



The Hardest Lesson

By Meghan Gylfe

SOME LESSONS in life are learned in the most difficult way. For instance, why it's not a good idea to vacuum over the cord, or why it's unsafe to touch the hot stove. The hardest lesson I have had to learn and am continually learning on a daily basis is a lesson of acceptance. It is accepting myself for who I am, for what I have been through, and for where I am going. It is accepting the past, knowing I can't change it and looking toward the future.

I remember the first time I heard of inhalants. I was sitting in 7th grade science. Some friends of mine were messing around with Sharpies and talking about how you could get high off of them. I didn't think much about that. The thought never really crossed my mind that I would ever do drugs. I was not a troublemaker. In fact, I would do whatever I could to not get in trouble. I hated confrontation and my parents had made it very clear that drugs were unacceptable in their house. But some nights, the pain of the past was unbearable. The dark demons that taunted were too loud.

I am a sexual abuse survivor. It happened when I was just a small, vulnerable eight-year-old girl. I never told anyone for years because I feared that I would not be believed. So, I stuffed and I stuffed. I hid every emotion I felt. I was

determined to forget the past; to make it go away. At the age of 11, I began to self-destruct. Cutting was a small release. The feeling that I was destroying what I hated was unlike any other feeling in the world. It slowly grew from a few times every now and then to a few times a day. But after a while it did not satisfy my need to escape the emotional pain I was feeling. I needed something more. Then, I remembered the conversation I had had with my classmates. That night I made one of my most regretted decisions. I went to the cabinet that held all of the aerosol cans. I picked one randomly, grabbed a paper bag and went to my room. Thus began my downward spiral.

Just like self-harming, huffing became an everyday thing. I would come home from school and go straight to my room to get high. The high I achieved slowly diminished. It too became inadequate for my desperate need to escape from my reality. I needed something more powerful. In the eighth grade, I began stealing prescription painkillers from my parents. It was an endless cycle. My depression and self-hatred worsened by the day. People, sports and school began to lose their worth in my life. I was so engulfed by my darkness and pain that I began to contemplate ending my life. I didn't want to hurt for-

ever and suicide seemed like the only possible way to be happy. I saw no point in living another day. I saw no worth in myself. Lies repeatedly shouted that I was not good enough, I was disgusting, I was nobody and that nobody cared. Even the escapes that once were successful became insubstantial compared to the pain I was feeling.

The night that I attempted suicide is unclear to me. It was one of the darkest and lowest points I have experienced. With no hope left, I was ready for my life to be over. I remember taking the entire bottle of my dad's sleeping pills. I laid them out on my bed and stared at them in both fear and relief. I then proceeded to huff, making the rest of the night a foggy blur in my mind. I awoke the next afternoon in an unfamiliar hospital bed. My mom had found me lying on my bedroom floor, passed out. She called 911 as my dad attempted to wake me up.

It took me a few years of more drugs, more cutting and more depression for me to finally see that the life I was living was no life at all. I have experienced many lows since then, but the high points make everything worthwhile. I am on the path of recovery and have been clean for over two years, although I would be lying if I said it was easy. Every single day I am faced with the temptation to fall back into my old addictions. But through this journey, I have learned so much about myself and I have found my voice again. I have learned that life is not just a quest to find happiness, but to find oneself and be okay with who we find. We need to look inside ourselves and not just see, but truly believe that we are worth so much more than this world may tell us. This is me finding my voice and raising it as loud as I can, because hope is for everyone. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Meghan Gylfe is a recent high school graduate from South Dakota. Alert Magazine congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.