

THE Z GARDEN

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It's okay not to be okay. Something I've heard many times but never used to heed. Why would I? I didn't want to be "not okay," and I felt like I was going crazy trying to convince myself that I was okay. Why did I do that? The root of the cause is not a single explanation, nor could it be for anyone, really, because roots are many, and their health depends on the care of the soil.

My soil, throughout my life, has struggled to be nutritious and strong, especially considering that I denied myself the right kind of help from the right kind of gardeners. I had to accept that my actions had consequences and that I was not careful about how I was growing. I found out that it is okay because sometimes a simple correction can save any plant. So, what did I do? More sun? More water? Grafting dying branches with healthy ones? The answer is yes to all the above. But what does that mean for a human who is clearly not a plant (as far as you know)? It means I add more good things to my life and left behind the toxicity that was killing me. I had to begrudgingly accept that I was, in fact, in crisis, and then look for help outside of myself. Which is not easy, by any means, but a plant can't water itself or pull out the invading weeds. (And if you've seen a plant that can, you might want to consider taking a nap.) Don't be fooled, this process followed four years of prior hell. But once it started, I felt like blooming again.

You don't know me, guaranteed, but if you did, you'd probably be amazed. Not because I am amazing, but because my transformation is unbelievable, especially considering the experiences I have lived through (and the ones I am still going through). It all began with looking up. Sounds simple, but when you spend years with eyes cast down and knees on the ground, well, it's one of the hardest things to do. For some, you may roll your eyes and think, "I bet she's going to bring up God or religion." And

though you're partly right, as someone who is a living enigma, don't discount me. My beliefs do not discount the lesson. Yes, I did give my life to God and felt saved by the Gardener and Savior himself, Jesus Christ. But I also met better people (not necessarily religious) and chose to work on loving and respecting myself.

I am, if not obvious in some ways, a recovering people pleaser. Not that I don't like to serve and love others now, but I have boundaries and know my worth. Truthfully, I'm still working on it, but the change is significant because I can stand up for myself. I now have a clearer vision of the beautiful flowering tree I'm becoming, with considerably healthier soil, and more than one gardener (including myself, now that I understand I have the biggest influence on my own growth). I know my generation is one of the most resilient, but living in the most depressing times. We have to stick together and water each other if we wish to become the most beautiful garden anyone has ever seen. Believe me, once you look up and realize that it's not about what kind of fertilizer you prefer, or whether you want to be pollinated by a bee or a hummingbird, but that we're all just struggling to bloom and grow to our full potential, it makes all the difference. I don't care what kind of plant you are, what color your leaves or petals are, or who you choose to help care for your soil. I care about your growth, and about you getting everything you need to thrive. I've gone through droughts, my soil has been cracked, my roots have been weak and untamed but here I am. I deserve to be here, and so do you. We all do. So, bloom, and let's face the storms together in this unearthly garden we're planting.