

Making Personal; Personal

By Jennifer Scott

When I think of myself now or when someone tells me to describe myself, I say that I am open (to certain people), funny, and happy. But about a year ago, before I was assigned to do a personal narrative in my AP class, I would have described myself in a totally different way. I would have said that I am a shy and closed-off, but happy, person. That one paper changed the way I was to the way I am now. What could possibly make a person change like that in less than one year? Talking about suicide.

Suicide: the unthinkable act of causing one's own death. Everyone knows about it, but no one ever thinks it could happen to someone in her own family. I didn't think so either until July 24, 2011, when my sister, Libby, tried to die.

I woke up that Sunday morning to my mom shaking my bed. "Get up, Jenn. I need your help," My mom said softly, trying to gently wake me.

"What, Mom? I'm tired," I said as my voice went hoarse.

"Libs is sick. Come on get up."

"I don't want to," I whined.

"Jenn, please," she begged.

I turned around in my bed to look at her. My thoughts were jumping around everywhere in my mind. *Does she have a cold or perhaps the flu?* Nothing could prepare me for a suicide attempt. For all these years I thought my sister was happy, but now she was almost gone, and she was slipping between my fingers like sand.

At first, everyone thought she was sick. Libby gets sick pretty easily, so this wasn't anything new. I got up to watch over her so my mother could run and get medicine, and that is when it all started. All of a sudden I heard movement coming from her room and then a sound like someone was gagging. When I reached her, I couldn't believe the way she looked.

"Oh my gosh, Libby!" I shrieked.

My sister, the bright, bubbly, blonde, was just sitting there in the middle of the floor in a pile of dark red vomit, rocking back and forth. The smell was revolting; I was scared out of my mind. Here I was, 17 years old and about to start my senior year of high school, staring at my sister, who wanted to leave for good. All she did was grumble and I couldn't understand one word.

"It's okay Libby, I got you. I'm not leaving," I said, reassuring her.

When she stared at me, I was speechless. The way she looked will never leave my mind. Her eyes were sunken in, her skin looked like it was about to fall off her bones, and her hair hadn't been brushed in days. To this day, I still wonder if she had been planning it all along. I wonder if I had ever crossed her mind during the process.

A few hours passed and Libby still hadn't progressed. Every time my mom or I checked on her, she would still be in the same position. I wanted to know what was wrong.

"Jenn, I think I might have an idea what's wrong with your sister," said my mom.

My eyes immediately darted to a Wal-Mart bag in her right hand. Inside the bag was a 500-count bottle of ibuprofen and a receipt dated from the night before. I noticed the coating of the pills matched Libby's vomit.

"Mom you've got to be kidding me! My sister wouldn't do that. She doesn't even have a purpose to do something like this," I yelled.

"Jennifer," my mother said calmly, "sometimes people don't need a reason."

So many emotions were flying through the room: shock, sadness, anger. I was shocked at the fact that my sister would try to end her life, sad because my sister was just a few more pills from leaving me and angry at my sister for being so stupid and having the audacity to try something like this.

"Doesn't she love me enough to want to stay?" I said below my breath. Another part of me argued back. *Apparently not, since she did it with you a door away!* I shook my head, trying to stop the madness going on inside my mind. "Stop it!" I yelled quietly.

When I got back to reality, my mother told me to count the pills. I don't know why she couldn't do it. I probably won't ever know, but I did what I was told. After counting, my mind went completely numb.

"Um, Mom?" I whispered.

"What? How many are left?" my mother asked.

"One hundred ninety-two. She took 308 pills last night." My mother had this look on her face like she had just seen a person cliff-dive 200 feet.

Every day someone in the United States tries to commit suicide. Some succeed and the lucky ones -- we don't know why -- live. My sister was one of the lucky ones. She tried to commit suicide on Sunday July 24, 2011. Her method: taking 308 (200 milligrams each) ibuprofen. She lived despite having more than 61,600 milligrams in her body.

After what had happened, that was all I could think about. During school, people would know something was wrong, but I would never say. Eventually, I grew tired of holding it in, so I decided to start talking and that is when I chose to write about it. At first, I thought that it would be easy. *Hey, I can do this. No problem.* But I was completely wrong.

