I have a healthy body that I *can* take care of.” I try to say a version of this reframing every time I notice the 2012 mind coming up, so that I can pave a new pathway in my brain more easily. Lori explained it to me like a hiking trail. All of the thoughts we have in our brain are like hiking trails. Some of them we have often and so they are well-worn trails, which make it much easier for those thoughts to subconsciously come up. However, new thoughts are sometimes harder to hold onto and harder to have because it’s like bushwacking and coming up with an entirely new trail. So this version of reframing is like my own way of trying to go off of my really well-worn path “2012 brain” and bushwacking to a more healthy reframing “I am grateful that I have a healthy body I can take care of.”

It’s wild because I have literally *felt* the new neural pathways forming in my brain in this last week as I have been doing these exercises. I have felt it get easier for me to state my reframe quickly when I experience 2012 brain coming up.

This morning has probably been the 2nd hardest day so far since learning about Eric’s cancer. I had a really hard time warding off the 2012 brain. I woke up and did a loving kindness meditation for Eric, and I tried taking care of myself last night more than I would have normally, and I tried meditating on an orange while eating it like my tarot card book had instructed, and I have been feeling my OCD mind taking OVER today in many ways trying to take control in some way or another to ease the anxiety that I have felt over Eric’s test results.

During his surgery I did a loving kindness meditation for him and I tried to send my healthy, positive, happy, and healing energy his way. I’ve been trying to do a lot of energy work in my meditations for the past week to encourage good news. Sometimes it is healthy, today it was a little bit more out of desperation… but I know that I am not perfect, especially while I am waiting in anxiety for these results.

I’ve been praying to God for the last 2 weeks since hearing about Eric’s cancer. I have been tapping into spirituality more than I have in a long time. Connecting with the infinite wisdom of the divine universe and begging for good news for Eric and for our family.

Sometimes I worry that when I pray it seems like it is only coming out of desperation or when I need help or guidance or when I plead for some good news at a time when things are scary and unknown.

And a lot of times I think that is true…

However, I don’t think it’s fair for me to say that it is always the case. I think that me living my life intentionally and mindfully in general and trying to be good to people and trying to give back as best as I can is another way of connecting with the divine. And I think that the universe karmically sees me as trying my best a lot of the time, especially given the circumstances that I find myself in…

So I think that I shouldn’t worry about when I go to God. I think I should just be grateful for God’s presence in the universe so that I can tap into that source when it feels right or needed.

This shit is hard.

It is SO HARD for me to not let my anxiety get the best of me and it is SO HARD to admit that I am really powerless in this scenario and that I just need to wait to hear back from the doctors…

I am assuming that I won’t hear back from them today, considering that it is almost 3pm and we haven’t heard from them yet.

This means that I will have to keep battling this sinking feeling and this anxiety tonight and tomorrow too, until I hear from them.

And oh my god I can’t even begin to think about what I would do and what would happen if it was bad news. I know that it might be a smart move to prepare for something like that, but honestly it breaks my heart so much to even think about it for a split second that I think it would actually be worse for me to try to prepare. So instead I am just hoping and praying and begging for good news.

**Please, *please* let Eric’s test results come back with good news for us all.**

***PLEASE.***

Writing through this has actually been cathartic for me right now. I think I needed to get this down on paper, because man oh man it has been rough and it has brought up a lot of shit that needed to get brought up but shit that is *hard* to deal with.

Something else that I wanted to remember on paper was that the other day after I got my 2nd vaccine, I was driving home alone back to Boulder on the freeway and I had a really healing experience.

I started to cry, and before I knew it, I started to sob.

I thought through all of the awful, awful shit that I’ve experienced and had to go through in the last month:

The Boulder shooting and my PTSD being in grocery stores.

Going to California and feeling unsure about everything in life.

Struggling to take care of myself and largely sabotaging my health on a daily basis. Numbing.

Coming back and wanting to break up with Dylan but not knowing how.

Learning about Eric’s cancer.

Breaking up with Dylan and in part the business and Basil.

Feeling lost and reborn all at the same time.

Pushing through anxiety and depression and trying to be my best self during hard times…

It all came up. And I sobbed so hard.

I sobbed so hard that I started to SCREAM. I realized that my screams sounded like a sobbing baby. A baby that screams so hard from the unknown in this universe and the unknown of being in a human body, and the newness of everything. A baby that is crying for their mother and crying for some sense of comfort.

I wailed in my car while sobbing. I screamed and screamed and screamed and cried and cried and cried…

I LET IT ALL GO.

I finally let it all out. All of the things I had been pushing down for so long, I let it OUT.

I don’t think I have cried that hard since I was a child. Sobbing and screaming with reckless abandon knowing that no one could hear me outside of my car on the freeway.

**IT FELT SO GOOD**.

Then, as I emerged over the top of the freeway on the hill and descended onto the gorgeous Boulder view, I saw the world open up in front of me, and my body relaxed.

I breathed. Deeply.

I let it all go even more.

My body was over oxygenated and tingly.

My neck and back that had been hurting for weeks felt less tense and lighter.

I felt myself calming. Releasing. Healing.

I thanked God and the Universe for the guidance.

I knew that it was so, so, so needed.

This release was a long time coming.

It was a magical and spiritual and healing experience. And I am so grateful for it.

As I sit in discomfort, and sit in the unknown, and sit in this space of healing… I know that things will be okay.

I’m scared.

But I’m pushing through.

More soon,

Jess

24