

~~DON'T OVERTHINK IT~~



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September 2023  
MJ Melendez

## INTRODUCTION

Since I was a child, my mom passed down to me the sayings of my grandmother. Sayings that guided me in difficult moments and served as a reminder that in life, giving up was never an option for us. Taking a pause to breathe, gathering strength, and gaining momentum was accepted, but stepping back or giving up was not worthy of us.

These sayings and teachings were like our traditional chicken and rice recipe, a dish passed down from generation to generation. Where each one of us could add our own condiments and adapt it to current times but essence would remain the same.

Consequently, my life has been shaped through these frameworks created by my grandmother, shaped by my mother, and finally adopted and adapted by me. I took the most valuable teachings from both, added my own seasonings and spices, and use them daily to find courage, encouragement, and respect, even in the face of my own thoughts.

My desire is that, by the end of this book, you can take my experience as a starting point and create your own recipe for well-being; and thus, perhaps transform my chicken and rice recipe into a delicious risotto, paella, or BBQ.

## WHO AM I?

My parents split when I was 8, and from then until I turned 20, I lived in a small apartment with my mom and my stepsister. She was 13 years older than me, and as far back as I can remember, our relationship was complicated. It was understandable, I was the product of love between her mother and a stranger.

With my dad, it was a similar story. He already had a daughter before he met my mom. And, by some twist of fate, she was also 13 years older than me. Our relationship was not close either, but once again, I understood.

The divorce of my parents came with a gift: my first cellphone! From then on, I talked to my dad every day. We were best friends, inseparable. He would wake me up in the mornings - even if ten calls were needed- to make sure I was awake and about to hop into the shower. We would have serious conversations, the kind a 10-year-old girl could have with her 57-year-old father. Our typical Tuesday afternoon dinners were accompanied by his black coffee and my warm milk. Our bond was unique. I could not wait to get out of school to tell him about my day, share my dreams, and plans. Every achievement I reached, would fill him with pride; the kind of joy only a parent feels when their child accomplishes something and becomes an extension of themselves.

It was wonderful. But this memory has its sad moments too. He was always sick, with the type of illnesses that are labeled as '*terminal*.' He used a peculiar phrase to give me comfort: '*Bad weed never dies*.' It was his way of telling me that neither cancer, nor end-stage liver failure, nor multiple heart attacks could take him away from me. He would always repeat that his passion to see me through college was stronger, motivating him daily to endure late-night emergencies, daily dialysis, and countless hospitalizations.

What I did not know in those moments was that these words would be more literal than I could imagine, and that he would pass away just a month after my college graduation.

This context sculpted my childhood and turned me into a very reflective child. I would often retreat to my room, turn off the lights, light a candle, and play soft music. I would delve into introspection, trying to understand why I had to live this life, if I was paying some kind of karmic debt, or if I just had bad luck. As the years went by, the constant late-night medical emergencies filled me with fear, the fear of waking up one day and discovering that my father would no longer be there.

That's when I started writing. I would pour my deepest emotions onto the paper, just releasing panic without filters. There was no fear of feeling shame or guilt. It was a judgment-free channel, like shouting from the top of a mountain until I ran out of voice.

Later, when I was calmer and more stable, I would reread these writings. And by doing so, would allow me to relive certain stages of my life with less emotional intensity and more rational understanding. This practice took me on a journey of self-discovery that helped me confront my pain and connect with the inner child who longed for protection and unconditional love.

Writing so much made me a highly empathetic child with the ability to easily connect with my emotions. In other words, I became prone to crying easily. It did not matter where I was, who I was with, or the reason; tears would flow naturally. Although I did not feel proud of this tendency, I learned to accept it as a part of my being.

In response to these constant tears, my mother used to quote a phrase from my grandmother that stayed with me: *'It is all in the mind. Don't overthink it, sweetheart.'*

So, I learned to do exactly that: *Not to overthink stuff.*

- ✘ Unpleasant, regrettable, or depressing situation?
- ✘ A problem over which I have no capacity for action or control?
- ✘ Heartbreaking pain that makes me burst into tears?

