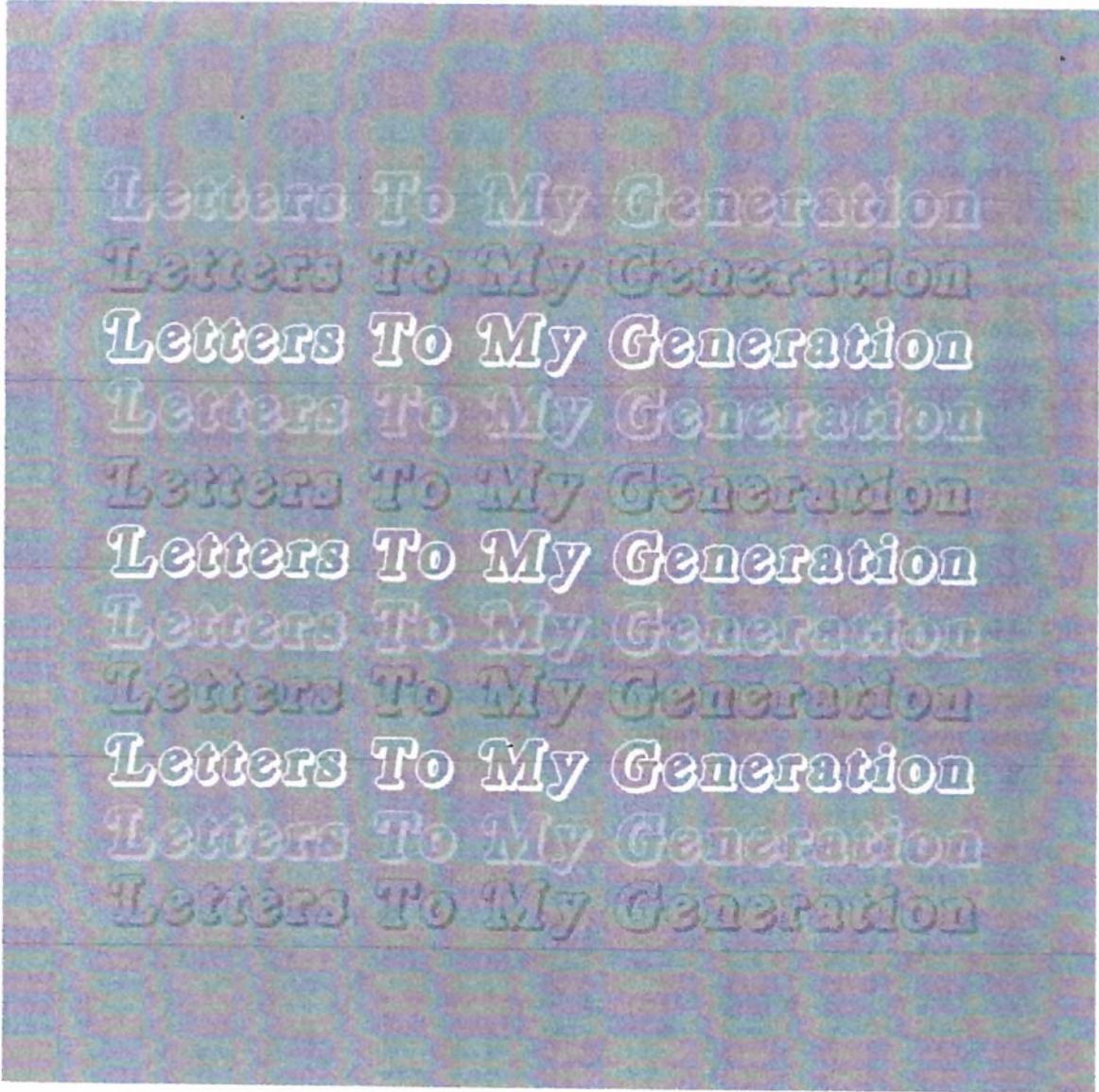


EA



Letter Testimonials

Title: "I wrote this after having a panic attack."

