

AUTUMN

*“I'm in awe of people out there who deal with Alzheimer's, because they have to deal with death 10 times over, year after year.”*

-Marcia Wallace

When the alarm wakes you up, go eat breakfast. Eat something that has protein in it, like eggs and bacon. Then don't forget to take your medications, it's the red pill in the orange bottle that sits right next to your bed. Take one of those every day, before you call your sister. Don't mention anything about your disease, she's still getting over Mother's death. Listen to her talk about her children, and try to help your nieces and nephew with their problems. You were an acclaimed clinical psychologist who graduated from Dartmouth, you know what you're doing.

When you hang up, go run on your treadmill for thirty minutes before you take a cold shower. Don't dry your hair, let it air dry. Go to the kitchen and drink a glass of water and take out a bowl of salad to eat for lunch. Then look at the sticky note you wrote yesterday on what you have to do, it should be on the fridge. If you have nothing to do, then go to the small green room at the end of the hallway, and sit at your desk. To your right will be a shelf, take the only notebook on that shelf and then open it up. Start from the beginning and read, these will be the memories that you recall from the past, memories that you don't want to forget. After you're done reading, start on the next clean sheet of paper in the notebook, and start writing. Write something, anything that you remember from the past.

After you're done writing, go outside for a couple minutes. Look at the purple canvas that's splattered with orange and blue paint, see if you can make out shapes in the clouds. Wave hi to people who look toward you, and cherish the feeling of the sun beating down on you and the wind playing with your hair. Go back inside when you feel like it and then eat dinner. There are these microwaveable dinners in the fridge. Take one out and follow the directions. Eat it with a glass of water. After you're done, wash the dishes and then do the laundry. Turn on the television and watch an hour or so. When the laundry is finished, turn up the music on your computer and fold clothes. After the dishes are done, put the dishes away in their homes. When you're done with all that, go back to the green room and read the journal again before you go to sleep.

WINTER

*“The early stages of Alzheimer's are the hardest because that person is aware that they're losing awareness.”*

-Patti Davis

There was a kid who was required to come to me as part of her punishment for violently beating up a kid in school. Elizabeth came from a troubled family, her father was serving jail time for domestic violence, and her mother was an addict. The girl was socially awkward, she

didn't know how to behave and her grades were mediocre. She needed help, but she didn't want help. Not especially from some stranger who she was forced to go and talk to. She made it clear that I would not be able to help her. She came to her sessions, and listened to me talk. I knew she was just wasting her time coming to me, and I didn't want her to feel that way.

She seemed like she was getting better when she came back a few weeks later. She talked about her family, and her problems, her insecurities, how her mother wouldn't even look at her because Liz looked so much like her father, how she didn't have anyone to talk to or go to because they all knew about 'that one messed up kid who would probably turn out to be just like her father'. The kid who started the rumor was the one she beat up, which made the rumor seem like the truth.

She sat there for a long time, in silence, as she let me take in all in. The bullying, the fights, the abuse, the nights she had to spend on the streets because her parents were having another fistfight. How the police came and took her father away from her mother, who was bloody and bruised. She had it so much worse than her peers. The reasons that I had for running away from home when I was her age seemed like nothing compared to what she was going through.

My mother became very sick at that time and there was a very low chance of her getting through that month. I took a vacation from my job, and stayed by my mother's side as she died. That's the time that Liz needed me the most though, her father came back home, and things were going badly. When I came back to work, I waited for her. She never came to her sessions, and I went searching for her. No one knew where she was, and what happened. Eventually I was given a letter in the mail that she had committed suicide. She jumped off the school's roof.

The blame wasn't aimed toward me, but I felt that it might as well have been. I was the one who was supposed to help her, I was the one who was supposed to save her from herself and from her own life. I was supposed to do my job and make her get better. I spent time away, I didn't do my job, and I sacrificed a life for a life that I already knew was going to end.

I wasn't there to help her when she needed me so desperately. How could I have left her? How come I didn't think? How come I risked her life? I'm supposed to save people, to help people, I can't just let them give up. But I'm giving up too.. How could I help people when I know that I can't even help myself?

I killed her.. And I'm slowly killing myself too..

