Throughout my life, I have often heard the saying, “You are not your thoughts.” I think about that phrase quite often, and I have concluded that while you are not your thoughts, your thoughts are a significant part of you. Allow me to explain. Your thoughts are influenced by your surroundings, experiences, and beliefs. The things that have happened to you in life are going to influence your thought patterns and styles, shaping your worldview and beliefs about life. What separates you from others is how you handle these experiences.

When I was ten years old, on my birthday, I was sexually assaulted by a stranger. My thoughts in that exact moment cannot be precisely typed up, as they resemble a puddle of jumbled words, emotions, and sounds. Any ability I had in my mind to form a cohesive response vanished immediately, and I was left a momentary shell of myself, reduced to nothing but the trembling child I was. There is no way I can put into words the pain that I experienced in that moment, nor can I express the pain I feel when I think about how I kept this a secret for six years.

This assault ingrained itself inside of me, leaving a permanent memory I will never truly rid myself of. I developed PTSD soon after that assault, but because I refused to tell what happened to me, I was misdiagnosed for six years. I was treated for anxiety disorders that spiraled into anorexia, depressive symptoms that led me to attempt suicide, and ADHD that gave me breakdowns. My thoughts plagued me daily, screaming at me to figure out why the new medicine was giving me problems, why the therapy treatment was only half working. I felt overwhelmed by my thoughts, unable to break the cycle of selfloathing and despair. I listened to my brain, telling me that what happened to me was my fault, and I needed to keep it a secret or I would be blamed. I let my thoughts and fears rule me for six miserable years. Not anymore.

I told my story. I told my parents first, and it went from there. I have been accurately diagnosed with PTSD, given medication that finally works for me, and I continue to advocate for mental health through my various platforms, even giving speeches on statewide levels. I have turned from letting my thoughts be my identity, and instead, I embrace the journey I have been given in life. I refused to let the bad overpower me any longer. I dusted off my jeans, stood up, and pushed on.

In summary, I am not my thoughts. I am not my experiences. I am myself, wholly and unconditionally, forever and always, shaped by what I have experienced and fought through. I am the girl who refuses to hide from her past, refuses to ignore her struggles, and instead embraces them as a part of her that she can grow from every moment she takes a breath.

Chloe Millard
12th Grade Essay Winner
Normandy High School, Parma
Debra Hudnall, Teacher
Rachel Urban, Principal

Keep Moving