Message:

It happened again
This time, I was in a room full of people I loved.
I felt it begin in my chest
I started to fidget
My body grew uncomfortable
I was so aware of every inch of my skin as it began to crawl
It felt like it would implode at any second
The weight of a thousand elephants was crushing my entire body making it impossible to
escape
I tried to talk myself out of it
I tried to take deep breaths
I gazed at the clock as 5 minutes turned into 40
I needed to get out of there, but what would everyone think if I got up
The thought of potential judgment made it all worse
I was gasping for air, but my own thoughts had me drowning underwater
A war against myself, and I wasn't winning
Then, it was over

-MR

Title: "Thank you."

Message:

I have generalized anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder and I want to be able to contribute to this extraordinary organization. I am super passionate about ending the stigma around mental health and educating others (especially the older generations) about this crippling crisis. I have friends who have taken their lives and I personally want to shed light on the stigma around suicide.

-LK

Title: "So why write the ending now."

Message:

Not really sure if this is what you're looking for, but this is my story. I'm sure you have been following Robbie's Hope (since this is how I found you guys) and Robbie was a friend of mine in high school for a short one and a half years before he took his own life. After he did it, I wrote this- my story and a call to action in hopes of helping getting others to understand the urgency of destigmatizing the conversation of mental health. I was lost, confused and in so much pain after Rob passed away, and hoped what I wrote would make sure no one had to feel the pain of going through depression silently or the pain of losing a loved one. I don't think this will help your project, but I saw you were receiving stories and all I want is for someone to hear me. I'm ready for someone to listen and maybe understand.

Hi my name is Sage and I am a junior at Lakewood High School. I am going to talk about mental health, and more specifically depression. My story through depression. Sadness will soon go away but depression is the feeling of sadness you get when you're doing the things you love. When everything in your life is going according to plan, perfectly, but you're still sad. It's always there everyday, and there is no way to make that feeling go away.

Two years ago in 2017 the Colorado teen suicide rate was almost double the national average. It's hard to confess to strangers I've never met, that I could have been a part of that statistic. It is never fair to assume someone is well just because of how they appear on the outside. On the outside you may see me as the outgoing friend who's always talking, smiling, cracking slightly inappropriate jokes in the atrium, on the soccer field or in the band room. Always surrounded with friends. You might see me as the straight A honors and AP student, who never misses an assignment or turns in work late. Who always gets great grades on every assignment. So she can't possibly be depressed, right? Wrong.

I have to confess, sometimes that's a facade, a mask to conceal the real me. The girl who despite losing interest in the things once loved but continues to do. The girl who sometimes lacks the motivation to leave the house, much less her bed. The girl who lives in a bubble of constant darkness, wondering to herself what is my purpose here on this earth, am I accepted? The girl who once loved learning now dislikes school, but still puts too much pressure on herself to always receive A's. Never a B. The girl who is relentless to make sure everything is perfect, when nothing ever is. She is a pot, lit from the bottom by the feeling of depression and soon consumed with suicidal thoughts, ready to bubble over. Will anyone miss me when I'm gone? Is the world better without me? But wait, it's morning. It's time to put on that mask. A lid to contain the fragile pieces of a broken heart and the confusing, negative thoughts the brain has stirred up. A lid to contain the tears and heartbreak from the night before when she was crying on the bathroom floor with a bottle of pills in her hand, seriously thinking of the pros and cons to suicide and realizing the pros heavily outweigh the cons. But this is what you don't see. You don't see the pain behind a smile or a laugh. You don't see the tears behind the eyes. You don't see the anxiety, stress, and pressure behind the exceptional grades. You don't see that, ever.