The answer to these situations was simple: *I did not allocate them any mental space. Instead, I focused on what did make me happy =)*

This skill became useful when I started living alone, moved out of town, and started over; got scammed and lost my savings and specially when my father passed away... the culmination of a trauma nurtured over years.

Over time, I got used to wrapping my worries in a sort of emotional parchment paper, and then, like a ritual, would put them in the oven of denial. I left them there, forgotten, never to think of them again. This strategy allowed me to continue cooking up more feasts in my life, without distractions or unwanted thoughts. I could focus on my studies, graduate at the top, secure a decent job, climb the corporate ladder, and even complete a master's degree and scholarship courses simultaneously.

However, none of that filled the internal void I felt. On the outside, my life seemed successful, but inside, there was a constant sense of sadness that puzzled me even more. Objectively, there was no reason to feel sad, and that would confuse me even more.

This confusion was the starting point of my journey toward emotional healing. A journey that has not ended but strengthens with every transition I experience. That is why my hope is that as we progress through these writings, you can find in my experience and the lessons I have learned some insights and tools that enable you to heal, grow, and discover your own inner peace.

## OG RECIPE

Paying the price for having this mechanism during crises took its toll on me several years later...

⌘ **I would think: “*Not stopping to keep moving forward.*”**

Just like a headless chicken. I could go far, but I would not know where I had already been, I would not know if I was where I wanted to be or even if I was going in circles.

- ⌘ Moving out at 20, working while studying, and living independently was quite the experience. It allowed me to mature and enjoy my youth without anyone watching over me, making it an interesting journey.
- ⌘ It took me a while to appreciate the good things too. I was 21 and had bought my first piece of land. I had a mortgage, but it would be *'mine'* someday.
- ⌘ Similarly, at 22, I won a scholarship and was in Paris for the first time, without knowing fluent French or having family or friends there.

I deprived myself of personal growth and self-recognition by looking out the window at what was outside, instead of seeing myself in a mirror and recognizing what I was experiencing and struggling with. Not looking inward delayed my self-worth, and personal realization that even in the worst moments I was able to move forward.

✂ I would also think: *“The struggle is kept within.”*

My mother used to say this, referring to the idea that we keep moving forward in life because that's how life is—we could not afford suffering. And if, in any case, sadness does creep in, we should carry it deep inside, so deep that others cannot see it, and that pain does not block us from moving forward.

When an apple rots, it starts from within, and it goes unnoticed for a while, giving the impression that it is still fresh and juicy in the outside. But this is extremely dangerous because it gradually spreads until it reaches the surface. And by the time it is visible, it is too late, and it is already rotten.

It's the same with our pain. Keeping it deep inside, without processing it does not make the struggle any easier. It only reduces visibility of how much it is compromising as it spreads, and healing it later becomes even more challenging.

✂ When my father passed away, I rushed back to work to avoid pain. I sought to stay busy to prevent the pain from spreading in my body or mind. I stopped writing because the pain overwhelmed my soul, and I stopped talking to him because I could not accept the idea of talking to an empty sit and pretending, he would be listening. This led to uncontrollable tears. Looking back, I recognize that I never truly processed my grief. However, I also understand that, back then, I actively avoided dealing with it. I wanted to *“not overthink it.”*

✂ I cried where it would not naturally be appropriate to cry. I passed an exam, bought a property, got a promotion, was recognized at work... the effect was the same, I cried. Yes, on one hand, it was tears of happiness, but I will not deny it, I also felt deep sadness. Sadness for not being able to share it with my father and see the happiness and pride in his eyes once again.

I did not allow myself to feel the pain at the time, validate it, and give it its place in my mind, and then move on. I was afraid of feeling so much pain that I would break and could not continue. So, I got used to hiding my rotten apples in the oven to keep cooking. It was useful for a phase, until the smell became evident, and there was no more space to hide them anymore. I had no choice but to open the oven and heal them one by one.



✘ I would also think: *“Celebrate war, not battles.”*

I did not celebrate the big or small, the transcendental or trivial. I was afraid of celebrating, being happy, and reveling in the emotion, only to stop being happy later. Because what a panic it was to enjoy something or someone, knowing that being more aware of their magnificence could later make me even more miserable for being fully aware of what I could end up losing.