The first step? Writing words. For some reason, typing after the title for the rough draft became the biggest problem. Maybe I wasn't ready to talk about it. After all, my teacher and classmates, some whom I do not know very well, will be reading it. *What if they judge me? What if they think I am the same as my sister?* Many thoughts raced through my mind, but at one moment, after several agonizing minutes of just staring at a blank page, I decided to take a leap of faith and just start to write.

I could lie and say it was simple to write my feelings on paper. I thought it would be easier than talking to an actual person, but the truth is, it wasn't. It sucked just as much because even though the paper didn't say anything back, the same exact emotions still went through me. At some points during the first draft, I was angry and sad and stressed and happy. All of those emotions came at me, but all I could do was keep typing and telling my story.

When the time came to turn in my first draft, I was hesitant. *Should I let my teacher read this?* In my mind, this was my shittiest first draft ever and when I got mine back, it confirmed it. All I saw were

red marks. Not just a few simple slashes here and there. No, this was ridiculously bad, and when my eyes glazed over the top, *See Me* was written in all caps in that infamous color: red.

See her? Umm, no thanks, but I didn't have a choice. So one day at lunch, I went to her room and sat down. I carefully analyzed her face that went from expression to expression. When she was done, she looked up and was about to cry. I cannot handle other people's emotions. Right then and there I started to close myself off even more, so I put on a brave face and kept myself from walking out, but to be honest, I wanted to cry with her.

After I left her room, I could still hear the conversation in my head. I could still picture her saddened, tear-filled eyes looking at me after reading the paper.

"Jennifer, I am so sorry for what happened," my teacher said.

At this point, I kind of shut myself off from telling her what I felt, too, because, after all, she was the one who was going to cry. It's not like I didn't cry when I was writing it, but the last thing I wanted was for people to feel sorry for me or take pity on me.

"It is okay, I'm fine," I reassured her.

"This is a very strong, powerful paper, but I need one more thing. Emotion," she said

I was surprised. That was the only major change I had to do. I thought I was going to have to change everything around, but I still couldn't believe it! Add more? How could I add more when I put everything into that first draft?

Being frustrated was one thing I did not have in mind when I went to see my teacher. After her comments, I didn't even want to work on my paper anymore. All I wanted to do was go to soccer practice to release my anger, and after 2 ½ hours, I did just that. I couldn't hide from the paper forever. So around 9 that night I decided to go to my aunt's house. I always loved going there to type any paper because it is one of the few places I can think. I can still see myself entering the dimmed basement, where I have to go down about 10 steps, and there, on the left side of the room, was the computer. At this moment, I hated going down there. I felt my palms sweating and my heart racing just thinking about opening up that file from my flash drive. I did not want to face that paper, but the one thing that I did like about going down there was the seclusion. Down there I could cry or yell if I needed to without anyone disturbing me. Down there I did not have any distractions because anyone who knows me knows that the littlest thing could get me off track. I was alone and being alone helps me think.

The hardest part of writing was picking the right words to start with. If I had chosen different words, different emotions would have come out. After picking the right words, my feelings just started pouring out.

I felt anger, guilt, sadness, happiness, and, most importantly, relief. I felt anger from being forced to do something that I didn't think I could do. I hated being pushed passed my limits when I truly believed I couldn't go any more. I felt guilt from telling every little detail about my sister. I didn't know what Libby would say if she found out what I did. *Would she get mad because everyone knew her 'secret' now?* That thought constantly popped up everywhere in my mind when I was writing. There was the sadness from letting mostly everything out. I also felt happiness, finally being able to smile again without what happened having to be in the back of my mind constantly. But most importantly, I felt relief. Relief at the fact that I had finally talked about it; relief from putting every emotion I could possibly find was left on that paper for everyone to read.

When the time came to turn in my final draft, I was happy for the first time since I was assigned this paper. I was finally able to let what happened to my sister go, and now whenever I have to write or talk about my feelings, I am not afraid. Now I am able to speak with my friends about what happened and, honestly, it feels good. Writing my feelings down and challenging my writing technique was truthfully helpful. It feels as if nothing bothers me now and my writing has improved greatly. If I wasn't assigned this literacy narrative my senior year, I don't know where I would be at. I don't know if I would be the same person that I am now. I wish the suicide attempt didn't happen, but it did, and the only thing I can do from it is learn and grow.