Hope is an acronym for hold on pain ends. Just hold on, one more day. Have something to look forward to in the future. Life is full of up and downs and though right now all there is is darkness

full of downs, have hope, have faith that things will get better and keep moving. I know it might not seem like it now, but when there is darkness there is light. I promise. Robbie's Hope is a non profit organization created to broaden and deepen the awareness of depression and suicide prevention in the local Jefferson County schools, after the tragic loss last year of Robbie Eckert who had taken his own life. He was 15 years young. This organization has the goal of reducing Colorado's suicide rate by 50% in the next ten years, and make a difference in this world where schools all around the country will be talking more openly about mental health. We want our voices heard and to destigmatize the talk of mental health because our mind matters; we are tired of losing our friends to suicide!

Don't be afraid to start the conversation or have a deep and raw conversation with a friend, or even a stranger. Be supportive of someone who is going through depression, and if you do not know how to be supportive, get someone who can! Don't do as I did at first by bottling up all your emotions. What worked and really helped me was reaching out to someone I trust and being completely honest with them on how I feel. For two years and still to this day, I visit a therapist often. Reach out to any trusted individual and get help now. It is literally life changing. Your feelings are not a burden to anyone you tell. There is no need to fight an uphill battle against depression in silence. Your teachers, friends, and most importantly your family loves you and will love you always. They are there to celebrate and congratulate you on your successes, comfort you on your failures, laugh at your bad jokes, support you when you're not mentally healthy and lend a shoulder to cry on. Remember that. Remember how the ones closest to you will love you unconditionally and no matter what, and this exact thing saved my life. You are not alone.

While it is important to help others, don't forget to help and take care of yourself. Being mentally healthy is just as important as being physically healthy. Find your HOPE. Find the reason that keeps you going despite the bad days, the toxic relationships, and the rocky path of life. For me, being involved with Robbie's Hope has completely changed my view on life, and it has provided me with a purpose in my life. It is okay to not be okay, but it is not okay to not tell anyone. I still remember that night like it was yesterday like a cd stuck on repeat replaying over and over in my head. In reality it was Friday July 21st of 2017 when I had the fate of my life balancing on a bottle of pills. I would not have any of the amazing life stories I've made over these last two years if I had made a different decision that night.

It might be surprising to some people to hear suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10 to 24, but this statistic just shows how important mental health is and how important it is to talk about it. Reach out and get help if you need help. It is not a sign of weakness and chances are the person you get help from has dedicated their life learning how to help people like us live another day.

Always remember that you are not alone, you are wanted, you are loved, and you matter before you do the irreversible. You are young and have a lot to experience and live for. Your story is far from over, so why write the ending now?

-SFJ

Title: "It was only get better from here."

Message: My struggle with mental health began when I was around 12, feeling different uncomfortable in my skin. I was just a kid so I didn't know any better, and I never knew it begin so small yet continue to stretch so far in my life. Around 14 I started the self harm cutting, burning, whatever I could think of honestly. At 15- freshman year- I decided I'd had enough of what this life had to offer, it wasn't enough not even close. So I went into my bathroom and downed 2 bottles of OxyContin and waited on my bathroom floor, my parents found me unconscious 20 minutes later and rushed me to an emergency room a few miles down Wadsworth. I have no recollection of that night after I went unconscious, most likely term amnesia from all the pills. My stomach was pumped and I lied about an "in the moments laps of judgement", buying my lie they discharged me and sent me on my way. The next 6 months were brutal, not only because of the emptiness I was left feeling or the lack of satisfaction from my failure, but because along with these I had no privacy. My house was filled with worry, it felt like every time I found a free moment to myself my parents would barter and insist I take medication or motivate myself enough to make it to therapy. I just wanted to escape because of me my house was restless with worry. Towards the end of these 6 months "accident" I was hospitalized a second time. This time wasn't the same though. It was unplanned, limited resources. Following my first attempt my parents made a point of locking away all prescribed medications. So my options this time were sleeping pills, Advil/ibuprofen and allergy meds. I didn't know which would have an affect so I swallowed them. I remember the second hospital visit better than the first, but still I can't quite create a picture. Bits and pieces that are enough to fill in the gaps. I'll admit, this wasn't so much an attempt as it was a cry for help. Sometimes all the bad one person goes through isn't enough to evoke a rescue party until it's fatal, which is disappointing in so many different ways. Around 16 I wasn't discharged after talking the doctors into thinking it was a silly misunderstanding, irrational momentary thinking, I was admitted to a mental facility for 5 days. There were a few of us there, most of them covered in slashes and stitches or burns, similar to mine. The entire time I was in that place, all I remember thinking is how badly I wanted to go back to my life and how much more I'd appreciate it when I had it back. Kind of hard to think about, because as soon as I had my life back I wanted to give it up again. I had planned on growing up within abandoned me, family lost trust in me, my relationship with my sister was seemingly broken. My life literally was not worth living anymore because I had managed to destroy all the good...but here I am, 3 years later surviving. It was a long time before I came to a point where I believed I could find enough things each day to stay alive, I'm not even sure I'm at that point now. But there is something to be said about wanting change. Who wants to heal from their brokenness without judgement and learn to at least coexist with a skewed mind. There is something to be said about those who've been through the worst and still choose to fight for those who deserve more. This project is not all of us are okay, not all of us are gonna make it because that's the cost of our accumulated depression, but this project will make a difference. It has for me already and I think that's a pretty good reason to stick around:) keep doing what you're doing, it can get better from here.

