The Rose That Grew From the Concrete

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete?
Proving nature’s law is wrong it learned to walk without having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else ever cared.
-Tupac Shakur, “The Rose That Grew From the Concrete”

Growing up in an unstable environment has never been easy, and most individuals in this position tend to lose their overall faith. Youthful aspirations of becoming doctors, lawyers or fire fighters are gone by the time most people who grow up under difficult circumstances reach high school. Many negative experiences in their lives have impacted them so deeply that most of these students will either drop out of high school, become young parents, or be incarcerated. This gives a negative connotation to the rest who fall under the same category. However, there are some individuals who grow up in the same circumstances and are able to turn negative experiences into positive ones, proving that growing up in an unstable environment can lead to self-motivation and leadership.

I remember the afternoon I walked home, and my sister was not there anymore. At the time, I was too young to understand why she had left; all I knew was things had changed. I could no longer go through her diary when she was not there, embarrass her when her friends
came over, or have someone to play “mother” during a game of “house.” In some sense, her departure marked the end of our stability as a family.

When my parents started suffering from depression, the instability started to take hold. Coming home I did not know what to expect, as every day turned out to have new surprises. I barely saw my father anymore because he was always working—expect for Sunday dinners. Therefore, he was always tired. I remember once, waking up in the middle of the night and walking to the kitchen to get a glass of milk. Suddenly, I saw my father laying down on the living room floor. His body was still, staring at the dark ceiling, as if life had passed him by and he didn’t know it. I looked at him and said “Papi, what’s wrong?”

He replied, “Nothing mi hija, go to sleep,” and then stayed silent. His silence spoke a thousand words.

Meanwhile, my mother spoke a thousand words but didn’t mean a thing. She too was tired, and the news of my absent sister, pregnant at fifteen, took a toll on her. My mother always tried to be strong, but most of the time she broke down, and her verbal outrage were inevitable. The challenges of being working class immigrants were already enough for my parents, and it was reflected in our family. However, both of them work very hard, to provide their children with all they need. This has always been acknowledged and appreciated. My parents’ struggles conceived an internal fear in me of not having to go through the same cause and effect. This led to spark an inner fire within me.

At the age of eleven, my family and I moved to the Dominican Republic (DR). My father claimed he had to leave New York City (NYC) in order to get better. He asked my siblings and I
several times if we wanted to leave, but we all knew in our hearts we could not say no. In DR, my parents’ relationship dramatically changed, and as their arguments grew worse, my music grew louder. When the news my parents were separating arrived, it did not come as a surprise, but sooner than we all expected. My mother was heading back to NYC and then my father left too. Although it wasn’t a surprise, that didn’t stop the pain as my siblings and I stayed behind. Growing up, my only family had been my mother, father, and siblings, so when the separation came, I felt more responsibility weigh in on me as my fire grew stronger as my family torn apart.

When I finally came back to NYC, I felt in some sense relieved. I was about to start my fifth school in five consecutive years and looked forward to some stability. It was the start of a new life, as we moved to our sixth “home,” and at thirteen, I now lived with a single-mother who had to work all the time. As more challenges entailed, my mother always reminded me “Make sure you get a good education mi hija, I don’t want you ever to go through, what I go through.”

I replied, “Yes mami, I know.” I always knew. She had now become a mother and father. The woman who worked every single day, to make sure my siblings and I never needed anything. All while trying to complete the tasks of a “housewife.” I appreciated this, so I tried to make the load easier. She never told me to do my homework nor did she wake me up to go to school, because it was not necessary, as I always did these things without being told. As my mother wasn’t around much, my responsibility grew larger: my fire embarked on a mission of its own.
When I began high school my inner fire led me to the goal of graduating, but I did more than that. Every day I would be the first one in my home to wake up in the morning, and then I would wake my sister for school and my mother for work. While in high school it was and it still is my goal to do my best in every single one of my classes. Although most of my friends were outside cutting school, I pushed myself to do the opposite. My junior year, I was selected to be part of Virtual Enterprise International (VEI), a program that inspired me to believe in myself. By the end of high school, I had competed in the Federal Reserve Challenge, Regional and City-Wide Business Plan competition and represented New York State as one of the six finalist teams in the VEI Global Business Challenge. Furthermore, I completed three paid internships and received two scholarships. On June 27, 2011, I accomplished my goal, when I was the first person in my family to graduate from high school.

Negative experiences in my life have pushed me to create positives ones. The struggles my parents have been through continue to inspire me to never give up, because they never do. Although, I don’t live with my father anymore, he is still very present in my life. He, just as my mother, makes sure his children have everything they need, but my parents were not the only ones who pushed me. I went to a school where my freshman class was about 1,200 students but where at the end only around 600 graduated, where most students thought it was more important to hang out in the halls ways and wear the latest name brands than study. This pushed me to seek to better myself every day and become a leader.
Most of these students have great potential but are lost and have no direction or guide. Some of my friends would be missing from school for a month, and upon seeing them I would ask “why weren’t you coming to school?”

They would reply, “I didn’t feel like it, I came today because my mother forced me to.” Then I would just stare at them with a blank expression and think to myself – *because your mother forced you to come to school?* This is when I realized there are two types of people in this world- leaders and followers. A follower is a person who stays in his or her comfort zone, and does what everybody else surrounding them does. These students don’t really have anyone to look up to, so they go for what they see. However, a leader is a person who does what he or she thinks is right regardless of what people around them are doing. They don’t necessarily have to follow the paths of others, because they create their own path. They are people who learn how to become self-motivated and motivate others.

You can say it was during high school, when I saw the doubt in people’s eyes, while also hearing bright predications of my future. You didn’t need be a genius to see people on the train give the looks of “hopeless youth”. It was listening to professionals talking about their life stories, and think, what I thought to be normal, was not. Seeing half of my friends drop out, become pregnant or not graduate at all, clearly stated the obvious. Pretty much, seeing it all, while seeing *nothing* at all led me to believe, that most people don’t believe in people like me. Yet I proved them wrong.

Self-Motivation and has been the burning fire within me which has pushed me to always look at the future, and strive to be the greatest I can be. Growing up in a place where, from
time to time, I felt lost, created an internal fire within. This led me to turn negatives into positives, and to push myself harder in everything I do. However, I am not saying that other individuals who come from different circumstances are not self-motivated, because that’s not the case at all. Nor am I saying it’s a “good thing” to come from such upbringing. What I want to make clear is that there are some individuals out there who have the motivation and potential to be successful despite all odds; this brings hope for those who believe in “the rose that grew from the concrete”.