Insignificant Moments
By Ursula Delgadillo

“You are trying to kill yourself!”

I remember the exhaustion of the moment, the oppressive warmth of the therapist’s office. My inability to draw in a clean breath, and the heaviness of my throat which kept my words trapped inside me. I was debilitating from the effort it had taken me to disclose my suicidal ideation. Hearing the therapist’s words, despair iced over my insides. It was our first session, and I had just expressed the horrific fear I had of what I was capable of possibly doing to myself. He was disturbed, and the impact my words had on him, the fear he exhibited, triggered a physical response in me, and I found myself shaking. The therapist seemed afraid and slightly angry, or at least that is how I perceived him at the moment. The last of my reserves fell out from under me as I realized “he can’t help me” which translated in my mind to “no one can help me.” I let tears fall down my face, but I did not weep. It was the last time I sought help for my suicidal ideation.

I survived a 14-year struggle with suicidal ideation and depression. My choice of words is purposeful. I did not experience 14 years of suicidal ideation and depression, but survived it. My insidious mind tortured me every day and I could not outthink or outrun it. My thoughts controlled my reality and in my pain, I loathed who I had transformed into. I believed that I deserved every wretched thing that happened to me. No one was as unforgiving as I was to myself. I existed in a state of pain and torment, lashing out towards anyone who showed me kindness. I existed without purpose or desire, my only goal - to compose an exceptional suicide letter. Somehow find a way to translate my pain into words.

Do not let this last act of self-destruction disturb you...
...I am sorry for everything, for becoming this thing, this horrible thing.

I could never capture the writing necessary to express my own suffering. It was something I pushed myself to do, to have some way to explain myself to the people I encountered every day. Some way to get them to understand that who I was, the way I was, came about from this heightened place of pain. I filled endless notebooks with such attempts to describe what I was going through. Notebooks which got thrown away by my best friend who couldn’t take reading them anymore. I knew that if I ever got the power to bridge the emotions I was experiencing to writing, that the people reading it would understand, but the words failed me. When I finally gave up on everything, all I left behind was a scratched out note which read “feed the bunny.” I didn’t want my rabbit to die with me.

The moment came when the last part of me ceased resisting my ideation. For years I had fought, day and night, my soul ravaged by the battle, so much so that I was left unable to recognize the moment I stopped fighting. There was no part of me left to acknowledge the defeat.

During my final suicide attempt, in what I perceived to be the last moments of my life, I experienced a vulnerable moment of complete surrender. Lying on the floor, too weak to move, and slowly falling into unconsciousness, brief periods of my life played rapidly in my mind. What I saw was not the heart-wrenching misery I had existed in, but insignificant moments of kindness that strangers, friends and family members had offered me in the form of gentle words or comforting physical actions. Struck by the number of compassionate acts I had received and which I had failed to acknowledge I sobbed and I realized: “It was good, life was
good.” Witnessing those delicate moments helped change my perception and reality. I found the strength to recognize that others could care for me, to acknowledge the courage it took for me to have faced every day, in what I believed was a losing battle. Discerning those moments, which I was unable to accept before, allowed me to begin to forgive myself, and to seek help again.

I sought therapy, and during the course of the following year, I realized that I had never been weak, but strong, enduring. I had survived my unseen battle against suicidal ideation, by grasping onto anything to stay alive. I forced myself to sit for hours at different tourist places in Los Angeles, because I hoped that I would not harm myself surrounded by strangers. I searched pages of magazines for places I might want to see before I die. I told myself to hold on for one more day, to live for my best friend. I pleaded with myself, in my isolation, for one more hour, one more breath, even as my mind fought against me. I sought help from professionals, even when I was terrified, not only of myself, but of the consequences of sharing my ideation. I realized for 14 years the person I had been, had had no respite from her pain, she had been weary and exhausted, so very exhausted, but she had persisted. I allowed myself to weep for her.

Life, for the past 12 years has been a gift, granting me moments with loved ones that I would have been denied. I was alive to support my best friend of 23 years when she received her cancer diagnosis and then passed away eight weeks later. I am blessed to be here for my best friend’s daughter, my goddaughter, to help raise and love her. For a year and half, I held my mother’s hand, as cancer took her one piece at a time, and I now have the privilege of helping and sharing my father’s life with him. I have been, and continue to be fortunate.

For 14 years I lived not thinking about a future, assuming I would have none. When I realized I would live, I made the choice to go back to school. I enrolled in a community college, and ended up studying psychology as an undergraduate at UCLA and am now currently finishing up a Masters in Marriage Family Therapy at California State University, Northridge. I am pursing my degree to become a therapist for the chance to help others who may be experiencing despair. I wanted an opportunity to be the type of therapist I had desired, when I sought help before my final attempt.

A moment came a few months ago, when practicing as a MFT Trainee I had a client disclose suicidal ideation. Fully comprehending the legal and ethical issues regarding potentially suicidal clients, I did not experience fear, but instead had a calmness came over me. I allowed myself to be present with the client, to bear witness to his pain and the courage it took him to voice it. I guarded his safety through my actions, words, and demeanor. I was in awe, humbled by the moment, and the opportunity I had to help.

I am fortunate.

If I could step back in time, to that office, where the therapist declared:

“You are trying to kill myself!”

I would have my voice to explain:

“No. No, I am trying to live.”

I am alive.