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race. for a normal



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An Endless Cycle It was a Saturday night during April, and my sister and I were at the gym.

We had just finished a brutal ab workout, and we were trying to prove who had the better four pack. I pulled up my shirt showing her the two lines forming four muscular quadrants on my stomach. She pulled up hers. Everything stopped as I stared at my little sister's body. Red, random gashes, criss-crossed on her sixth grade stomach. So many thoughts raced through my head.

I blurted out, "What are those from?" She turned a shade of beet red and quickly pulled down her shirt. The image was locked in my brain just as my little sister was locked under my questioning eyes. She quietly murmured, "The cat." Realization set in about the same time I processed the fact that our cat had died two years ago.

A couple of months later, my sister went on a bike ride. She left around 3:00 in the afternoon. At 4:28, my mom called to ask if my sister was home yet. That's when my heart started to race.

For a normal family under regular circumstances this wouldn't be a big deal, but we weren't that ideal family. My little sister struggles with depression and chooses self harm as a way to relieve the stresses put on her by the world as a consequence of her being gay. Imagine feeling like a stranger in your own skin during a time in your life where the only thing you should be concerned about is coming in first in a game of tag. Many people struggle to define who they are; many more struggle to become comfortable in their own skin. These things are hard at any age, but when you are a gay 11 year old, the pressure

is intense. My sister reached her breaking point the night of her bike ride. With a few pills, she thought she could solve it all.

My little sister cried out for help through her actions she made that night. She realized taking pills was not the answer and called my parents for help. But everything had already started to change. She made it through that night, and I was happy that she did, but something inside of me felt different. I became aware of the gasps crossing her porcelain skin. I noticed the bags beneath her eyes signifying another sleepless night.

I realized something in her eyes seemed empty, but when I looked in the mirror, I saw a twin of my sister staring back at me. Since that night, I've never truly been happy. I may have appeared happy, but there was always that fear clawing at the back of my mind reminding me that it could possibly happen some day.

Anxiety was a term I became acquainted with. Living in fear of the unknown became a normal occurrence for me. Things became better overtime, as they usually do. There was a point when my sister hadn't cut for around 80 days, a huge accomplishment for her. Although she seemed to be getting better, I wasn't. I constantly worried that she would slip back into her old ways, and I'd find myself one sister short. The stress from this situation and the multitude of activities I participate in pushed me to a place I didn't want to be. I found myself crying at school over any little thing someone would say.

I felt my strong, confident facade wearing away. I didn't want my reputation to slip away along with my sanity. Fortunately, I had learned from my sister that self harm wasn't the answer. I knew that I would need to see a therapist

before things became even worse. Part of me felt guilty. My problems were nowhere near as bad as hers were. I was supposed to be the “easy child”; the one my parents relied on to have a plan, but soon that image wore away as well. I found myself drinking hoping it would solve my problems, but I found it only made it worse.

When I was drunk one night at my first party, it only magnified my sadness. I confessed to my parents the next day because I felt horrible about what I had done. It was crushing me like a ton of rocks. They were a little disappointed but extremely proud that I had owned up to my mistakes, but that was just the beginning of my downward spiral. A series of events followed that helped shape the person I was becoming. My sister was still a constant concern for me. I always worried what the future would hold for her.

One day on the way home from school she told me she needed to confess something to me. What she told me that day made my worst nightmare come to life. She explained to me how she almost gave it a second try. She didn't because of something I had told her earlier in the week.

She told me that if it wasn't for me, she wouldn't be here. Her girlfriend and her had gotten into a really big fight over something she had lied about. I came home to find her sobbing and questioning if living was even worth it anymore. I screamed at her that there was more to life than her girlfriend. So many more people cared, cherished and loved her besides her middle school crush.

Through my uncontrollable sobs, I pointed out how selfish she was being to think only of her own problems and ignore the ones she would create.

This was the only time being right about a situation wasn't what I wanted. It only validated my fear of the unknown and of her instability. I was extremely grateful that I was able to help her make the right choice, but it made me wonder how much she clings on to all the other stuff I say. It made me nervous that our sisterly fights were a contributing factor to her sadness. I tried to refrain from relentlessly pestering her, but change is hard especially when the thing you're doing wrong was considered okay for so long. I try not to show the fact that I'm hurting on the inside because I don't want her to feel worse about the situation. I don't want her to feel like me and think she is the contributing factor to my sadness.

She already has enough problems to worry about, and I don't want to add to the sadness she already feels. I try to stay out of the way and let her focus on herself and getting better. A little less than a week ago, my sister actually attempted to commit suicide a second time. This time it was no longer just a fleeting thought that crossed her mind but an actual plan. Last Tuesday she tried to hang herself.

She grabbed some rope and tied a couple knots putting her plan into action. This was the same night I spent two hours getting lectured by my parents for another one of my mistakes. My sister sat there quietly observing, standing up for me when she could.

Eventually their speech came to an end, but my tears continued to stream down my face. I made my way upstairs with my red puffy eyes and tried not to think about how awful my life had just become. I trudged up to my room, and my sister stormed to hers. I should have checked on her to make sure

she was alright, but I didn't. I had enough to worry about, and this was a normal occurrence for her so I knew she'd be fine. I've never been so wrong. It was that same night she decided to take her life. It wasn't just that conversation, but a mixture of things that pushed her to that point.

Everything seemed like it was getting so much better, but she had turned into me. She became an expert at hiding her feelings from the world. All of this happened Tuesday, but I didn't even find out until Thursday. If that doesn't scream horrible sister, I don't know what does. Wednesday was a blur, and I struggled to keep my tears in due to the consequences from my mistake. After a long night at work, I went to bed completely ignoring my sister. She was with her girlfriend, and I really didn't have the energy to have another fake conversation with her and try to act happy. Thursday night was the first time I saw her since the incident.

I knew that it had happened because my parents had filled me in, but it wasn't enough to prepare me for what I saw that night. When she took the pills, I was aware that it happened, but it didn't leave any physical marks. This was completely different. On Thursday night, I met her at the hospital where she was getting tested for internal injuries. Severe rope burn circled around her neck, a fresh shade of red. There was a thicker line towards the front where the majority of the pressure had been. Dressed up in the blue hospital clothes, she sat curled up in a ball resting on a stretcher in the emergency room.

When she saw me, her face lit up, and she quickly tried to hide the evidence. I had learned from my past experiences that it was better to avoid asking

questions because she would usually answer with a lie. She seemed so happy and excited which made the situation seem surreal. She filled me on how her day went and tried to distract me from the actual situation. I faked some smiles, but on the inside I've never felt so numb. My smiles felt more and more forced, and I soon ran out of the energy to try anymore. I was beyond ecstatic to find out that she was alright, but at the same time I've never been more sad.

A feeling of emptiness began to consume me. This cycle is never ending. I've learned that the shimmer of light at the end of the tunnel is only the sun reflecting off of the blade my sister drags across her wrists. There is no end. I'm tired of being optimistic. Everytime there's hope, it's always taken away. My personality is slowly being drained out of me.

Most stories have an ending, usually a happy one at that. However, this one is still going. I don't know how it will end, but at this point, I'm ready for anything. All of these experiences with my sister and my own mistakes have changed me, whether it's for better or worse I don't know. I can't remember the last time I was truly happy.

Everyone says that over time things will get better, but I'm tired of waiting.