

**Thanh, Yasuko. (2019). Mistakes to Run With.
Toronto: Hamish Hamilton.**

Reviewed by: Matilda Cronshaw, Macewan University

Do you ever wonder about how you would survive the streets if you left home as an adolescent? Yasuko Thanh wrote a memoir about her eventful life titled “Mistakes to Run With” that was published in 2019. In her search for freedom, love, and independence, she leaves her parents’ home at the tender age of fifteen. Moving from Victoria to Vancouver, she gets involved with a ringleader which puts her onto the path of prostitution, drugs, homelessness and violence. From beginning to end, there are distinct themes within her lifestyle. She becomes codependent on others that inadvertently gets her into a string of abusive relationships. With each relationship, she tries to attain the nuclear family and struggles to recognize her identity away from her partners. The transition period of becoming a mother and weathering the storm of single parenthood is a breakthrough moment for her independence. Through twists and turns, Thanh finally finds herself and gets her happy ending. But at what cost?

Thanh leaves home to show her parents she can be independent and do what she wants. The fact that the opposite is true is purely ironic. From the moment she leaves, she bounces around from Luna, to a friend with a closet, to Pat, to Ruth, to Yvonne, to Will, to Jay, to Frances, to Avery. She is always on the hunt for accommodation and getting her basic survival needs met. Between befriending these people, she is sleeping rough on the streets, or working her way through motels. Being so emotionally dependent in her relationship with Avery causes issues. She idealizes who Avery is in her head and what they are supposed to be. She becomes

jealous of his other girls and she tries to prove to him her worth. In moments of realization, Thanh acknowledges that she cannot leave him because she has nowhere to go or any money to live on. The tendency of codependence is still showing through when she settles down her life with Philip. Returning from Mexico with nothing but a few bills in her pocket, he offers her a place to stay.

Thanh eventually learns to become emotionally independent by re-evaluating what her interests are and each time, taking a break away from Avery, Philip and Eddie. Returning to Vancouver to meet up with Avery the last time appears to have given her closure about that chapter of her life. Upon reflecting on this theme, the signs of codependency closely align with the signs of Borderline Personality Disorder. Can her mental illness diagnosis actually be responsible for her actions?

Thanh chasing love and freedom is, unfortunately, demonstrated through unhealthy relationships and a lack of boundaries. Her need to people please is what gets her into trouble, but she keeps going back to her man of the month. Her self-esteem is so low, and jealousy is so high, she cannot see how this is affecting every relationship she has. Avery is important to her; he is her main relationship within her story. There are multiple signs of abuse, yet she overlooks it all in her quest to feel wanted and needed. As the book goes on, subtle drops of toxicity are dropping, and it has a gradual buildup, like many unhealthy relationships do. Her well-intentioned mindset gets her into chaos. Before she even meets Avery, she says “freedom came with hardship. I reminded myself, Isn’t this what you wanted?” (p. 52) Thanh doesn’t see the restraints she already has by being ‘free’.

Avery’s explosions and poor actions are justified in Thanh’s head as a mental illness. It gives her headspace some room to forgive him and be kind, even though he fantasizes about

killing her. She remains hopeful that he will get better and they can have the life she dreams of. She will be loved. This reflects the classic cycle of abuse. Thanh talking about her relationship brings awareness to readers about the small comments that are made over a long period of time.

As much as it seems chapter after chapter that Thanh is still doing drugs, prostituting herself and pursuing companionships, she goes through transitions. Her first being when she originally leaves home. Very quickly, she learns the dos and don'ts of the street world and portrays herself as successful, even when she's not.

After realizing she's completely lost in the world of drugs, money and sex, she goes through an identity crisis. There is a turning point when she gets pregnant the first time. A character profile that originally comes across as thoughtless and cold is actually caring and maternal. She longs to become a mother; a side to her that is not really shown until now. She wishes her partners will become the perfect father and husband. This important turning point is her realizing the unhealthy relationship she is in and the person she lost from it. As a way of finding herself and a textbook remedy of becoming emotionally independent, she starts using creative outlets.

When she becomes pregnant with Jet, she goes through the major transition of motherhood and working through the motions. Highlighting her struggles to fit into a group of other mothers sends a message to parent readers that they are not alone. Motherhood also ties into her codependence issues, in that she has to be independent and she is surprised at how much she is capable of doing. At this point in her memoir, she finds her wings and is learning to fly. Motherhood isn't her sole personality, but it is the making of her.

In Thanh's efforts to reduce stigmatization and portray the less-than-ideal circum-

stances that people get into, usually out of no fault of their own, her success to do that is clouded by privilege. Her struggles are appreciated, and her accomplishments illustrate that success is possible even when one is at rock bottom; however, she always had the option to go home to her parents, of which she did a few times. Thanh's grievances and trauma that nobody should endure are unfortunate, but the fact remains: she was still a runaway teen. She chose this life. Regarding Philip's lifestyle, she says "his ability to romanticize his poverty verged on irritating, since of course for him it was a choice" (p. 196). It was irritating to read that as she dismisses her own poverty as a choice she made.

There were also a couple details that seemed to have been forgotten and not touched at the end of her story. Philip is the biological father of Jet and Maisie; however, it seems that when she leaves him, he completely disappears. Is he never to be heard of again or do they co-parent? She also mentions she quit smoking cigarettes, but nothing was said on her hard substance use. Was she lucky and didn't get addicted to drugs? That would be hard to believe looking at her addictive personality. The ending also seemed to be wrapped up fairly quickly and the significance of Maisie having Obsessive Compulsive Disorder wasn't clearly communicated. Was that just another detail to add to Thanh's hardships? Her mental health was also lightly touched on at the end and diving into it more could have tied her history back to when she was an unheard teenager. It felt like a book of facts and, even though horrific events happened, emotion was missing.

"Mistakes to Run With" contributed to spreading awareness about this style of life, whether chosen or not, and the unfortunate events that can occur. Leaving home and being independent is fun at first; then it is fun with problems until eventually, it is just problems. Thanh's abusive relationship with Avery made her stand on her own two feet and become the

successful writer she is. She can provide her daughters the love and acceptance she was looking for, so they don't make the same mistakes as she did. With so many aspects to this memoir, the reader demographic can be quite diversified. For purposes of personal reading, this can help parents and troubled teenagers who are experiencing the same challenges. It can help and inspire other people who are in a similar situation. In a professional setting, this book is suited for experts who study interactions between human behaviour, brain functioning and society. Reading a personal detailed narrative of events can assist professionals with their studies; therefore, it can be beneficial for psychologists, psychopathologists, sociologists and criminologists.