- ✘ This attitude prevented me from being my own biggest cheerleader. I did not give myself encouragement for all the small achievements and accept that I was on the right path. I did not acknowledge my effort and the sacrifices I had made to get where I was.
- ✘ When things went well, I did not pause to congratulate myself; I only pressured myself to maintain or speed up the pace, capitalize on the momentum, and keep moving forward.
- ✘ And when things went wrong, I was my own worst enemy. I would thoroughly analyze the situation from start to finish, mapping out all the mistakes I had made, to berate myself for not being able to foresee and prevent them in the first place.

I -unnecessarily- punished myself for a long time, believing that being demanding of myself would push me to go further and stay on track. Over the years, this attitude became so repetitive that it was my frequent routine in the face of all kinds of challenges.

## UPGRADED RECIPE

After falling and getting back up countless times... and realizing that each time I got up, I ended up with more wounds because of my coping mechanisms, I managed to learn that perhaps, how I processed my experiences was not the healthiest way to reach mental peace, and that something had to change.

That said, I transformed the thought of: *'It is all in the mind. Don't overthink it'* to: *'the power IS in my mind, and it might be time to digest it'* and so, I started taking my apples out of the oven and opening them up.

- ⌘ **So, now when I think: *"Not stopping to keep moving forward."* I recognize my need to pause, connect with my inner self, take care of me, and keep sprinting.**

I identify my emotions, following thoughts, and actions. I am aware that my judgment may be clouded so I keep a prepared checklist that helps me confirm that if I am experiencing these emotions, I may be caught in this recurring pattern.

- ⌘ **Feelings:**

- ⌘ Overwhelmed
- ⌘ Anxious
- ⌘ Impatient with myself and with others

- ⌘ **Thoughts:**

- ⌘ *"I better keep pushing forward -even if tired- I'll feel better when I finish."*

My unconscious self, looking for satisfaction by achieving goals, instead of listening to what my body and mind need. Focusing my energy on specific tasks instead of stepping back and seeing the bigger picture. My obsession with progress ends up costing me the overall vision.

- ⌘ **Actions:**

- ⌘ I populate my calendar to create a fake sense of "moving forward."
- ⌘ I cease to find time for disconnecting from the daily routine and reconnecting with my inner self.
- ⌘ I overcommit to third parties and overload my schedule.

### The price of happiness: A reality check:

Have you noticed how certain milestones, achievements or possessions promised to deliver happiness, only to later leave you right back where you started?

Let's take a second to reflect on some of these scenarios:

- ⌘ Weight loss goal you believed would lead to ultimate happiness.
- ⌘ The dream job that was supposed to make life meaningful.
- ⌘ The ideal partner who was meant to bring lasting joy.
- ⌘ Perhaps you've been convinced that a new car or the apartment with the amazing view would unlock profound happiness.

And so, the list can go on, tailored to your unique experience.

The point here is:

- ⌘ **Before achieving it:**  
How happy did you think it would make you on a scale from 1 to 10?  
How long did you predict you would feel that level of happiness?
- ⌘ **Once you achieved it:**  
How happy were you actually?  
How long did it last?

I invite you to do this exercise with the last three events you considered would make you the happiest and confirm whether you had the ability to correctly calculate their duration and intensity.

Now, ask yourself,

- ⌘ What did you stop doing during that time?
- ⌘ What was the cost of pursuing that goal without rest?

I review this list frequently and update it to stay grounded in how bad we humans are at calculating our future happiness when it is tied to certain achievements, events, or external factors. This helps me put into perspective the real contribution over time of what I am pursuing and the cost and impact it has on my life.

**NOTE:**

The message is not, "*do not pursue goals and stay in your comfort zone.*" It's about putting into perspective that our goals are not perfect, that they will have a cost, and that it's worth taking a breath and pausing because when we reach them, problems will continue, they will transform into different types of problems or anxieties, but we'll need to arrive with a clear and free mind to have a better capacity to face them.

