

Growing up in public school we learn from an early age that, “kids can be mean” and “sticks and stones” and for most that remains true. Most kids don’t get cornered in the bathrooms and beat up between classes, or ridiculed for hours on the state of their clothes, most kids don’t decide to take matters in their own hands and hurt themselves to regain control of their lives. Most kids live as bystanders while the rest live as survivors. I was lucky growing up. I was lucky because enough people deemed me “normal” enough. Some of my friends were not so lucky. One of my closest friends was tormented by the same group of girls every day, they would call her names, push her into walls, steal her things, insult her family, and laugh when she fought back. She hated herself because of these girls. She wanted nothing more than to never see them again, to change schools and start fresh but that dream was too far fetched for her. So she tried other means to achieve her goals. She hurt herself, she would come to class with cuts up and down her arms and bags under her eyes. It all reached a breaking point when I had to call the cops on her one night because she took it too far. For those who recall their years of young adulthood, it is not easy. Everything about you from the age of 12 to 20 is constantly changing, your mind, your body, your goals and your dreams, your entire identity is shifting. This constant life of change is difficult, it’s taxing emotionally and physically, and above all else it’s confusing. To be questioning yourself every day and then have someone you don’t even know criticize the entire process takes its toll on the undeveloped mind.

Kids can be cruel. Of course we all know this. Kids can be so cruel that they can rip each others hair out before school and shrug it off like it was nothing. Kids can make other kids hurt themselves because it’s “funny” and kids can push each other to do the unimaginable. As much as we would like to say that this doesn’t happen, as much as we would like to claim that kids still live in innocence this is not the case for every child, and for some the chance to start over is a chance at life. I speak for those that cannot speak for themselves on this issue; bullying isn’t like it used to be. Bullying isn’t just calling kids stupid on the playground. Bullying has become psychological warfare on our youth. The choice to leave the environment and start anew was never open for those that needed it the most when i was growing up. We have the responsibility and the ability now to change that for the future generation, we can give them the opportunity to feel safe and valued in schools, a right that every child should have.

- Maddie Renee Smaker