

## Surviving an Impossible Situation

*For much of the past few years, I have lived in confusion and isolation, carrying a truth that is too heavy to hide. I now realize that without speaking openly, I may never have the freedom, support, and safety to truly move forward. While this may serve to help others, my primary purpose in sharing this recount is to protect my own wellbeing and allegiance to the truth. This is a recounting of surviving an impossible situation from age 17-28.*

I am 30, broke, and exhausted. The last 12 years has been chaos and I am still making sense of it. It started a few months before my 18th birthday when my father sent me to wilderness camp in Utah (April 2012). I was "gooned" or kidnapped like most of the kids are. Wilderness was awful and inhumane and I will leave it at that. Afterwards, even tho I was 18 I had lost much of my ability to act independently. I was pushed into an aftercare program in various different countries which reinforced the wilderness narrative over the course of about 10 months (2012-2013).

My plan was to eventually use college to regain a foundation emotionally. I ended up at College of Charleston (2014-2015). A condition of my father's was that I had to see a therapist he had chosen. The therapist had a long standing relationship with my father and was given my wilderness file with all my letters and information. He was operating under a life coach title as an ex-therapist, tho he referred to himself as my therapist often. I saw him every other week while in college. Him and my father regularly discussed my attendance and would cc me the emails. Most sessions were trauma focused without much focus on actually resolving the trauma. Over time my anxiety increased and so did my partying to cope.

I eventually started to break down and give the therapist some trust. Then in a moment of vulnerability he called my father mid session and told him I needed to leave Charleston immediately (Dec. 2015). When he did this my whole body went numb. This scenario echoed what happened with the therapist in wilderness (calling my parents mid session) tho I didn't see the connection at the time. Despite having good grades I dropped out of college and left Charleston that night. The reasoning was said to be my drinking and partying. I was then told to go to a rehab to prove I would be sober. The therapist chose the rehab and my father paid for it. I agreed and went as I thought it would earn their trust (Dec 2015/Jan 2016). I knew I wasn't an alcoholic and had no problem staying sober (still am) but saw the rehab as a way to show that. The place had awful conditions and eventually became unbearable. When I tried to leave they refused to give me my car keys despite me checking in voluntarily. They said they needed my fathers approval. I called him over the next couple weeks but he denied me being let out. Once I was finally let out I had over 100 bed bug bites all over my body. The conditions were that bad. But the bugs weren't the worst part, it was the feeling of total dehumanization that mirrored wilderness. When I finally get out I find out most of my family had heard about the rehab and believed I was an alcoholic (even tho I knew I wasn't). This made looking for support from any of my family besides my father feel impossible. I was also in a prolonged state of reliving the powerlessness from wilderness as the triggers were being constantly activated. The therapist was

threatening to send me to halfway houses, despite my sobriety, and I could not bare the thought of another residential program.

Eventually the therapist offered to have sessions in his town as an alternative to another residential treatment program (Early 2016). The arrangement was that my father paid him directly and I was never told how much and if I didn't participate he could tell my father. My father also paid for my living expenses which were presented as tied to my participation in this arrangement. It was made clear that if I didn't comply with what the therapist wanted I would lose all support. The therapist insisted on daily sessions an hour and a half long, weekly dinners, periodic meetings with his associates, and other obligations. Much of this was put in writing and considered a "program". He said it was necessary and honestly I was too exhausted to not comply. Over the next 15 months I became extremely isolated from the outside world (2016-2017). The only meaningful contact I had was with the therapist, his associates, and my father. The sessions were often trauma digging without any real resolution. I was not given the freedom to lessen session frequency and the relentlessness of the trauma digging left me constantly destabilized. This intensity made it nearly impossible to maintain outside relationships and my lack of social life was then presented as evidence that I needed more treatment. The therapist often threatened to send me to residential treatment facilities (despite my continued sobriety) which only made me even more confused and terrified. Eventually I was pushed into a caretaker role to the point of even being pressured to take care of him in the hospital and tend to his needs in his physical recovery (sometime 2016/2017). I remember making his breakfast one morning and I thought to myself "what is going on". It was a total role reversal. My father told me this was a beneficial experience for me. I was totally terrified and confused but at this point I had no energy to question his actions, it was just daily survival.

Over the next 6 years I gradually began finding ways to separate myself from this situation. I had to be careful enough not to trigger retaliation until I was strong enough to go no contact. This included moving farther away until I could gain some autonomy and mental space. During this time I stayed very isolated as all my energy went towards navigating this situation. I went no contact with my father a month before my 28th birthday (June 2022)-about a decade after I was sent to wilderness. 10 months later, I went no contact with the therapist (March 2023). Almost 29 years old I was dead broke and exhausted. Not knowing much about finances I went into debt. I took it as a necessary concession for my mental health. I eventually moved into my car and have been surviving in Los Angeles. I am still struggling but now (Dec. 2024) at age 30 I am truly untangling what happened and trying to understand where my 20s went.

### **A few key points**

**1.) Why I didn't just leave.** The impact of Wilderness which involved the kidnapping and systemic breaking down of my autonomy created a thumbscrew of vulnerability. Afterwards, I was often being triggered in ways that went beyond my conscious understanding at the time. Without adequate treatment for the trauma and with my vulnerabilities being so clearly laid out in my wilderness file, I could easily be pushed into a state of confusion and helplessness.

Eventually getting real treatment for my wilderness trauma from ethical professionals has been integral in allowing me to separate from this situation.

**2.) How this situation could exist.** Many of the institutions and individuals involved were operating under false narratives and with significant financial incentives. Others who may have helped me were often blinded by these narratives. The struggle to articulate the nature of this situation also shielded it from obvious scrutiny. This is an example of how resources, while often used to create support, can also be used to create elaborate systems of harm.

**3.) Why sharing is essential.** I am sharing this story publicly because what I experienced was no private matter and it cannot be handled as such. It involved institutions, professionals, false narratives and systemic isolation. The all encompassing impact of this makes secrecy not only difficult but dangerous as it fails to protect me from further possible harm. This is not about staying in the past but about finding a way forward.

Written 12/14/2024 in a McDonalds parking lot somewhere in California.