*You do not win a marathon by sprinting the first five hundred feet downhill but by maintaining a sustainable pace throughout the whole race. Life is a race.*



- ⌘ **Now when I think: “*The struggle is kept within.*” I confront the reality of a challenging situation. It reminds me of the resilience I’ve demonstrated in the face of adversity before. In this very moment, what I crave the most, is to provide the same nurturing self-compassion I would offer to my loved ones, to my Dad for instance.**

First, I take a similar approach by identifying my feelings, thoughts, and actions to recognize my patterns.

- ⌘ **Feelings:**

- ⌘ Hopelessness, deep sadness, or helplessness
- ⌘ Disconnection with my feelings

- ⌘ **Thoughts:**

- ⌘ *"I can't get depressed; if I get sad, I might fall into a pit and not come out. It's better not to open that door, not even to look at it."*
- ⌘ *"I can't believe that this is really happening, I can't believe I achieved it. How come did I become....?"*

My mental and emotional disconnection from what was happening around me, made it hard to accept how plans are becoming reality and how I was transforming and growing at the same time.

- ⌘ **Actions:**

- ⌘ I suppress my negative feelings by drowning them out with a busy schedule filled with tasks like hitting the gym, working, reading, shopping, or engaging in social media. It allows me to temporarily distract myself from trauma or challenging situations.
- ⌘ I turn overly sensitive and emotional in any scenario, and I find it hard to understand why I feel so sad or have such deep sorrow.

In those moments, I hit the pause button, shifting my energy away from the hopelessness and anxiety of the future. I take a moment to appreciate and acknowledge what I have accomplished, survived, and learned. Like recharging my batteries with the strength and wisdom of my past, empowering me to face the present.

## Vision Board vs Pride Board:

The famous "Vision board" is often discussed as a tool to visualize where we want to go, what we want to achieve or the type of life we desire to have. It is highly focused on the future, on what we can obtain if we do certain things.

Although it fills us with encouragement and empowerment, it often carries an underlying tone of "more, more, more." This constant drive for improvement is amazing, but it's equally important to pause and reflect on our current achievements and the factors that have shaped us. That's where my "*Pride Board*" comes into play.

A Pride Board is a collage of the achievements I have been accumulating every year. It is not based on the results but on what I have learned and grown. It is a collection of moments, people, or experiences that document what I have been capable of and how strong I am and have been.

So, I ask you:

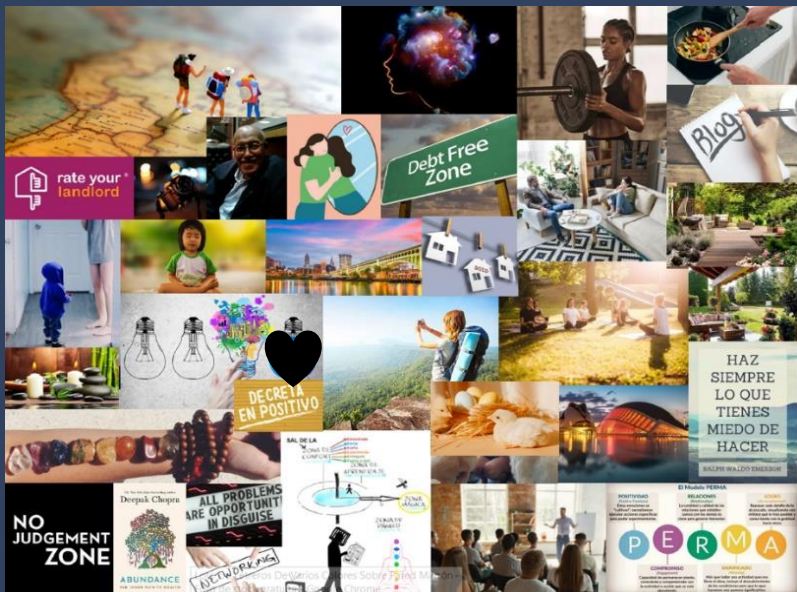
- ⌘ What are the accomplishments that, year after year, have filled you with pride and played a key role in shaping the person you are today?
- ⌘ What experiences, regardless of their level of difficulty and even if they did not turn out as expected, have had a positive impact on you and have shown you what you are capable of?
- ⌘ What did you think you could not overcome but eventually did?

