

KARI SEMEL SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



KARI SEMEL

is a senior at Shaker Heights High School. She enjoys keeping busy as a member of B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO) and by performing in the Playmaker's Youth Theatre shows. She is manager of the varsity hockey team and a member of A Cappella women's ensemble. She plans to take a gap year to volunteer in Ghana and Israel, working in orphanages and teaching in local schools. Her dream is to become a teacher.

*"Sisters are different flowers from the same garden."
-Anonymous*

An orchid is known for strength, beauty, and rebirth. Lucy* represents the same characteristics, although she may not realize it. Coincidentally, orchids are Lucy's favorite flower. Although Lucy and I have always been close, we recently established a deeper connection when she confided in me about her former self hate.

While Lucy and I were talking, we discussed why she wasn't involved in my youth group. She told me that she had always struggled with her weight and her lack of self confidence, and that she couldn't be involved in the youth group while her older sister was still a member. She told me she couldn't stand being compared to her "skinny older sister", and was nervous she would be called "Jacqueline's* fat sister". She continued to tell me that although she always wanted to talk to her sisters about her issues, she never felt comfortable telling them what was really wrong. Despite being surrounded by family and friends, she always felt alone.

It really hurt me to see how much this was affecting Lucy. To me, she was a beautiful and strong young woman. On the outside, she seemed happy and content with her life, but as I came to learn, she was lonely and upset on the inside. Her words were powerful and left such an impact on me. I know that there are so many girls like Lucy in my community. They should be able to feel great about themselves, on the inside and the outside. My talk with Lucy was the inspiration for Project Orchid.

The goal of Project Orchid is to bring girls together as Big and Little Sisters. Each eighth grade Little Sister will be paired up with an eleventh grade Big Sister. Once a month, the girls will come together for a seminar dealing with loving and respecting oneself. For the first meeting, Lucy will come in and tell her story, and the girls will do an activity about body peace and self confidence. Each month, a new speaker will be brought in to share her story, just like Lucy. We will watch films, read excerpts from books, and have discussions to create awareness of the problem of low self esteem. The sisters will get together on their own, to go see a movie, go out to lunch, or to simply hang out and get to know each other. The Big Sisters will act as mentors to the younger girls. The bond that they form in Project Orchid will stay strong as the Little Sisters enter their freshman year. They will have a senior Big Sister to provide support and reassurance throughout the year. By helping to start Project Orchid, I am planting the seed for a program that can hopefully change girls' lives. I hope that the effect of this program will be as lasting as the effect of my discussion with Lucy.

** Names have been changed*