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When I was Alone

I used to climb the large pine tree in my backyard after it rained. I like to think that the damp bark would negate the pale sap that oozed from the crackling skin of the ancient wood. Truthfully, however, there was a part of me that liked the way the sap would remain on my fingers for days, no matter how hard I tried to remove it. A part of me that came to life at the lonely freshness of dripping needles. A part of me that longed for the subtle tremors that circled my nerves as I pulled myself higher and higher into the soaked branches of my tree. I knew the real reason I would climb, however, was to reach the empty bench that the limbs of the pine made at the top. The place where I would I could sit and watch the laughing children at the park across from my house. The needles created a window for me to look at the children laughing and running in the damp grass. Their shrieks of joy would echo up the alternating branches below me to the place where I perched. I wished I was with them, rolling in the mud and grass.

There is a part of every person that longs to be part of a community. When I was young I tried desperately to ignore this fact. There is something both terrifying and painful about opening up, about being vulnerable. In every situation, I would give the right answers and responses. I was funny. I was kind. I was friends with every person I met, no, I was friendly with them which in my mind was the same thing. I was never bullied, or at least, I never knew if I was. I walked through the first half of my life in a protective fog of ignorance. I kept people at bay and isolated myself if they did not accept me. I was liked. I was lonely. I was forgettable.

I now look back on those days of false independence and acknowledge the lies I had fed to myself. Community is not something that comes to you out of nowhere. It is not a miracle or lottery that is only handed out to the people with just the right amount of patience and luck. In order for a friendship to be truly cultivated it must be worked for. I spent years of my life justifying my self-inflicted isolation

by calling it independence. I tried to convince myself that I did not need a community or support system. That I could fend for myself and did not need another person to look out for me or be my friend. It was not until I found a real community of my own that I realized how necessary one is.

Having a group of people that I knew I could turn to and count on changed my view of myself and of life. I realized that I am worthy of friendship and love, that independence does not mean trying to prove that I do not need anyone else. The truth of the matter is that everyone needs other people. I know that I did. Relationships take work and are not easy. You need to hold on tight when you find a community and not let go. In a way, keeping a strong community is like climbing a tree. You need to work and reach for every connection you want to make. Having a community allowed me to see and become a person I can be proud of.