

By Neeti I.

School. Otherwise known as my prison. Constant cruel remarks thrown at me. Hardly anyone pities another person except for themselves. And when they have that much of a heart, they steer clear of the battle area for their own well-being. I'm always on the losing side. Always.

I am bullied in many forms. Cyber-bullied, verbally bullied, physically bullied, you name it.

Bullying easily makes one insecure. Like me. Negative thoughts whip through my head every day. I'm too fat. I'm too ugly. No amount of makeup will cover up my excuse for a face. I don't deserve to live. I need to be punished.

But why do I stay in this world? Because of what my mother said to me before she passed away.

"No one can make you less of who you are. Being beautiful on the outside doesn't define you. You're personality does. Remember that."

And this is true from time to time. I have made some friends before. Then they fade away, either because they had to move, or because they felt obligated to make me suffer. I would do anything to have a friend who actually cared about me.

And the first step to achieve this is to make people aware of their mistakes. I have known this for a long time, but I can never find the right opportunity to do so.

I trudged to my school, wondering what would happen today. As I entered, I noticed students hovering around the notice board. I waited for the crowd to clear out, then quickly stepped to the board. I saw a big announcement.

STUDENTS ALL AROUND, A COMPETITION HAS TAKEN PLACE!!!

For the first time at this school, an oratorical contest will occur on April 20. Students must inform their homeroom teacher to enter. If you win, you will be rewarded with a \$100,000 prize.

Had the moment I had been preparing for all my life really come this close? I couldn't pass this up. This was my chance. I would have to hurry and make the speech, though, since the competition was only two months away.

The bell rang and I continued on with my classes. As soon as I was about to go into my homeroom, a group of girls approached me. The middle girl glared at me.

“Hey, loser. I saw you look at the board this morning. You aren’t going to enter.” I glanced at her name tag which said Mckenzie.

What? I won’t be told what to do. Especially not this.

I squared my shoulders and looked at her. “I’ll enter if I want to.”

“Oh really, you will? Well, fine, but we both know who’s going to win. The judges will choose me. I’m pretty and your not,” she shot back.

These comments wouldn’t affect me anymore. I turned and walked to my homeroom teacher.

“Mrs. Hamilton, I would like to enter the oratorical contest,” I said confidently. She looked at me with confusion. I knew why. I was never the type to speak out to people.

“Ok, hon, I’ll tell the main office,” she said.

The day then proceeded. As soon as I arrived to my house, I immediately started to write my speech and practice.

The day of the competition. Mckenzie scowled at me as I passed her to get to the auditorium. Looks like she had already said her speech.

“Hey, loser, good luck. You’ll need it! They were totally sold on me,” she said. I rolled my eyes.

I entered the room and saw four judges before me.

“Start when you’re ready,” someone said.

I took a deep breath. This was it.

“Bullying. I’ve experienced it all my life. It made me feel worthless. But was I?

Before my mother died she said to me, ‘No one can make you less of who you are. Being beautiful on the outside doesn’t define you. You’re personality does. Remember that.’

And I did. This is the truth. Then why did so many people inflict pain on me? Over the years, I found out why. People don’t want to be in the same position as I am. So they join the bullies. Or bystand. Both are unacceptable.

Self-esteem is vital in order to have a healthy life. As it weakens, we are reduced to nothing. People are committing suicide. I would have done it if I hadn’t listened to my mother. Bullying is a mental illness.

And the fault doesn’t weigh entirely on the students. Teachers as well are responsible. They understand this happens in the school. They think some touchy-feely presentations will solve this issue. It doesn’t. So they say that we can file an incident report. But most of the time, people who are getting bullied are too scared to do this in fear of getting hurt.

If I had to choose what type of bullying was the best out of all, I would choose the physical type. Yes, it hurts. But it heals. The scars fade away after some time. But

words? Once the snarky remark is made, it cuts you until you want to end it all. It never heals. It can't be taken back. 'Sorry' doesn't fix anything.

We need to end this. We are done being scared of school. We need to be enveloped in love. People need to care.

And just because this happens doesn't mean we can't forgive. We will forgive, but never forget. Forgiving is the first step to kill this illness. And it will be done. We just need some help to get started. So will you help?"

Everyone was in shock. Applause filled the auditorium.

"And the winner is..." the judges boomed into the microphone. I heard my name. Applause once again erupted. The money was given to me. A smile was plastered to my face as I left the auditorium.

But money doesn't matter. I made a difference in the world. I had achieved what I had truly wanted. This is the biggest gift of all.