



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

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Yasuko Thanh's book, "Mistakes to Run With," is a memoir capturing tangible issues in our society and the circumstances one may experience throughout a lifetime. The reader gets exposed to a succession of cultivating issues such as; mental health, self-harm, drugs and alcohol use, prostitution, teen pregnancy and abortions, and different kinds of abuse. In Thanh's memoir, she guides us through her journey living in Vancouver, BC, from being an honour-roll student to leaving her home at fifteen to go work on the streets. Many readers may mediate throughout the book as to why she left her home to go live on the streets? Thanh answers this question with in-depth explanations of her family life and her end goal in life. The reader learns that Thanh wants to have the freedom to live the life she wants to live, to have control of her life, to have a secure and safe family of her own, and she would do whatever it takes to reach her goal. She wants to be able to reach her full potential. Her family was one of the most significant impacts on her life.

Family is one of the essential factors in our lives. They help determine how we will progress and grow as individuals. They are a support system for us and can provide help when we need it. However, not all families are there to help us prosper. For Thanh, she felt trapped living at home. She felt like she was not living her full potential or had the freedom to do what she wanted to do. Take gymnastics, for example. Thanh was a natural when it came to gymnastics; she would

do “handstands on the grass, in [her] bedroom. [She] did push-ups and practised the splits” (p. 22). Victoria’s best gymnastics program for girls invited her to join them, however, her father refused the offer. He was afraid she would get hurt. Thanh’s parents limited her potential in life. She was held back from great opportunities and was sheltered from the real world by their expectations. She was never recognized for her academic achievements and would sometimes cry herself to sleep, “Nobody cared enough about [Thanh] to wonder why [she] cried [her]self to sleep at night” (p. 28). She was a bright child and did well in school but got no praise. In grade three, Thanh’s teacher asked her to “read, out loud, [her] story about airplanes, and a war, and a little girl. [She] read it to [her] parents. They asked [her] if [she’d] plagiarized it” (pp. 21-22). Thanh’s life was managed strictly by her parents. She was unhappy. This confined way of life led her to leave and take control of her own life.

Thanh left her parents’ home at the age of fifteen to lead the life she wanted to live. She was on the streets and needed to make money to survive. The need for money steered her into the direction of prostitution and theft. She “stole things and sold them on the street for a third of their cost: butane curling irons, Black Magic chocolates, diapers, whatever people wanted [her] to steal” (p. 58). She made more money from prostituting than reselling stolen items. Thanh met people on the street that she would eventually live with or make them her lover.

She bounced around a few men in her life, usually pimps. Although these men were much older, she always dreamt of a family of her own. She desired not to raise her children the way her parents raised her. She wanted to give her children the freedom and support that she never got. Thanh lived through miscarriages and abortions, but in her late twenties, she became pregnant. In

the long run, she raised her two children on her own and went above and beyond for them, straying away from her parent's parenting style. Thanh finally had the family she wanted after years on the track (the name for her line of prostitution work). She was able to quit working on the track since she had a stable amount of money and started progressing down the path she wanted to pursue.

After quitting the track, Thanh eventually went back to school for creative writing and left her prostituting behind. Writing was always something she was interested in pursuing. From a young age, Thanh would demonstrate her love for writing, "The summer [Thanh] was six [she] filled a fifty-page notebook with [her] first novel. Loneliness spurred the writing, but the release it bestowed kept [her] at it" (p. 15). In her mid-thirties, she was on her way to achieving her goals. After completing her degree, while raising her two children, she won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize in 2016. She came such a long way from dropping out of school at the age of fifteen to going back to school for writing to be able to accomplish so much. This all ties back to why Thanh left home to end up working and living on the streets? The answer is simple. At home, she lived her life in a small box. She was controlled and limited by her parents while she yearned for freedom and control of her own life. Thanh wanted to live her life the way she envisioned it, and she knew that staying at home would stop her from doing so. She did try to mediate with her parents, who gave her "everything they had yet still failed to provide what [she] needed" (p. 257). We follow Thanh through her life story and realize that her home life had such a significant impact on her life today. Her parents failed to provide her with the necessary means to reach her desired goals, so she chose to go down a path most individuals consider the 'bad' path.

How Thanh took to achieve her desired goals in life is deviant to society. Individuals in

society expect everyone to have similar cultural goals and similar institutionalized means of achieving said goals. When we discover that someone is on the streets using drugs or prostituting, we assume they are going down a 'bad path.' However, with Thanh's story, we can comprehend that that is not always the case. Thanh innovated her institutionalized ways to meet the cultural goals that she wanted to attain. With the circumstances embedded in this book, Social Workers may find the situations Thanh had to overcome captivating as Social Workers have to deal with similar situations. The general public or individuals in similar positions may also be interested in this book, as Thanh's story can be relatable. Her story shows resilience and true strength, which can give many others courage. Additionally, individuals in careers such as counselling, psychology, and sociology may find this book insightful. It highlights various aspects seen in those lines of work.

I found "Mistakes to Run With" to be not only insightful but also eye-opening. Not many individuals open up about situations like what Thanh was in. I respect and appreciate that Thanh could open up about her life and release her vulnerability into the world. She was genuinely outspoken and shared her experiences in engaging ways. I admire her tenacity and her effort never to give up. However, I do believe that some aspects of her life could have been explored more deeply. The last quarter of the book, I felt, was rushed. Her narrative about going to school, her writing, and awards could have had a more significant analysis. Overlooking my thought on a slight weakness in the book, I sincerely enjoyed reading it. I would recommend it to anyone looking for an educational page-turner.