I started working on mine 10 years ago, and every time I feel like I cannot handle a new challenge, I look at this *Pride Board* – which only grows in the face of adversity – and I fill myself with pride and courage to continue, realizing what I am actually made of.

*Just because I do not remember how I got my scars does not mean I do not have the ingrained reflexes to respond better to a future threat.*

## Vision Board Example:

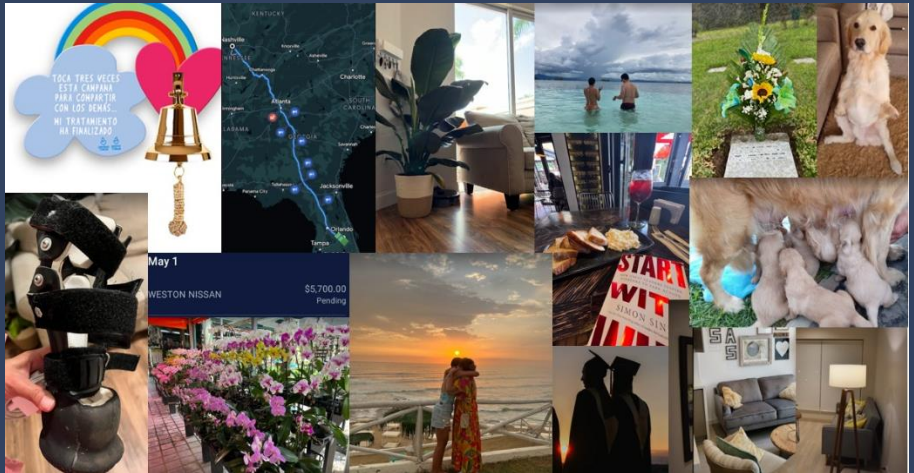
It focuses me with what truly resonates in my heart and fuels the fire with in me to press forward. Helps me align my current actions with what I desire to obtain or become in the future. I visualize how I will feel and what my life will be like in these scenarios, and it motivates me to strive every day.



- ✘ Workout daily and lose 8lb.
- ✘ Learn how to cook.
- ✘ Publish a blog to help women.
- ✘ Conduct in-person coaching workshops.
- ✘ Pay off all my debts.
- ✘ Step out of my comfort zone and change jobs.
- ✘ Sell my apartment and make a profit.
- ✘ .....

### Pride Board:

It reminds me of what I felt, thought, and did when I went through each of these moments. But they also immortalize that despite the pain and anxiety I felt, I also managed to grow and endure much more than I imagined.



- ✕ My mother fought cancer, and we overcame it together.
- ✕ Survived my dad passing away.
- ✕ Took care of our disabled dog, and after months of research and tests, found a prosthetic perfect for him.
- ✕ Chose mental peace over launching third business.
- ✕ Started mindful activities to cope with feeling alone and disoriented.
- ✕ Got scammed but turned it into a business opportunity.
- ✕ .....



- ⌘ Today, when I think: *“Celebrate winning war, not just individual battles.”* I remind myself of the journey that brought me here. I reflect on the immense effort I put in to reach this point, the desires and dreams that fueled my determination. This mindset transforms my perspective, reminding me to appreciate the NOW -even if it is a tiny battle- and honor the past versions of myself who struggle to make it possible.

Once more, identify feelings, thoughts, and actions to recognize patterns and acknowledge myself more easily.

- ⌘ **Feelings:**

- ⌘ Prone to feeling envy, as I stop valuing what I achieve myself and start appreciating what others have accomplished.
- ⌘ Guilt for not achieving more, for not having the capacity to be aware of more (as a human being).
- ⌘ High fear of making mistakes. I burden myself with negative energy.

- ⌘ **Thoughts:**

- ⌘ Overly demanding of myself. Negativity because I focus on achieving X, and nothing less. If I fall short of 100% of X, I fixate on the 10% I did not achieve instead of the 90% I did.
- ⌘ Scarcity thinking. I think of all the scenarios that can go wrong to avoid them and "secure" victory. I struggle to enter a mode of gratitude because I take positive results for granted and dedicate my energy to getting even more, entering a negative addictive loop.

