

My Catalyst

Everyone has at least one moment in their lives where they see some aspect of themselves or of the people around them differently. Before that, they may just be part of an everyday mold. They go through the motions and follow the rules that they are given, without fully understanding why. But then, they go through this life-changing event, which could be a near-death experience or a simple rephrasing of words. When I was at my all-time low, I needed help from someone else to see the positive side, to see what I could look forward to in my future. What I needed was a catalyst, something to help me get my life going a bit quicker. My catalyst, Wendy, helped me see where I was headed. She didn't give me a destination, but instead, showed me direction and hope for the way there.

My senior year of high school was truly a challenge for me. I was constantly bouncing from classes, to extracurricular activities, into my social life, and back again. I was dealing with the stresses of my college search, while trying to balance friends, family, and my boyfriend, Matthew. I had so many things to accomplish each day, and barely any time to relax. It finally got to the point where I wouldn't go out with friends, and I avoided social events just so I could avoid the stress and anxiety that came with them. Quite frankly, I was emotionally exhausted and needed to escape from the madness of teenage life. I wanted to really hone in on what was happening with me on an emotional level. Maybe if I could organize my emotions and figure out why I acted the way I did, I could make some

positive improvements for myself. That was when I decided to see Wendy.

Wendy was one of the town therapists that, before our first session, I had never even met before. We were to meet once a week for an hour before noon. At our first session, she welcomed me with a hug, and sat me down. Her office was dimly lit and spacious, yet very warm and inviting and I felt very at ease. I was also immediately drawn to her open and caring personality and I enjoyed sharing my time with her. For our first session, we did some icebreakers and breathing exercises. I remember one exercise specifically where I would pinch one nostril closed with my index finger and push down lightly on the other with my thumb. Then I would inhale through my nose for ten seconds, and exhale through my mouth for another ten seconds. I suppose it may not work for everyone else like it did for me, but this exercise calmed me down almost instantly whenever I was upset or nervous. After the breathing exercises, we got to the hard stuff. We talked about when I was a young child, some of my favorite memories, and some of my worst. We talked about school, my social scene, my parents' divorce, and death. I'm sure that this was not only a way to get to know me better, but also a way to link present problems or issues to the past. For me, it was simply relieving and refreshing to talk about my memories, considering I had not consciously thought of or talked about most these events in years. I remembered things that had obviously made an incredible impact on my life, but the events themselves had slipped from my mind. At the end of our session, she gave me my first homework assignment, which was to write down a detailed description of

every dream that I had for the next week.

At our next session, I told Wendy the only dream I had actually remembered from the whole week. I was younger in my dream, maybe even eleven or twelve years old. I was at the Enchanted Forest, which is a local water park that I had practically grown up in. I explained to Wendy that I was sitting atop an enormous water slide with an old friend of mine, with the water flowing over our legs. We were discussing our futures as we watched dozens of people zoom down the slide around us. What amused me so much was that I was so young, yet so content with what I wanted to do as I grew up. My plans for the future were precise, and I didn't seem stressed or nervous at all. What a difference from what I was normally feeling! I knew exactly what I wanted!

Wendy sat and thought about it for a moment, and then put my dream into a new perspective, one that I would have never thought of. She explained to me that the slide might have been a symbol of my life. At first, it sounded a bit peculiar, and perhaps it still does, but it really made me think in a new light. She went on with her analysis. The size of the slide and the different directions that each person traveled represented the open doors and possibilities that lay before me. My dialogue in the dream said that I knew exactly what I wanted in life, but the slide stood for possible changes and flexibility. I contemplated her dream analysis, and then related it to the way that I have made decisions in the past and what I could expect in the future. I couldn't see any reason for her to be wrong. I did have a lot to look forward to. I was just trying to take too much on at once. After hearing what

she had to say, I wanted to step back from the everyday motions and take a while to regroup, and when I was ready to continue my life, I would do it one day at a time. No one decides exactly how his or her life is going to be in one day.

Wendy and I had many enlightening sessions similar to this one. I confided in her more than I had done with most of my friends. And for that, she spoke to me like she had known me for years, even though the sessions were discontinued only a few months after they had started. She helped me realize that life truly is what I make of it, and that I have the power to create and develop my relationships, love, and memories. She also taught me that talking and listening to other people has helped me discover myself.

Our sessions were cut short due to a near-death skiing accident that Wendy's son was in. Wendy and her family left town almost immediately to care for him, so we never had a chance to say goodbye. A few weeks later, she sent me a letter telling me that she was still thinking of me and hoped that I was still progressing from when we had first met. Although she was going through an extremely difficult time, she still reached out to me. I have yet to write her a letter back that expresses my gratitude fully for how she's helped me and for the support she had given me while I was struggling. I will keep her and our discussions close to my heart always.