



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

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Yasuko Thanh's book, "Mistakes to Run With" is Thanh's autobiographical memoir. She recalls the events and emotional stages of her life, from rebellious teenage runaway, to hardened under-aged prostitute, soul-seeking writer and world traveler, to mentally distraught mother. Drawing from her collection of extensive writings from throughout her life, Thanh's introspection provides a first-person perspective of some of the difficulties faced by immigrant families, sex trade workers, and victims of mental illness. Thanh wrote her memoir chronologically which centered around her relationships. They can be categorized as follows: her nuclear family, independent living, common law relationships, and marriage. Through it all, a repetitive and destructive cycle emerges that characterizes every meaningful relationship she is a part of, her pursuit of intimate love and acceptance, having her dreams broken by those she seeks love from the most, and the inevitable need to escape the now undesirable relationship. Thanh's memoir is an intriguing case study that exemplifies the fundamental human desire for intimacy and attention.

Thanh begins by describing her relationship with her biological family. Born to a Vietnamese father and a German mother who immigrated to Victoria, B.C. in 1970, the family lived in relative poverty on account of her father working as a shoe salesman instead of in business as his education from back home would have permitted. She is the first child followed by a

younger brother. She describes how her brother was treated as the favorite child, while Thanh was older and therefore according to her parents did not need the same amount of attention that her brother did. This is where the first cycle began. Feeling neglected by her parents, she longed for their attention and appreciation. As a result, she resorted to misbehaving, which prompted authoritarian parenting and physical punishment from her parents. They expected perfection from her and were never impressed by the accolades she received. She explained, “For my entire childhood—and still, today, part of me waits—I’d needed to hear three simple words from my parents: You Are Good. Good. Worthy. Valuable” (Part I: Fortunes of all Humans). Thanh recalls anecdotes of her parents preventing her from accomplishing her dreams, the most egregious being when her father refused her the opportunity to become a gymnast. These, along with the realization that her parents would never care enough, culminated into a series of counting compulsions where she instead tried to gain God’s love through repeated daily rituals. Alongside these compulsions, Thanh began using writing and journaling as a way to escape her emotionally neglectful surroundings. But eventually this too was not enough of a coping mechanism. At age fifteen she ran away from her home and lived with friends; all the while her parents knew where she was but never attempted to bring her back home.

Following her departure from home, Thanh writes about how she became a wanderer, roaming the streets following her friends. Whoever was willing to accept her and acknowledge her existence became her new family. This period in her life was also characterized by learning how to survive. Thanh described how she would imitate her friends to stay alive; drinking and doing drugs to fit in socially, shoplifting from stores to stay fed, and eventually prostitution to pay

for whatever she wanted. Toughness and a thick skin were a new way of avoiding pain. Prostitution became her way of life, and she was proud of it.

Prostitutes were not known for being responsible or successful. Yet for the first time I realized how society could be wrong. How people could claim a certain knowledge while misjudging a situation. I became suspicious: what else had society lied about? What else had I been persuaded to believe? The world had turned upside down. Everything bad was good and everything good had become pompous, hyperinflated with the air of its own self-righteousness (Part I: Hell Guards).

Despite the challenges of living on the street, she remembers searching for love, desperate to find out what it felt like. But whenever she thought she had found love, it never lived up to what she was hoping it would be, or the other person would break her heart, leaving her searching again. One particular love interest, Johnny, epitomized this cycle when he called her a hooker following her first prostitution gig. It shattered her heart and left her feeling undesirable once again. The broken dreams of a potential romance would be promptly followed by the desperate need to escape from the heartache and pain.

As Thanh's career as an escort became more established, she sought out romantic connection and economic diversification in the form of pimps. This began the common-law relationship stage of her life. This stage was characterized by her pimps, Jay and Avery, and her soul-searching partners, Kyle and Phillip. Jay and Avery seduced Thanh and manipulated her into exploitive relationships alongside their other "wife-in-laws" (other prostitutes). Where as Thanh sought love, affection and security from these men, she was mainly a source of income and a prestige item to them. Together, they partied hard and lived expensively. Ultimately, both Jay and Avery ended Thanh's dreams. Jay overtly cheated on her with another prostitute, ruining her dream of an

exclusive romance. Opposingly, Avery and Thanh's goals in life grew further and further apart; with Thanh wanting to retire to a socially responsible lifestyle while Avery tried to hang on to his old life of luxury. In both cases, Thanh walked out, escaping the relationships that no longer felt loving and accepting.

Immediately following her lifestyle of opulence with her pimps, Thanh did a complete 180° turn to a life of soul-searching poverty. She had fallen in love with travel while on a vacation around the Caribbean with Avery, and had decided that seeing the world would make her feel whole. Thanh recalled how her travels had started in Mexico City and ended when she met Kyle, a paranoid American fugitive who lived on the beach in Zipolite, Mexico. They dreamed of building a house on the beach and making a family, but this was not to be. Kyle could provide the intimacy that Thanh desired, but his paranoia suffocated all of her freedom. So she returned to Canada, where she met an artist named Phillip. He was a university educated painter who chose to live in squalor for artistic insight. At this point, Thanh had decided that if she was ever going to have children, it would have to be now or never. So they had two girls, Jet and Maisie. The girls were everything to Thanh, but Phillip would not let parenthood distract him from his painting. Overtime, Thanh's and Phillips' visions of the future drifted apart and eroded, leaving Thanh as a single mom of two trying to keep the three of them alive. Her life so far, consisted of four common-law partnerships, four families that initially seemed to satisfy her need for love and acceptance, and four escapes once the relationships fell apart.

The last relationship that Thanh writes about is with Eddie, a country music artist. At the time, Thanh was attending the University of Victoria's creative writing program. Trying to juggle

raising two children while attending school, she felt alone and isolated. Thanh described her relationship with Eddie as something similar to an act of desperation. He was someone to love and be loved by. She described her rational like this, “I was, once again, subsuming important aspects of my character to build a connection with a man. I called it love. It was fear” (Part II: Department of Heart Gouging). She described persistently trying to convince Eddie to move in with her and her kids, thinking, “We aren’t “serious” if we don’t live together. If he loved me, he’d spend every spare second with me” (Part II: Department of Heart Gouging). She dreamed of a stable, lasting relationship. Eventually, Eddie moved in and they married one another. Unfortunately, this is when Maisie developed obsessive compulsive disorder, and Thanh started exhibiting delusions associated with borderline personality disorder. Many of Thanh’s more persistent delusions were associated with Eddie’s ex-wife and stepdaughter attempting to steal him away from her, or how Eddie was plotting to kill her and her parents. After finishing publishing one of her books, she ran away from her family to escape the paranoia in her life caused by the turmoil in her mind. This spelled the end of her marriage, as Eddie had moved out by the time she returned. Their relationship was based on the fear of being alone, and ended because she could not escape the thoughts inside her head.

Thanh has crafted a well-written memoir that is engaging and captivating, if primarily because of the novelty of experiences in comparison to my own story. Her story makes for an intriguing case study, and would be especially interesting for those interested in psychology. The vast variety of relationship compositions make “Mistakes to Run With: A Memoir” a change of pace for anyone interested in relationship and family dynamics.