

Many occasions in my past altered my life's path and meaning in this universe. If I mapped out my experiences, the trauma brain would lead the way through the maze, misplacing the positive experiences. However, one of the most significant moments of my life was March 14, 2018, when my 9lb 2oz baby boy came into this world. He may never know the quantity of strength I have pulled from the love that I have for him. If it hadn't been for his existence, there are aspects of my life in which I would not have been successful. He unknowingly forces me to be a better person. Tony unconditionally loves me, regardless of how I look or feel, even when I'm mad at him. He represents my third chance at life, leaving me to thank the universe for making me his mother.

It's still undetermined how he will turn out as an adult. I don't know that he won't fall into some bad ruts (everyone does), but I can say that his dad and I are striving to break the cycle of trauma for him. We strive to give him everything he needs and wants while also teaching him empathy and what it means to feel. These experiences, combined with the truth of the traumas we've overcome (when sharing them can be deemed appropriate), will lead him down a path of finding himself—resulting in the ability to be his true self for as much of his life as he can.

I look at him, and I see the potential. He's intelligent, sweet, and empathetic. Looking at him, I see a world of possibilities that my dad saw for me at such a tender age. I have had to claw at that world of opportunity to reclaim it, stripped away from me in many ways.

Today, I'm undoubtedly grateful for my struggles. Those challenges enabled me to see the beauty in my son growing up in a safe and loving home filled with laughter and happiness. In comparison, my childhood and most of my life were like dropping an entire container of glitter on the carpet. Eventually, after lots of sweat and elbow grease, tearing up the carpet to find

beautiful hardwood floors underneath. Those gorgeous floors had been just below the surface the entire time. Despite my relentless efforts to clean and polish the beauty I'd discovered within, the glitter still pops up. It's dirt brown and blends in with the hardwood floors, not even the pretty silver or gold glitter which adds a lovely accent. Once noticed, it cannot be unseen, glaringly apparent from a mile away. It was daring to be wiped clean, only to multiply. With an area rug placed over the top and cleaning paused, there was an attempt to cover the glitter. However, it only takes a short time before the glitter becomes visible again.

Over the years, the floors wear; some furniture begins to inhabit the house, adding to the quality of the area rug. Yet, despite the restoration and polishing, the dirt-brown, ugly glitter is still there. The glitter never ceases to remind me that it'll never go away. That's how my trauma is. I seem fine on the outside, and often, my 'funny' motto is "I'm fine; It's fine; Everything is fine." According to the dictionary, being fine can mean a few things. Most days, the definition of fine in my motto fluctuates between "of high quality" and "thin." My favorite purpose of F.I.N.E.: freaked out, insecure, neurotic, and emotional.