

Mama Didn't Show Me How to Cope - Chapter 1

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How much can one write if their memories are a single blur?

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I had about five minutes to think this over. Picture this: I'm sitting in the bathroom taking a dump, I have a case of diarrhea and stomach cramping due to having a stomach infection that occurred right after I returned from my trip to Mexico during spring break when I suddenly see a video shared by a Facebook friend. The title reads Things People with Anxiety Want Their Friends to Know . I can't say I am very concentrated with my morning business, diarrhea just has a way of working on its own, and I thought "I don't know much about anxiety, and if I do know something, it's basic stereotypes," so I decided to stay and watch the video, silently. Now picture something else, my little sister occasionally goes through anxiety attacks I don't remember when the last one occurred, but when she has them, her hands turn icy, she visibly shakes, she's inconsolable, and her eyes scream pure terror and confusion. Loud noises make her more hysterical and if anyone goes near her it's as if they're trying to hurt her. I wasn't aware about my sister's anxiety, I had to find out during a family party at night while the music played loudly and she was being cooed at by my parents after she woke up from a nightmare. I was not happy with my mother, I'll tell you why in just a few moments. I asked when it had first started and she told me she first found out when my sister was at an aunt's house. My sister and my cousin are very close they have been since they were toddlers, but when my sister accidentally tripped my cousin she went into this hysterical mode. It sounded confusing to me at the time, she had two older brothers who she ran around with and they too had the habit of falling because they don't pay attention. So when my mom told me my sister had panicked because she thought my cousin got hurt, I was little...perturbed. She had never shown signs of mental illness and I was wondering what had suddenly triggered it. Besides being perturbed I was also upset, my mother didn't think it would be a good idea to let me, the oldest sibling, know her current medical state instead she did to her what she did to me, keep it quiet. You're probably wondering, what could she possibly keep quiet? My sister isn't the first person in my family to have a mental illness. I happen to have one, so does my father. While she's getting treated for anxiety, or at least I hope so, my dad and I had to cope with our depression. My sister was around 5 or 6 when she began to have her panic attacks and it reminded me of when around that age I was already having suicidal thoughts and talking myself out of it even though I didn't know it at the time. So now I'm quite cautious and on my

toes with my sister. I never know when she might begin to shiver without her being cold, when her heart rate might start shooting at higher rates, or when she's beginning to feel unsafe. At some point she's woken up having a panic attack, it's the middle of the night and the only one around to help her calm down and remember that she's safe with me—her big sister. But at her age, when I was the one going through the nightmares and I wet the bed because I couldn't find it in me to get up from the bed from the fear, who was there to comfort me? No one. Instead, I had to deal with constant reprimands of "You know you have to get out of bed when you need to pee" and "Stop lying, you need to grow up and get yourself to the bathroom" and "It's all in your head." In all honesty, being scolded for wetting my bed wasn't what triggered me into having depression, no. My depression started way before I started bed wetting. I can't really say I remember everything from when I was a child because it's not true. There are so many things that I can't remember and most of the time I spend my time thinking of what my life used to be like, but there was always something that has been clear and has been repeatedly been playing in my mind. First memories shouldn't really mean much, but to me it's what triggered such imbalance in my life and growing up they were shadows that plagued my dreams. I don't particularly sit in bed and try to think of why it had to be my first memory and curse my luck, I'm too busy with my life to let myself fall into another pit of self-pity. But sometimes I do have to sit down and think where my experiences (or lack thereof) are leading me. It was a reoccurring dream: me, sitting at a table and coloring a Hello Kitty picture from my coloring book—ironically, I hate the character now—and look up to see a coffin stationed right in between two bedrooms, my grandmother's and my aunt's. I was confused, what was going on? Why are people crying? What was that box doing there? And the question that always woke me up, what was in there? But you see I'm older now, I know who was in there and I know why my life changed so drastically without understanding such frustrating and confusing stages in my life. I don't remember much about my grandmother or the condition she was in when I would see her, but one thing I knew for many, many years was that my dad's side of the family had a high chance of cancer. My dad was an infant when he lost his eldest brother to leukemia, and my grandmother passed away from uterus cancer when I was four. Maybe I should rephrase what I said before: I know nothing of my grandmother. However, it didn't matter to four-year-old me because child me loved her grandmother and held the idea in her heart that her family would never die, and then she did.