

Most adults have forgotten what its like to be in high school. Some fuzzy memories of endless classes and piles of homework remain and a few clear and defined moments that your brain deemed important. The highlights and the low lights and that you faintly recall; that teacher you hated or those friends that you miss. But the older you get and the more absorbed you become in your current life the highlights and the lowlights gradually start to get fuzzy or fade all together. Those friends that once were so important to you become nameless and you have long forgetter what they look like and what their voice sounds like. You tell yourself it is all right to forget because it's in the past and you have more important things to think about like your present and future problems.

For some high school was a time of despair and loneliness for others it was simply just normal and you had friends and were an average kid with good days and bad days. Then the lucky few had a wonderful experience with many friends and experienced a world that was kind to them. The lucky few were the ones who invented the phrase "High school is the best time of your life". Many high school graduates over the years have discredited this phrase, saying that high school was the worst time of their life.

Near the end of high school most students realize that high school is a time for us to mature. A time for us to get prepared to leave our homes and life we have known for college. Our time spent growing up is comparable to a road. That road is different for all of us. It can have a few bumps and some little hills and but nothing too jarring. Or it can be a bumpy road filled with large potholes and sudden hills and drops. This is a story of a bumpy road.

I collapsed onto my bed relieved to be alone and be away from the stressful atmosphere that encompasses every school. I let out a long sigh, which helped me in letting go of the day and along with it brought a small amount of peace. I had gone through another mentally taxing school day of a sophomore in high school, and was now thoroughly exhausted. Not the type of exhausted that makes you satisfied and happy with what you've accomplished through hard work and dedication. This type of exhaustion was the culmination of a lack of sleep, the effort required to maintain your friendships and of giving an effort to try to memorize the teacher's dull lecture about a subject you aren't interested about.

My body yearned for sleep but my mind regretfully informed it of the homework I had to finish for tomorrow. I groaned and let my droopy eyes move to lazily stare at my heavy

backpack, full of incomplete papers and unread books. My current largest school problem was an unwritten lab report due tomorrow. It would require a great deal of thought and my desire to finish it was weighed down with my dislike for chemistry and with sleep deprivation. I knew though however that if I did not complete this lab report then my grade in chemistry would drop immensely and I would get a failing grade. My GPA would fall and my parents would be disappointed in me. If my GPA wasn't high enough colleges would look at it and they would judge me as an unintelligent person and move on to the next applicant. Accepting this truth, I trudged over to my backpack and cursing all the teachers who gave me homework today, got to work.

My work was interrupted by texts from my friends and the call to come down for dinner. I would happily indulge in these distractions and when they were over grudgingly get back to the work I had to finish. Eventually though I was able to put my warm pen down and rub my tired hand. I had finished it all and I could relax for an hour or two. I took a deep breath and let it out, reflecting on my life. There seemed to be no purpose to it all. The next day I would just receive another batch of homework and a few conversations that made this time more bearable. Being a sophomore, I still have two more years of this same dreary routine.

My mind turned to my friends at school. They seemed far away and distant from me. It wasn't just the physical distance separating us but also an emotional distance, like I was the only one who thought sad and lonely thoughts. My brain knew that this wasn't true but I couldn't seem to make my heart understand. This feeling was amplified by the fact that my freshman year I had been more connected to my friends. Now I felt the emptiness that has been created by their absence, like the missing piece to the puzzle that is a human being.

It all started in my first semester art class. I was just starting high school and really nervous but I wanted to make friends. Art class was an elective so nobody took it too seriously and our teacher would let us talk all hour as long as we were drawing too. The perfect environment to start a friendship. The teacher set the class into tables with about eight people each, sitting next to me was a boy. He had gray eyes and his hair was a dull brown. He said hello and I said hi back and we started to talk. I got to know the basic stuff about him. He told me his name is Ethan and he liked to tinker with machines. I told him my name is Maria and that I loved to read. Our whole table would talk and I would join in but I did consider Ethan my closest friend at the table. After about a few months of talking in school we exchanged numbers.

