

SARAH KRAFCIK SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



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is a senior at Padua Franciscan High School in Parma. She loves poetry and spends much of her free time reading, writing or sketching characters. She intends to major in biochemistry or pre-medicine with a minor in psychology at Michigan Tech in the fall.

Many people like to say teenagers are crazy, but having a mental disorder reinforces this stereotype with solid supporting detail. I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and depression my sophomore year of high school. Naturally I didn't want to accept the reality handed to me, as anyone with a mental disorder was stereotypically insane. Friends ignored me and acted as if depression was contagious, teachers turned a blind eye to my cries for help and even my own family had hardly been on speaking terms thanks to my episodes of panic. I was then alone with nothing more than my own thoughts; eventually forced to question my own value as a person thanks to the hatred I felt by those around me.

Many people wear masks; the insecure wear masks of makeup, the craven wear masks of humor, and I wore a mask of smiles. I grinned at the world, trying on the surface level to convince others of what I couldn't even convince myself of: my own happiness. However beneath my shallow attempts of creating a pseudo-reality a war waged within. A war that I nearly lost at one point, when the murmurs and rumors of my own worth became the straw that broke my back; I decided in the spring of 2010 that ending my own life was the only way to end my own misery.

With every attempt my fear of the unknown increased, and with every cowardly thought came a sense of hope that no one else but I could instill in me. When finally receiving help for this disorder, I became completely repulsed that no one was willing to reach out to me. I went to a "Catholic" school that was rooted in loving and generosity, so why did the faculty get away with discriminating me, mocking my absences when I was too panicked to face life? Why did my peers spread lies when I'd all but looked at them? I was different and rejected because I didn't fit their mold of a normal girl. Ever since I've lived each day with a hopeful attitude; and this change in myself is leading me to becoming an advocate for change.

I now know I am blessed for experiencing discrimination first hand; if I hadn't I wouldn't have been moved to take a stand. To date I've helped five students in my own school that were suicidal, and countless more with their personal stress and other difficulties. I understand what they've been through and then realized this wasn't enough; everyone had to know. Ever since my experience, I've dedicated myself to educating my peers about discrimination in nearly every form. My passion has become helping others, and my high school class is nearly drama-free because we've all decided to stop bullying in its tracks. When we graduate we'll take this idea with us across the state, country, and possibly even globe, spreading the idea of tolerance and peace through our actions and our words.