

UC Merced

The Vernal Pool

Title

Exhaustion, Broken Relationships, and Deterioration: The Workaholic

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5d14x8sd>

Journal

The Vernal Pool, 4(2)

Author

Hernandez, Juliana

Publication Date

2018

DOI

10.5070/V342038460

Copyright Information

Copyright 2018 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

Exhaustion, Broken Relationships, and Deterioration: The Workaholic

By Juliana Hernandez

There I was—eight-years-old—with my denim skirt and a Bobby Jack, orange shirt. My braided, black hair was running down my back, and its appearance was similar to that of a rope;

I was oblivious to the significance of that moment. It was an early Sunday morning in the year of 2005, and as the heat assaulted the gravel, my father, sister, and I sought refuge under the shadow of the lemon trees. The backyard was chaotic; there was a separation between the rigid, grey concrete and the dirt, which was covered with sticks. There were indents on the concrete from rollerblading accidents and holes in the dirt from days when my sister and I hunted for worms. But this was no worm hunting day. My dad decided this was the day he would teach us self defense, making the claim “that he knew karate,” and he would pass on his knowledge to his two, young daughters. He stood tall, strong, and charismatic with defined laugh lines around his lips. He held a pillow on the side of his leg and said, “kick! kick! kick!” Hours went by before we went back inside; it was a typical day.

It was 2010, when poverty stroke and bills were unbearable. This is when he slowly started to fade; my father was working early mornings and late nights, trying to provide for his daughters. Soon after, weekends were occupied by work, and he became a silhouette in our home: present but not truly there. His dependence on work began shortly after he withdrew from his addiction of alcohol. He began to work seven days a week, fourteen hours a day, with no close end. Shortly after, he became a stranger to me. I recall staring from a distance, analyzing his posture, his characteristics, and his appearance. I noticed the following: he had curly, black hair, black eyes, about 5’4, tan, and had small, light indents of wrinkles around his eyes – his features were identical to mine. I could not fathom the idea that I felt no connection with the individual of whom I was a replica. When I looked at him, it was as if I was taking a stroll through a park and an individual just seemed to catch my eye along the way, but I would keep

walking. I only seemed to notice him for a split second. Conversation became difficult and he slowly lost his daughter for trying to redeem his addiction with all the things he bought her. He had no other outside interests, and the ringing of his work phone was on a continuous spiral.

2015: I sat in the cold, frigid chair at my high school graduation, in the middle of the field, looking down upon the grass, wet from the rain that had fallen from the previous day. I lifted my head slowly off the ground and examined the animated faces of my peers, who were ready to leave behind their high school lives and enter the journey ahead of them. Soon after, my name was called. I moved across the field and recognized, from a distance, my favorite teacher, who was ready to praise all that I had accomplished. As I walked onto the stage, there was an empty feeling. All that I had worked hard for had finally paid off, but that moment felt bittersweet; however, I could not pinpoint what was missing. As I walked off, I took a quick glance at the audience. He was not there. My mother looked at me, and as she noticed that I was looking for my father, she quickly looked down and tightened her lips. He was at work. I became so used to the feeling of disappointment that it became a natural state. After graduation, while trying to find my family, I stumbled across a friend and saw how her father hugged her and said how proud he was. This is the moment I realized that my father's work was the most important aspect of his life. It came before his daughter. Every missed award ceremony and every missed performance led to this day. It all became clear and I diagnosed his symptoms: exhaustion, broken relationships, and deterioration. He was a workaholic.

In 2016, hardly surprising, he ended up on a hospital bed.

I walked through the hospital hallways, two months after my father's stroke, holding my little brother's hand as tight as I possibly could. I took a deep breath and built the courage to keep walking. Every room was filled with elderly people, who lay in their beds, alone. It appeared as if they were corpses with their only mobility being in the eyes. Soon after, room fourteen was in front of me. My mother ran out and hugged my

brother and cried. She held her son as if it was the last time she was going to see him. I slowly walked into the room and what I saw was life-changing. There he was, laying in a small compact bed. His body was swollen, tubes in his throat, cushions clasped around his feet and the top of his head had a pronounced scar. He began to sob uncontrollably, clasping my hand as hard as he could. My body cringed and something tore inside of me. I wanted to run, to hide, to sit in a corner, to cry, and pretend this was not happening. He looked at me, and his eyes widened; he was petrified. My father finally understood the wrong doings in his work patterns, but his epiphany came too late; the aftermath caught up to him.