- ⌘ **Actions:**

- ⌘ I do not rest enough. Even when I sleep, I do not rest well.
- ⌘ I postpone activities where I should quiet my mind and live in the moment, like enjoying a book, watching a sunset, or relaxing without screens nearby.

### Victim vs. Player:

After enduring a challenging phase, it's perfectly human to express our frustrations and grapple with feelings of anger, sadness, or even helplessness. Unfortunately, these emotions are an inherent part of life's journey, much like the adventures and exciting moments we encounter.

In this scenario, I acknowledge the importance of not simply burying myself in endless activities, as it's not a healthy long-term solution. However, I also understand that jumping right away into problem-solving mode might not be the best answer either.

So, here's the deal: If I feel the need to briefly embrace the victim role, allowing myself to lament and complain, and even letting my energy be drained, I set a specific time for it. However, I also commit to later transitioning into the "Player" role, where I will actively overcome the current situation.

There are certain rules though:

1. Set a maximum time to be on Victim role. Let's say 4 days.
2. Experience a mindful period of Victimization, meaning not worrying about how to fix the current situation, but actually feeling and embracing current emotions.
3. Last but not least, generate at least one hypothesis about why I began to feel this way in the first place.

Then comes the "Player" stage, where I put the following into action:

- ⌘ **I pick up ONE activity that makes me feel good about myself.**  
I start with one improvement at a time, avoiding the commitment to multiple changes that may prove unsustainable and potentially harm my self-esteem.
- ⌘ **I let go of ONE unhealthy habit.**  
Reducing social media engagement time, criticizing myself for mistakes I made during the day, or complaining about trivial matters.
- ⌘ **I recreate conditions from the past that boosted my self-esteem:**  
Dimming the lights, lighting a candle, playing music, and reflecting, reminiscent of my childhood at age 8.

### **The Power within our Inner Child:**

It's extremely uncomfortable to remain in silence with oneself. And it can even be dangerous when the words we tell ourselves are not encouraging. That's why it's easier to navigate through social media, read self-help books, or listen to personal growth podcasts.

Therefore, an uncomplicated way to connect with our inner selves involves having a childhood photo nearby. This picture acts as a portal to our earliest moments of fear, allows us to access the details of where we were, why we felt so scared, who we turned to, what they told us, and what we did.

Do you remember what that child wished for? What was on their mind?

Imagine that this same child walks through the door and looks at you with the same fear and apprehension...

### **What would you say to your younger self?**

Now that you know what you're capable of and how much you've achieved, repeat it, looking at yourself in the mirror and seeing that scared child in you. We always have the chance to reparent ourselves and give us the love and protection that child needed and still needs.

These are some of the thoughts I've had for many years, and they sometimes invade me during moments of crisis without me realizing it. These writings have helped me get to know myself better, understand why I act the way I do, rather than just criticizing myself. And in this way, I've stopped surviving to live a richer life full of experiences and dedicate my energy to valuing myself and my surroundings.

These are some questions that have helped me recalibrate daily and give perspective to my days:

- ✕ What will I miss tomorrow from what I have today?
- ✕ What do I have today that I was begging to have 5 years ago?
- ✕ What is my biggest fear and why; when have I experienced a similar fear before and how did I overcome it? (If I'll think about the future and its endless

possibilities, I'll also think about the past and how I've done it before, which is where the Pride Board comes in handy).

- ⌘ What are the biggest lessons I have in life, and thanks to what pain do I owe them? Did I know these things before that pain? How could I then see events that generate pain or fear differently?

Recognizing thoughts that once served others or even my past self but no longer benefit me today, is part of my new practice. A routine where I consistently examine and adapt my mindset, shaping it into a version that serves my personal growth.

I hope these recipes have enriched your journey! Remember, just as you can customize them with your own seasonings and sauces, you can explore your unique path to emotional well-being. Your story is one of a kind, and your healing and growth goals are too.

If these words have struck a chord with you and you're eager to embark on your path to well-being, reach out to me at [dont.overthink.it.alone@gmail.com](mailto:dont.overthink.it.alone@gmail.com). If you seek a safe environment for self-discovery, customized guidance, and actionable steps to empower your next life chapter, I'm here to support and coach you on this journey.

**MJ**  
**Life Coach**

