

Taylor Green

English

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A Change In Me

Freshmen year was the worst year of my life. I thought that finally progressing into high school would be the greatest experience ever. I dreaded middle school and the only thing that kept me sane was that I had a funny and reliable group of friends that I could always go to. I had pictured going to high school being like the movie “Clueless”. Hanging out with amazing friends, going to parties and always having fun. But I was wrong. High school isn’t the paradise that cliché teen movies portrays it to be.

My fate was sealed on June 15th, 2015. That was the day of my 8th-grade graduation. My heart was pounding and I was bouncing my knee up and down as my principal called the names of my soon to be ex-classmates. I wasn’t tense because I was afraid of going up on stage in front of a crowd of friends and family, I was tense because all of the high schools that were being said.

It was like a record stuck on repeat. My principal would call a name, say a high school and everyone would clap.

“...Central High school.”

Not Science Leadership Academy.

“...Franklin Towne Charter High school.”

Not Science Leadership Academy.

“...The Arts Academy at Benjamin Rush.”

Not Science Leadership Academy.

That was when I realized that I would be going to high school by myself. I had been with the same people from kindergarten all the way to 8th grade. Everyone had become like a family to me. So not only did I have to deal with being in a new territory, dealing with new people, and learning new things, I had to do it completely and utterly alone.

When September rolled around, I wasn't as nervous as I was at the beginning of the summer about starting high school. My mother gave me words of advice, saying that this would be the first year for others too so that everything would be fine. I figured that she was right. I didn't have anything to worry about because everyone else would be facing the same dilemma. There's no way that I could be taken down so easily.

Or so I thought.

Not only was I bombarded with the workload, but the expectations as a high schooler. Grades were considered to be a thousand times more crucial than they were in middle school. Every little thing mattered, and accuracy was more present. I learned that the hard way.

In English class, one of our first major projects was to create a presentation for a book that we read in our book clubs. I thought that it would be easy, but the criteria that the teacher had expected us to follow was advanced.

My group had presented and I was confident in our work. We had given it a lot of thought and effort and I thought that it was worthy of a B at the least. However, our teacher felt otherwise. He said to us that our project lacked creativity and that we should've had something more elaborate, considering we were the last group to present and had more time to prepare.

He continued to go on and on about how our project wasn't good enough and I began to grow heated. I wanted to yell and say, "How do you expect me to teach a classroom full of

students about a book that half of them didn't read when you can barely do it? I don't intend on becoming a teacher!" But I didn't. Instead, when the class was over, I went to the girl's bathroom and I cried. Not because my feelings were hurt but because I was angry and irritated. I was disappointed in myself and thought that I was stupid and not good enough to be at such a rigorous school.

In October, I lost my aunt and my great grandfather within the span of a week from each other. They were two very important forces in my life. When I first had heard the news, I felt as if I had been driving on the highway safely only to be quickly side swept by another vehicle. It was so sudden and so abrupt. Their deaths had uprooted my life so instantly.

The next few days at school were dreadful. My attitude had shifted, and I wasn't my usual happy and optimistic self. I didn't know what to say or what to do. I couldn't talk to anyone because I didn't feel close enough to anyone to put my feelings out there like that. I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve, but I was afraid of being dubbed as too "emotional" or "sensitive" to confide in someone or vent.

Around December, I thought that my grieving period was over and that I was finally in a better place. Christmas was coming up and I was so excited for Winter break. I was in African American History class sitting with a group of people talking. We had a work period, so we could talk freely and just say that it was for the project. Everyone was sharing their past experiences in middle school. People were sharing laughs and reminiscing about the good old days. I was smiling, going through my own memories too. I thought about field day in 7th grade and how my friends and I managed to dunk our history teacher in the dunk tank or the time we

went to New York for our class trip or the time a can of Axe body spray exploded in the cafe and we all went home smelling like vile teenage boys.

“Taylor are you okay?” I hadn’t realized that I was crying until someone had brought it to my attention.

It was as if something inside of me broke. I left the classroom in tears. I ran into the girl's bathroom once again. At this point, it was becoming like a sanctuary. I pulled out my phone and immediately sent a text to my sister, briefly telling her that I couldn’t handle this anymore. It was as if all of the incidents that had happened in the previous months had just piled up inside of me until I couldn’t contain it anymore. I erupted like a volcano.

When I got home that day, I was greeted by my mother and sister sitting on the couch. I sat on the chaise and told them how I’ve been feeling. It was hard to describe because I couldn’t grasp it myself. I told my family that I just wasn’t happy, and that I hadn’t been happy in a long time.

“Are you depressed?”

“Have you ever hurt yourself?”

“Are you suicidal?”

I didn’t know how to answer these questions that were being thrown at me. I answered mostly “no” and “I don’t know”. I told my mom that I wanted to go to therapy, so I could talk to someone freely.

“You’d rather open up to a complete stranger than me?” When my mother asked me this, I felt bad. I could see where she was coming from. Why would I confide in a stranger before my

own mother? I told her that I wanted to talk to someone who had no preconceptions of me so that I could say what I wanted without being judged.

I started going to therapy January 12th, 2016. Every Tuesday for 45 minutes a day from 4 to 4:45, I was in a rustic brown room with grey accent colors with my therapist Crystal. Before my first appointment, I took a test. The questions were simple, asking stuff like, “Do you find it difficult to sleep?” “Do you experience fatigue or lethargy?” and other questions that gave more insight into my personality.

I told Crystal what happened during the previous months that lead up to now. I opened up about my insecurities in school and with friendships, my lack of motivation, the loss of family members and anything else that I thought was important.

“Well Taylor based on the test and what you’ve told me today, it seems to me that you have bipolar depression.”

I froze. It was as if my whole world had stopped. Not once did I think that I was bipolar. I guess it was due to my own misconceptions and naivete. I always thought that being bipolar meant you went from nice to mean in a matter of seconds. Crystal described it as having manic highs and depressed lows. I heard the word “manic” and thought “maniac”. I wanted to say that I’m not crazy, but my lips stayed sealed.

Learning about this diagnosis was hard for me because it made me feel unsure of myself. I felt like I didn’t know who I was. It’s like an out of body experience hearing someone tell you that you’re suffering from something as if they know you better than you know yourself. However, I didn’t fight it. It made me want to better myself. I knew that I wasn’t automatically going to become happy, but as the year went on I tried to be more consistent when keeping track

of my emotions. Whether if I was having a manic or depressive episode, I would focus on my wellbeing. I'd make sure I was getting enough sleep, not stressing out that much about school, talking to my family more and continuing treatment.

I learned that it can be hard asking for help, especially since I didn't know what I needed help with. But in the end, I was glad that I actually talked to someone. I felt as if I was eased of a thousand burdens and that I could finally start living a better life because I knew what was happening to me. I still have my days where I'm too overwhelmed by everything and I just stay in bed and put my phone on "Do Not Disturb". But now whenever I'm upset or I feel as though I'm at my breaking point, I vent to someone. Whether it's my friends, family, or my therapist, I tell people how I'm feeling so that I'm not bottling up these emotions inside for too long and that they can offer me the love and support that I need.