SPRING

*"You know, people get frustrated because their loved ones who have Alzheimer's, oh, he doesn't recognize me anymore, how can I recognize this person, if they don't recognize me? They're not the same person. Well, they are the same person, but they've got a brain disease. And it's not their fault they've got this disease."*

-Ronald Regan

M. (or at least that's what you've signed on the bottom of your last note),

Please do not be offended by this letter, I'm not in my right state of mind. There's this hole inside of me that's growing and growing, and it'll eventually engulf me and drag me into its abyss. I do not know what M. stands for, maybe it's for Margaret, or Millard, or Mike, or Mitch.

In your last letter, you talked about mother. I am assuming that we were talking about the same mother, which means that you must be a sibling of mine. I would look through old photographs, but I do not know which ones are of my family, which are of my friends, which are of my coworkers. I did peruse your letter over and over, hoping that I'd find a hint that tells me about my self, or you, or our relationship.

What I did find, was that you were asking for me for advice on your children. You mentioned something about psychology and college. Perhaps psychology was my college major? Or was I a psychologist? What college did I go to? Did I even go to college? Did I even have a job? If you do not know the answers to these questions, please don't feel bad. Just tell me that you don't, just direct me to someone who does know. Someone who might understand.

I guess I've put this off long enough. You are the only person that I've kept in touch with, I do not know what happened with the people who I surrounded myself with when I was still working and when I was in school. I have a deadly disease, it's slowing killing me and there's nothing that I can do. I can't help myself and no one can help me. Soon, in the future, I will lose all memory and all sense of self. I already am, little by little, I do not know who I am, or who you are, or what I have to do today.

I have something called Alzheimer's disease, and I've hidden it from you since Autumn. I've spent my life in the seclusion of my home, hiding myself from the harsh, judgmental world.

I had coped just fine, and I know how serious Alzheimer's is. I am well educated, or at least I think I am well-educated.

I was in denial. I still am in denial. There was a little note that I've written, I remember this because on the fridge it refers to 'the note', except I do not know where it went. I cannot find it, and I've looked just about everywhere. Lately, I keep misplacing and losing items. I've forgotten, because when I wake up, all that I see and know is this fog. All I can do is wander in the labyrinth that is my sanity and hope that there is a door or a window where the fog does not affect me as much. Through that door and window, I can see and remember little bits and memories. The fog comes and goes, one moment I know what I'm doing, and the next moment I don't know who I am.

I am telling you this, because you are the only person I can tell now. You are the only person who has stayed with me, through whatever has happened. Perhaps we were not close, perhaps we were close. Whatever relationship we may have had, please push the past aside. Please just read and absorb this, think and respond. You are all that I have left, please don't leave me alone. I can't deal with this alone.

- D (which is how you addressed me in your last letter).

SUMMER

*"Your mind is sickly from Alzheimer's disease and decadence and debauchery killed your memories."*

-Megadeth

There is this man who comes to visit me everyday. I'm in the hospital, I have no idea who I am. The man looks like someone who I've known for a long time, but I'm not quite sure. But he comes and sits by me everyday.

He tells stories of people who were saved by a psychologist, she helped everyone because

she wanted to see some sense of fulfillment in her life. She helped others, because helping people healed the scars inside of her heart. She wanted to be successful, and success to her was helping people. He says that she ran away from home and lived with her best friend because she felt like she didn't belong. When that girl went to Dartmouth, she started to love herself and life. That girl was happy, and everyone thought that she would die after living a wonderful life.

One day, out of the blue, that girl became sad again. Her mother had recently died, and one of her patients committed suicide. She blamed herself. Then she started forgetting things, she forgot where she was going, what she was doing, and what she had to do. Something was wrong with that girl, and so that boy, who loved her more than all the stars in the sky, went to the hospital with her. It turns out that she had a disease called Alzheimer's, which would eventually make her forget everything about herself. After she knew that, she started pushing everyone who she cared about away. It broke the boy's heart, but she wanted him to leave. So he did, he left her to spend her days alone, until she responded to a letter from her sister. She told her about her disease, and her sister admitted her to a hospital.

That man tells me that she's happy. I ask him about the boy. He says that the boy's heart still hurts, I tell him that I hope that the boy visits the girl. The man tells me that he does.