



**SOLI COLLINS**

is an eighth grader at Roxboro Middle School. She plays soccer and lacrosse and really enjoys math and reading. Soli loves to write and would like to pursue a career in writing or in math.

There was an empty feeling that surged through my body as she uttered those words from her lips; the ones that would leave behind marks of insecurity and self-hatred. It astonishes me how simple four letter words can entirely change a person and their aspect of themselves. Slut. The word spread through my veins and sunk into my mind like a bullet. Fast and numb until the pain hit me. My mind went blank and my voice vanished as I felt my vision blur and my stomach tense. I bet she was smiling as she typed, her thumbs hitting the buttons ever so in sync and chuckling to herself as she pressed send without any hesitation. It wasn't just one person, it was a group. They made me perceive this image of myself that I loathed. The rumors that spread through each person always came back to me.

I think the hardest thing I ever had to deal with was losing one of my close friends. Nick\* and I had a strong relationship and I considered him a brother. He would give me advice and help me through my struggles. Recently, though, we had been shifting apart. One of his other friends, Lucas\* was one of the few people who found me abhorrent. He would create lies, making Nick\* fall farther and farther apart from me until he too became one of them. I was devastated. The person who I once poured my heart out to was now believing the same rumors and deceiving me.

Social media made a big impact in the ways that they would share their derogatory feelings towards me. I came to a point where I realized I couldn't allow these hurtful words and people control my emotions. I told my mom about the situation and we confronted the guidance counselor who then discussed the matter with the people who had offended me. The noxious words fell short and I began feeling much more secure and confident in myself.

I think I've received multiple apologies from the girls and boys who contributed to the situation and I've built back my friendship with Nick\*. We aren't as close as we used to be nor will we ever be because of what happened but I'm glad we got back in touch. Bullying is an act of hate that no person should experience or commit. At such a young age numerous kids are exposed to this type of behavior daily. If we portrayed an image that guided kids to take a step back and reflect on the damage that can be done with simple powerful words we could not only be better people but be a better community and society together. If we merge our knowledge with other kids we could eliminate the hate. Standing up for your peer and maintaining the "bigger voice" in a situation is a constant thing kids should be striving for. Being an upstander and leading others is the type of behavior we need to achieve.

*\*Names have been changed*