-KT

Title: "This is an extremely hard story for me to tell"

Message:

My mental health story started with anxiety. I started having panic attacks in 7th grade, so I started on an anxiety medication. Going into highschool my freshman year, I lost my best friend of 2 years that I was extremely close with. I didn't have any other friends, so I started to try to branch out to new people. I ended up getting caught up in a group of people who didn't make great decisions and I ended up getting into the habit of drinking and smoking all the time. During this time, I was taken advantage of sexually while intoxicated by a guy in the group. When I tried to explain to people in the group what had happened, they all turned against me because they had known him longer. Soon after, word got around the school and extreme amounts of drama had been started and I was bullied until I finally snapped and tried to commit suicide. I was hospitalized for a week and my parents finally agreed to let me transfer schools. Since then, I have continued to struggle with severe depression and anxiety. This is an extremely hard story for me to tell but I would love to be a part of this group because I feel very passionately about this conversation :)

-MC

Title: "When I look down I don't feel ashamed. I am proud. I am proud of my battle."

Message:

I've struggled with depression for years but it wasn't until last year I was actually diagnosed. I had been denying myself help but junior year heightened everything. I began to have a lot of anxiety about junior year which also heightened my depression. I started to self harm. I started to retreat into a shell of denial as well as shame. I was ashamed because of the stigma that encaged me. I knew people would judge because they don't know differently. They know what they are taught. The stigma teaches people that people with mental illnesses are different and are something that should be hidden. In that year I had two suicide attempts and was hospitalized at a stabilization unit. Although it seems like my story has only just happened recently is has been something that has been going on for years. I've had depression for years and I've had bad anxiety for years. I've had suicidal thoughts for years but junior year heightened everything. I'm choosing to share my story because I want to help others break out of the shadow. I have scars that will never go away and I have struggled a lot with this. I am reminded every time I look down what has happened. I used to look down and be ashamed. I was ashamed of my suffering and what I had done. Now when I look down I don't feel ashamed, I am proud. I am proud of my battle. I want people to be proud of their scars and not hide them in fear but be proud of all they have fought and all they have won.

-RR

Title: "Thank you for reading this and I'm glad someone is doing something to help others like this."

Message:

Hello, I'm not really sure if what goes through my head is considered mental illness, or just something everyone goes through. Usually I just think it's nothing and everyone goes through this and I just push it away because I don't want to think about it. But, I thought I'd tell you anyways. Usually I get into my car every morning and think, I hope someone just hits me with their so I don't have to do it to myself. But then other days I'm fine and I'm happy. Then other days I think things like I told you about getting in my car. I have thought about what it would be like to off myself, and I have been on the verge of it before. I think about hurting myself sometimes too. I've only done it once though. Nobody in my family knows, and I've only ever told one person before. So I don't know if this helps you in anyway, I hope it does but who knows. Thank you for reading this and I'm glad someone is doing something to help others like this.

