

Hear Me Out

The year is 2012. I am a freshman in high school. Like most teenagers, I went out and came home past curfew. I engaged in reckless activities and I didn't think about the consequences of my decisions. However, unlike most of them, I did these things because I had given up on life. I was struggling with depression and it was something I rarely heard about. Depression was just a word I would hear during those Prozac commercials that played every now and then. I tried to make sense of why I couldn't get out of bed anymore, why I never had an appetite, or why I slept all the time but still felt exhausted. The days I could get out of bed were spent hanging around the wrong people, doing the wrong things. I started going to school less and less, and my grades began to drop dramatically. As they dropped, the pressure from my parents increased. The words they said in the heat of the moment burned in the back of my mind. I feared disappointing my parents more than anything just because of how horrible they made me feel after. I started to hide secrets from them, and I went out of my way to communicate as little as possible. There would be periods where we didn't talk for days, even weeks. I felt lower than I ever had before, and it's almost impossible to fully describe that feeling. I felt pain, but I also felt numb. There was anger, sadness, hopelessness and loneliness all mixed together, and each separate emotion amplified the others. I remembered thinking that I would do anything to make it all stop.

Then one night, it all came crashing down on me. My parents were at a party, so I found some pills and I took them. I laid on the bathroom floor and wondered if I would know when I was taking my last breath. About twenty minutes later, my parents came home and found me in

the bathroom hovering over the toilet and puking up the pills I took. My body was still fighting for my life even though mentally I had given up. At first, they had no idea what happened. I finally told them because I was scared that I was actually dying. I realized that I didn't want to die but I was afraid it was too late. My parents were furious. I begged them to take me to the hospital, but they refused because they were ashamed of what I had done. "How could you do this to us?" they asked in disbelief. For the next eight hours, from 10 at night to 6 in the morning, I was either unconscious or throwing up. In the morning, my parents realized that I wasn't getting any better so they drove me to the nearest emergency room. I spend the following day in the hospital, and I voluntarily checked myself in to the psychiatric unit.

Now it was my turn to be furious. I didn't want to believe that my parents put their pride and self image over my life. But I had just spent the longest eight hours of my life in my room, trying to recover on my own from an overdose. I spent the next week in the impatient program, and there was a mandatory family meeting. The therapist had a translator on the phone because the lack of communication between my parents and I had created a language barrier. Cantonese was my first language but since I was born in the United States, I spoke English more frequently. Once I stopped talking to my parents every day, I began to forget our language. The family meeting was brutal. There was a clear misunderstanding on my parents' side and a large part of it is due to the cultural difference. My parents were always very stoic. They never showed affection, not towards each other or towards me. They couldn't understand what was the cause of my depression. I had a roof over my head, clothes on my back, and food in my stomach. They would tell me that I was being ungrateful because there were lots of people in the world who had it worse, and they weren't depressed.

According to them, I had no reason to feel the way I did. The therapist brought up that I had several cuts on my arms and wrists, and my dad's response was, "She's doing it for attention." I remember leaving the room because I was so frustrated and upset. Of all the people I was in the psychiatric unit with, I was one of the very few patients whose parents weren't considered a part of their support system.

The year is 2015. I am a junior in high school. I am almost done with what many people regard as the hardest year of high school. It truly was the toughest year, but not because of college applications or standardized tests. Part of me didn't bother with applying to college or planning out my life after high school. I convinced myself I was not going to graduate because I had other plans in mind. It was mid- April when I overdosed again. This time, my parents didn't hesitate on taking me to the hospital. Their initial reaction of anger had been replaced with worry and fear. I had taken so many pills that I almost permanently damaged my liver. The doctors stressed how my parents' quick thinking saved my life because if it had been a couple minutes later, I wouldn't have made it. I was transferred to a hospital in D.C, one that specialized in liver transplants. I stayed in the intensive care unit for a week, and miraculously, my liver began to heal on its own.

My parents visited me every day, and held my hand when I was in too much pain to even move. They hugged me and kissed me and told me how much they loved me. I could see they were changing and they carried a lot of guilt with them. Guilt from putting so much pressure on me, and talking down on me for years. It happened so often that eventually I began to have

unrealistic expectations for myself, and when I couldn't reach them I would take it out on myself. They realized how their method of "tough love" had taken its toll on me. I spent the following week in the psychiatric unit. The family meeting this time did not bring me to tears. It did not end in me leaving the room. My dad did not accuse me of looking for attention; he devoted all of his attention to me and my treatment.

The year is 2018. I started my first semester at Montgomery College after taking some time off from school. I began to advocate for mental health awareness in my community. Many aspects of my life have changed for the better; one of the most important being my relationship with my parents. It took years for my parents to reach the level of understanding they have, but they never gave up. They sought out support groups for parents who had kids that struggled with a mental illness. They read books and listened to interviews. They worked with my therapists and psychiatrists. My parents have come a long way since my first hospitalization. Years ago, I would have never imagined that my parents and I would be as close as we are now. It took a lot of effort on both sides for us to overcome our differences. Patience and communication helped mend our broken relationship. I had to accept that it would take some time for them to come around, and how it is especially hard to understand something that was considered taboo in their culture. In turn, their growing acceptance of my mental illness made my recovery a lot smoother. Although there were a lot of hardships that had to be overcome, I wouldn't change a thing.

Without those challenges, my parents would still believe that a mental illness isn't real. They put their pride aside and stopped worrying about what their relatives or friends would

think. If they don't understand what's going on, they ask questions and we talk about it. But most importantly, whenever I have something to say, they hear me out.