

Sitting in the dark, hatred filled my body. Orange and black cat hair covered the mattress, and the white walls looked a shade of dull gray in the night. Life felt like a train running me over. I wanted to be anywhere but here.

When I entered high school I had a small group of friends who I loved and adored. I thought we were perfect, not a single flaw. We would hang out in person, hold group calls, and watch movies together. We would make time to see each other no matter what.

But all of that changed at the beginning of my junior year. Our school held “challenge day” when students left their classes to talk to other students in their grade about their issues or challenges. This introduced me to the idea of vulnerability. Getting to hear others open up as well as allowing myself to be vulnerable was a fantastic experience. It was something that I realized was missing from my friendships. However, when I would try to be vulnerable with them, it felt like I was speaking to a wall. Mustering up the courage to talk to my closest friend as the phone rang, the “I'm not okay” text I had sent lingered in my mind. When they eventually picked up, not a single question was asked. My stomach twisted, trying to find the words to ask for help. I opened my mouth but nothing came out. Thoughts loitered in the back of my mind. If I couldn't talk to the people I've known for 6 years, who could I talk to? Afraid of getting hurt, I pulled away.

I closed myself off to everyone in my life. My room became littered with things I was too tired to pick up. I sat in bed for hours at a time. When I found my eyes welling with tears, I quickly wiped them away. I had to cry when no one was around. I couldn't see any way of fixing my situation, because how do you open up to someone if you're afraid they'll make it worse? I had hit rock bottom.

Eventually, I had a big fight with my dad. “I never want to come back, I don't want to be a part of this family”. My words struck my dad like an arrow to the chest. My face was hot, and tears welled up in my eyes. I excused myself to the bathroom, where I sat in the dry bathtub and cried as hard as I could. All of the pain I had been feeling, everything I hadn't spoken up about ran through my mind. Eventually, I was pulled from my misery by a single text from my dad. “Can we talk?” All I felt at that moment was hatred. When the conversation began, I used one-word answers, looking away from my dad at all times. As I was sitting in the dark the silence was horrible. I was only making my situation worse. Tears welled up in my eyes again, and my cracked voice broke the silence. “Can I have a hug?”.

In tears, we both hugged for a long while. Eventually, I started to talk about what had been bothering me. And I realized how good it felt. The dam I had been building up finally let loose. I had found someone I could talk to.

I began to accept that I needed to change my situation. I started having more conversations with my parents. I also started to take bigger steps with my therapist, digging deeper than I had previously talked about. Being vulnerable helped me let go of a lot of grudges I had. Consequently, my mental health started to improve. Opening up to my therapist led me to learn that my friendship with my friends had gone as far as possible and that it was time to meet some new people. I began reaching out to old friends and forcing myself to get more involved in activities. I decided to rejoin Girl Scouts to meet people from other schools. I was able to reconnect with a lot of the things I had learned from my long journey in Girl Scouts. How good it felt to help people, communicate with others, and most importantly have people surrounding you.

My journey is still in the making. I've taken up more responsibility, playing a more significant part in clubs for my senior year. I pursued new hobbies to find other ways to express myself, and most importantly: I've worked on opening up as soon as a problem occurs, and not bottling everything up. I am not perfect, but I'm starting to enjoy life again.