-MA

Title: " I believe mental health is extremely important for our generation to express the need for help and growth."

Message:

I have very high levels of anxiety which cause uncontrolled panic attacks. There came a point in my life where these panic attacks became forced. Whenever I felt as if I had done wrong, I put myself in the state of mind to receive a panic attack. To this day, anxiety has taken over anything I am able to do; however, it's time for me to realize that I am more than what I create of myself. That is something anyone should believe no matter what.

-BD

Title: "What has changed though, is every day I work to improve myself and my mental health"

Message: Ever since 7th grade, I have had really bad depression and anxiety that comes in all forms. In middle school through sophomore year it came in the form of social anxiety, to the point where I couldn't carry on a conversation with anybody, and I was constantly worried about being out in public. I couldn't sleep, I either ate too much or too little, and sophomore year I started to cut. I had several suicidal thoughts. I never carried through though, because I always thought that one day I would wake up, and all my problems would be better. I was always holding on to a future image of myself in college, having a job, or having kids, just something to distract me from how much I hated myself in the present. Through therapy and a life changing summer camp, I was able to lose most of my depression and social anxiety at the start of junior year, but my anxiety never left my side, controlling my life, my sleep, my actions, and my self worth. Senior year, my anxiety and depression control my life in the form of constant unrest and panic attacks, abstaining from eating and bulimic tendencies, and constant anxiety dictating my every move. What has changed though, is every day I work to improve myself and my mental health. My depression is no longer consistent and only comes in waves. The majority of things I used to get anxiety over earlier in my life; I no longer do. That is why I want to get involved with Letters To My Generation, to help others constantly fight for themselves, and for them to know that there is a place where they can find help. I want to help and be involved in your project in any way that I can.

Title: " And I am not ashamed of the things I have done, because I know that I'm not that person anymore."

Message:

My mental health journey begins a lot earlier than I would like to admit. My childhood took place in a massively broken home where I lived with my grandparents, who have always been my biggest cheerleaders. I grew up in an environment where I was constantly held to a standard that would be considered overwhelming and unattainable for most. I was raised to have the mentality that I was the best and I would always be the smartest person in the room. I was raised in a flower shop, where if I wasn't helping with customers, I was behind the register reviewing flash cards. I was always considered way too smart for my age- most of which came from my people skills and ability hold conversations with virtually anyone. Throughout the years as I grew older this quickly changed, and the happy, irrepressible child that everyone had known wasn't recognizable. At about the age of eight, (mostly as a result of extenuating circumstances that were out of my control) I had become a shell of a child. I had severe behavioral and abandonment issues and I was forced to see that the world wasn't what I'd been promised it was. These issues continued steadily until I was in middle school, when they worsened. In my mind I was fixated on the idea that my life was not worth living anymore. "Things are never going to change," I thought to myself- and for a long time I was right. But for me, I always knew the silent struggle I went through would always pay off. So I began prioritizing everyone's issues before my own. I thought that if I was able to fix everyone else's problems that somehow my problems would get fixed along the way. This was a short lived plan, and when I was in seventh grade I began to struggle with self harm. I made up excuses about why I was wearing long sleeves all the time, and I would insist that I just hated swimming. I was just surviving for longer than I could remember, and for a very long time my only reason to keep living was because I knew my best friend, Makayla needed me. When I got to high school things got significantly worse, and I somehow found myself in a place I didn't even know existed. My fears about my home and social life becoming worse came true. In the first few weeks of high school, I quickly gained a reputation of being a "slut" and a "druggie" and just about every other alternative to those titles. And honestly, I didn't really see the point in trying to prove anyone wrong. So my eight year old self returned, and I was back to being the shell of the person everyone used to know. I began doing drugs in the first trimester of my freshman year, and for the first time in a while- I was able to escape. I continued to put myself in horrible situations just so that I could feel free, even if it was just for a few hours. I was no longer suffocated and consumed with the feelings that I wasn't enough or that I deserved everything I was going through. And for a split second I was able to escape the encompassing feeling that none of it would ever get better. I trapped myself in a revolving door of guys who I thought would be able to fill the gaps that were so prevalent in my life. My mom was probably my biggest support system through all of this. She is the strongest woman I know, and has never failed to hold my hand when I needed it the most- but realistically she couldn't do much when I couldn't even be honest with myself. Then on February 1st, I met Lauren. When I say that she is my personal guardian angel I do not mean that lightly, and I whole heartedly believe that I would not be here today if it wasn't for her. She somehow managed to see past all of the labels that I had carried with me for so long, and

