

In seventh grade there was a girl in my school who had a mental illness. She was 13 years old and struggled with it every day. She had blow ups in class with teachers and other students, and she just didn't know how to handle herself. Kids thought she was crazy. They did not like her and said and did mean things to her. The teachers treated her like she was incapable of thought and that she was dangerous to everyone. It seemed like no one wanted her in that school. By the middle of the school year she was only going to school half days. She was home schooled the rest of her classes. She had few friends and little contact with other students. Her doctor was not hopeful for her future and even told her she should never have children. He put her on so much medication that she couldn't even dress herself in the morning. She needed charts to aid her in doing simple every day activities, like taking a shower and doing chores. This girl was lost, lonely and suffering.

Fast forward three years as a 16 year old sophomore. That girl changed. She is now an A student, attending school full days. The kids in her school no longer pick on her or think she is crazy. She has many friends and enjoys being with them. Most teachers consider her their favorite student. She joined Forensics and won a gold medal at her first meet, ever. She went on to win a silver medal at the state meet. She was ranked fourth in her class in biology and began tutoring other students. She made honor roll the last two semesters of the year and is going into advance classes in her junior year. She also baby sits young children frequently and hopes to have a large family. She feels confident, sure of herself and who she is. She feels valued. She's happy. She has plans of going onto college to study either biology or graphic design.

So what turned her life around? Her mother never gave up on her. She knew her daughter could and would get better. She pushed for answers and better services. They became involved with the Wraparound program to help pull a treatment team together that focused on her strengths, not her weaknesses. They found a doctor who properly diagnosed her and she is maintaining stability on a very low dose of medication. She was educated on her illness, her triggers, her warning signs, and she knows what to do for herself to keep well. She is receiving appropriate trauma treatment and is learning how to overcome her fears as well as understanding how her traumatic past has impacted her life as a child and as she matures. She is learning coping skills and increasing her social abilities. She has learned how to stand her ground and stand up to the kids who ridicule her. In fact, when it happens to her or to others, she realizes that the kids are doing it because they don't understand so she gives them an education on the impact of mental illness. She is empowered. She has marched on the capital to push for mental health parity. She has participated in NAMI Walks. She understands the stigma and discrimination against people with these illnesses and she fights for change. She believes in Recovery. She believes that everyone should have a happy ending.

Do you wonder how I know so much about this girl? I know because I am this girl.