

A specific time in your
life when you felt
extremely stressed by
the pressure to ...



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Stress Relief I sat in my car, but I wasn't moving. I mean, my car wasn't moving. I mean both. I mean neither. My body wasn't moving and my car wasn't moving but my mind was spinning around about a million miles a second. From the outside, I was just sitting there, at the intersection, looking at first one, then another, of the three roadways proceeding before me. My mind was having trouble focusing on what I was supposed to be doing right now. If I continued forward down the dappled street covered by overarching tree limbs, I would eventually arrive at the retail store where I worked. My boss had called just as I was walking out the door.

"Ian called in sick again. I need you to fill in the shift so Sue can get home. Can you do that for me? I know you can, I can always count on you. Bye!" And just like that, like she'd done so many times before, Margie threw a wrench in my already overcrowded weekend schedule. She hadn't even given me a chance to refuse, or to say anything at all. This probably meant that she intended for me to work a double shift since I was already scheduled to relieve Ian. This is the third week in a row. And I hated that job. Or I could turn left, into the open sunshine toward the lake where the rest of my family was gathering for a big picnic. Things had been tense between me and the folks lately. No matter how much I worked or how hectic my school schedule, they always seemed to believe I was trying to avoid them. Every time I turned around, there was my mom with her sad, hurt eyes and my dad with his angry, accusing stare. Just being around them was difficult enough anymore but finding things to talk about with them was becoming impossible.

"All your uncles and aunts will be there and all their kids are coming," my

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mother had said. What she didn't say was that if I managed to skip out on this picnic, I was telling her and everyone else in the family that I didn't love them anymore.

But what I really needed to do was turn right and head over to the library. My books were laying accusingly on the passenger seat next to me and I couldn't help panicking a little about the English assignment due Monday that I hadn't even started yet.

I had thought I would go to the picnic for a little while but cut out early, go to the library and make a bunch of copies just before I went to work and then hope there would be some down time so I'd have the time I needed to read the notes. If I managed that, I might just manage to get the sleep I needed and still have time to write my paper.

After Margie's call, I didn't know what to do. It seems my world had been so full of pressure lately I just couldn't function anymore. So I just sat. I don't know how long. I don't know if there was any other traffic while I sat there. I guess if there was, they just decided to go around me. It's a pretty quiet and forgiving town.

Suddenly, I noticed a big silver truck behind me. I don't know how long he'd been sitting there. I don't know what made me notice him. I know he didn't honk. The color of his truck seemed to match the color of my thoughts – misty, grey, difficult to find in form or detail. A large man slowly climbed out from behind the wheel and came strolling up to my window. I didn't know whether or not I should be afraid but discovered too late that I had already rolled down the glass.

"Are you lost there buddy?" he asked.

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“ I live down the street,” I answered truthfully, surprised at myself and my openness.

“ I see,” he said. He stood there for a few minutes looking around. “ You know,” he said slowly, “ trees are good listeners. I bet if you tried sitting under one for a while, it’d help you trace your roots, figure out what’s important.” And he pointed vaguely off to the left.

My mind snapped clear and I looked up to thank him but he was already gone. I turned left, toward the park. I would spend some time with the people who meant the most to me, then I would spend some time with myself. What good was working so hard when I couldn’t remember why I was doing it.