made me realize that I was better than all of those things. I was bigger than just the sum of every horrible thing I have been through and every terrible choice I had made. So little by little, with her help, I was able to become the person I was meant to be- the person who desperately needed to be seen throughout this entire process. She forced me to see that I was worth it, and I deserved to get better. In april of 2017, I began therapy and I was able to work past years of childhood trauma, verbal and mental abuse, self harm, substance abuse, and several other things that I had no idea were really issues to begin with. The process of healing is not the romanticized process that so many people make it out to be. It is not pretty, it is not easy, and it's a lot more than putting on face masks and going to bed early. Healing is having breakthroughs so profound that you find yourself crying on the kitchen floor on your birthday (yes, that happened). Healing is making the tough decisions and realizing that you need to live for yourself before anyone else. And healing is prioritizing yourself and putting your oxygen mask on before anyone else's. Today, I am not a victim of any part of my story- I am a survivor. I once heard a quote that said, "in order to love who you are, you cannot hate the experiences that shaped you." And I am not ashamed of the things I have done, because I know that I'm not that person anymore. I've needed to be honest with myself in order to heal- and the truth is that my story made me who I am.

-ED

Title: "It's hard. But it get better.

Message:

i don't think it's talked about enough. it's hard. even harder to fight alone and I found it incredibly tough to speak up about my problems. it felt so hard to speak up that it just made me feel worse. I've struggled with depression the past 3 years and I've only talked about it briefly with my parents. I refused taking medication or going to therapy and it's a big regret of mine. I wish I took help, it's hard when you have no drive to get up in the morning or hate the fact that you did wake up, i struggle to fall asleep every night and I find myself awake at 2-3 in the morning consistently. I wish I got help and if I could help anyone in anyway with advice it would be to please get help. If you're struggling in any way, it's better to open up then to suppress for so long. It's hard. But it gets better.

-J

Title: "I am so very grateful for where I am today and I have decided that mental health is no longer going to control my life :)"

Message:

I am 16, and for most of my life I have struggled with mental health. I was bullied in 3rd and 4th grade and had begun to question myself from the early age of 9. It was because of my body and that quickly got to my head. I solved the problem by forcing myself to eat less in hopes to achieve a body that would be appreciated. I was 11 and borderline anorexic. By 6th grade, I was very depressed and angry. I was upset that I was never enough for anyone. Fighting for friendship, good grades, and acceptance began to get overwhelming and exhausting. I started to unconnected with my purpose in life, my hobbies became underwhelming and my sports interests got more stressful than fun. I bottled up my feelings due to many, many reasons and that habit became routine. Eventually I was a mess of anxiety and depression. This continued until 8th grade. I was blessed to be helped out of my dark place by my friends, teachers, and family. When I was 14 I had the best year of my life. I was relieved to be experiencing less anxiety and depression. But, as the thought of high school became a reality, I slowly began to retreat to my old self. I was worried about being accepted in a new environment with nearly all strangers. My freshman year was hard. I had incredible highs and devastating lows. Back and forward with friends old and new, struggle to keep old connections, and stress of having to do things right by myself. With both my sisters in college, I had to endure high school alone. At the end of freshman year I was, again, a mess. The summer of 2019 was my worst, hardest, and most emotionally draining of my life. I became more depressed than I had ever been. I felt like I had no friends, no purpose, and that I was a burden on everyone. I began to isolate myself and surround myself with negativity that I created. Despite the hardship, I had the help of my mom. She is the most amazing person in my life. She helped my through it all and reminded me of who I was and that she loved me. This helped incredibly. Coming into sophomore year, I felt better than I had but still not great. The beginning of the year was the nightmare that I expected it to be. Friend drama, being an only child again, and stressing about sports and homework. I was less depressed but still very anxious. This continued throughout the first half of my year, but I was able to endure with help. I am still working out of my anxiety and depression, and the most advice I could give anyone struggling is that everything happens for a reason. I now realize how strong and unique of an individual I am through all of my hardships. Also, you have to be on your own team. You have to be able to help yourself, because in reality, only you can change your mindset and your lifestyle. I am so very grateful for where I am today and I have decided that mental health is no longer going to control my life :)

