



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

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Yasuko Thanh's book, "Mistakes to Run With", shares an intimate account of Thanh's life, from when she was a child being raised by immigrant parents, through her teenage years working the streets of British Columbia, into her adult life as an accredited author. Throughout her tumultuous journey of life, Thanh writes of her struggles with overcoming trauma, managing mental illness, and understanding love. She shares with us the gruesome and violent details of her life as a teenage sex worker struggling with addiction to both drugs as well as an everlasting search for approval and love. Thanh's chronological account of her life on paper serves as a definition of resiliency against a world of pain.

Trauma was an ongoing theme in Thanh's story, and therefore her life. She begins by detailing her childhood as a young girl with two immigrant parents in Canada. She writes, "Perfection was expected. Not praised" (p. 8). Thanh clearly felt that nothing she had done was enough for her parents, nor would it ever be. She was receiving perfect grades, volunteering in her community, taking part in religious activities, and still – it was never enough. When Thanh reached the age of fifteen, she began to rebel against her parents. She turned to drugs, alcohol and made the streets her new home. She details multiple instances of sexual assault from before she was working the "track", which only grew more recurrent as she began work. A teenage Thanh found

herself moving from house to house, street family to street family, never being able to call anywhere home. Her experience dealing with violent pimps and tricks, losing friends, and time spent in and out of jail detailed her adolescent life. Despite returning to university and becoming a loving mother, Thanh still finds herself struggling to overcome her past trauma's. She details, "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" (p. 8). Thanh's past continues to shape her as a person, mother, and writer today.

Mental illness consistently played a role and grew alongside Yasuko Thanh. As a young child, she would jump from trees and high surfaces in order to elicit a reaction from her father or other friends standing by. She kept a jar of dead bees and wasps in her room that she admits to smelling their foul odour for the sole purpose of proving to herself that she could handle it. Furthermore, she began to inflict pain on herself through methods of self-mutilation, abuse of drugs and alcohol. When she grew older and began to engage in relationships with her "pimps", Thanh wrote in detail of her jealous tendencies. She often connected these feelings back to her childhood and feelings of worthlessness. Additionally, Thanh writes of obsessive tendencies such as feeling the need to write down every mundane aspect of her life as a child, in an effort to please God. These tendencies would later reveal themselves in her daughter, Maisie, whom would be consumed by OCD to an extreme extent.

Thanh writes about repeatedly being referred back to psychiatric facilities and programs by both doctors and the legal system throughout her time on the street. Her mental health was continuously an area of concern but was not given a direct diagnosis of borderline personality

disorder until later in life. She writes from a perspective of knowledge – that is, Thanh knows her diagnosis at the time of writing her memoir – yet she maintains a true and clear recounting of her memories as if she was going through them with the reader for the first time. Thanh eventually found herself retreating back to her old tendencies of drug abuse and isolation when she was forty-one and had left her children for a motel in Vancouver. This resulted in her admittance into a psychiatric ward, where she was given the correct medications that would help enable her to control her illness.

Finally, and most significantly, Thanh's struggle to understand love is a major theme in her memoir. Thanh consistently uses the phrase "then they'd see" (p. 31) when writing about her loved ones. When she was a child, she would consistently strive to prove her parents wrong by achieving the highest standards. When that failed, she began to throw herself off of things in a subconscious effort to seriously injure, or cause herself death, in a warped understanding that her parents would then realize that their expression of love was not enough. In Thanh's first relationships, she was consistently used and abused for means of money. As a result, Thanh began to believe that was all she was good for. This is evident in her future relationship with her pimp Avery, in which she writes as though she knew the relationship was doomed, yet still falls back onto her preconception that love will survive if she could just be better. As this relationship comes to an eventual demise, Thanh spends the next years of her life travelling and finding a new relationship with old habits. As one relationship ends and another begins, the only constant in Thanh's life is her notion that she is not good enough. However, when Thanh becomes a mother, it is clear in her writing that she has discovered a love that she is worthy to experience. She writes

“I wanted my children to know – it was imperative that they know – that they didn’t have to *be* anything but themselves for me to love them” (p. 226). This statement from Thanh herself reveals to readers that although romantic love had not worked out within her memoir, that does not mean she does not know what love is, nor is she incapable of it.

Thanh’s book writes about her life in an incredibly captivating and mesmerizing way, enthralling readers with anecdotes that are at times difficult to stomach. These accounts of her life show not only how strong of a woman she is, but also that healing is not a linear process. At no point in her memoir does Yasuko Thanh attempt to mislead the reader in promoting the idea that quitting drugs, or motherhood, or continuing your education will create a perfect life. Instead, Thanh embraces all of her struggles and writes in an effort to expose that she is still dealing with them to this day.

Yasuko Thanh’s memoir, “Mistakes to Run With” is greatly suited to an audience interested in the implications of past traumas in the course of an individual’s life. This could include professionals in the psychiatric field, therapists, psychologists, and researchers. Additionally, I believe this book is also an outstanding sociological example of how traumatic events can impact relationships across familial and romantic plains. For this reason, Thanh’s book would be well suited to post-secondary students in a sociological field.

Although Thanh’s memoir discussed brutal and honest accounts of serious topics that may be difficult for some readers, I believe her story is too important to ignore. Thanh writes bravely about her past, not hiding or sugar-coating any one factor. Therefore, I cannot identify any limitations in Thanh’s memoir, as it is raw and real to her truth. Her book was intensely emotional

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and eye-opening to read and provided a perspective I had never thought of prior. Thanh found the beauty and importance in her story and shared it with the world, creating a real and exceptional work of art.