-SM

Title: recently when i decided to take my life back.

Message:

my story is a pretty short one, but i struggled with depression and anxiety and i let it rule my life for awhile. i was suicidal, struggled with anorexia, body dysmorphia, and self-harm. that went on for around 4 years until recently when i decided to take my life back.

-A

Title: Normal. But I am not normal.

Message:

I am drowning in the ocean of warm flannel that is my bed, sinking deeper into the dangerous thoughts in my head. I can smell the musk of my dirty body as the nervous pit in my stomach grows into an uneasy gap from deep within. I adjust and pull the covers over me so tightly that I could suffocate. Microscopic thoughts flood my head.

"Am I okay?"

"Why are you like this?"

"This isn't what normal people do."

I was normal: in the 80th percentile for height and weight, on the dance team, with average grades, and addicted to my cell phone. But I wasn't normal. My mind was scattered around like a deconstructed puzzle, my moods disturbingly unpredictable and uncontrollable. I was 15 when I was diagnosed with manic-depressive illness, also known as Bipolar Disease. This disorder would both shake my world and also help mold me into the person I am today.

I can still remember the weak aroma of air freshener and urine stained seats that surrounded me as I rode in the back of a patrol car, back to my parents who I had run away from three short hours before. Looking back, I can barely remember why I ran. Maybe it was to prove a point that I could do it, or to be straight out defiant. Either way, this was the first time I knew something was wrong, that I was not normal.

My cold, plastic, "happy" face was getting worn thin by middle school. I think that the most difficult part of my journey was admitting that I needed help. Sobbing to my mom, I pleaded for help because I wanted to be better. I was tired of being sick and I wanted to be happy. In my heart of hearts I knew I could be.

It is easier to see and understand the struggles of a person with one leg than it is to understand the everyday challenges of a mental illness. Without medication and work your moods can be unpredictable and catastrophic, varying every few hours.

There are countless components that make up the daily routine of a healthy bipolar individual: medication, journaling, therapy, and a never-ending quest for new and better coping tools. It takes countless hours and a lot of work to keep your brain positive and healthy. As my therapist says, "If you don't swim with the current you drown."

This journey requires patience and strength. It humbles you and helps you to identify your flaws, but also your fortitude.

I have been on this journey for most of my life. I went through years of therapy and several diagnosis to get where I am today, but today I can say that I am happy, and not just happy but content with who I am.

It has been tough - really tough - in places but I am so grateful for all I have learned from Bipolar. People tell me that I am mature for my age; I have spent more time on personal growth and emotional care than most adults. My disease sets me apart and has helped me to grow into the person I am today. Bipolar has humbled me and has taught me patience for others but also

for myself. Still, the most important piece that Bipolar had taught me is acceptance and how to accept myself for who I am.

I will live with this condition for the rest of my life and I have learned to accept that and love myself for all I am. I have never been on an adventure like Bipolar, one I am still exploring, but it is part of who I am and I am so incredibly proud to say with no shame and no doubt that this is me.

-DH