I texted him whenever I could and we would talk for hours. Ethan was funny and he would joke about a lot of things but what I loved most about our friendship were the deep conversations. Those mattered so much to me because I really got to see Ethan's inner thoughts. One of those deep conversations happened when I mentioned to Ethan that in theology class we talked about abortion. Ethan wasn't very religious but he had strong beliefs about what was right and what was wrong. I texted him that I wasn't really sure about how I felt about abortion. It was a morally grey area to me and I understood that you could make a mistake and want to fix the problem. Ethan explained to me, in one sentence, why he is against abortion. He told me that his parents were thinking of aborting him. That really struck me because if they had chose abortion, this boy that I was beginning to care about wouldn't be texting me right now. We wouldn't ever have met or talked. We wouldn't have run down the hallways together or annoyed our teacher with talking. Abortion is wrong.

My daily routine had adapted to accommodate my ever-growing friendship with Ethan. I would get to school and meet Ethan at my locker and we would work on our homework together. The two of us were self-proclaimed procrastinators but always seemed to manage to finish before the work was due. I would meet him in between classes and we would talk for a few minutes then rush to make it on time to the next class. After school we would just walk around the school without any real direction. He would tell me about his day and I would do the same. We would talk about our mutual friends on occasion but I knew that I was his closest friend and he knew that he was mine.

I introduced him to my close friends from middle school over a group chat and they liked him immediately. I loved that they all got along and it made me happy that my new life in high school was able to blend seamlessly with my old life in middle school. My friends had their own conversations with Ethan and I was very happy about this. My friends from middle school had taken a large part in shaping the person I was today. They meant the world to me and I wanted Ethan to understand that part of my life. He would get to know them and that would help him to get to know me better.

At school our teacher got annoyed of our constant talking. So much so that our art teacher decided that we needed to be separated. I was really upset with this decision but Ethan comforted me saying that she could change our seats but she couldn't keep us from talking. The next day I got up to grab another stencil and while I was searching for the right one, Ethan came over. I

smiled and talked to him for a few minutes, no longer caring about the stencil. This became a regular occurrence and if our teacher noticed she didn't say anything. It was our quiet way of rebelling against her separating us. We had many bright and happy conversations but our words could easily turn to dark and depressing.

Ethan opened up to me about his parents. They were abusive and the reason we could never talk on the phone was that he wasn't even supposed to be texting me. If he started talking on the phone to me then his parents would hear and he would be punished severely. His parents wouldn't let him hang out with anybody on the weekend and he was just supposed to do homework and then stay in his room. His father was violent with him if Ethan didn't do what he wanted. My heart was torn to shreds when I heard this. He told me that they didn't used to be so abusive but after his siblings went on to college they focused their attention on him. I told him that he should call social services but he didn't want to because if he did then he would have to leave our high school. If he left our high school then he would be leaving all of his friends behind, including me. We went to a catholic school and it costs a lot of money for tuition which nobody would pay for if his parents were in jail for child abuse.

He was always at war with himself to call or not to call. He wanted my advice on what to do and I told him to call. I cared about his safety more than anything and I didn't want him to be hurt more than he already was. Ethan didn't want to have to go up in front of a court and testify that his parents hurt him. By calling social services it would end the possibility for things to get better with his parents. Ethan considered everything and came to the conclusion that he wouldn't call. He told me that a part of him still cared for his parents and that he really didn't want to lose his friends at school. I encouraged him to call but accepted that it was his decision.

One night, when we were up late texting, he told me of how he dreamed of running away into the forest behind his house. It tore at my heart that this boy that I cared for could want to escape his home so badly that he would live in the woods. I talked him out of this idea with the logic that he simply couldn't survive the winter outside and it's really important to go to school and get a good education. Without a good education you cant get a good job and without a good job you cannot support yourself financially. He understood this and promised never to go through with this plan. It pained me that the people that are supposed to take care of you and love you were hurting my friend physically and emotionally enough to make him want to run away.

Ethan wasn't satisfied when I would only talk about easy topics. School problems and questions that I could answer simply were easy topics. He believed that the way to get to know a person was through asking the harder questions and the ones that inspired emotions. So he would always start conversations that would really break down any walls separating us. He asked me what were the things I was ashamed of. At first I told him that I didn't want to tell him and asked if we could change topics. Nobody wants to tell people what they are ashamed of. He wouldn't accept this though and kept asking. Eventually I told him one of the things that I'm not proud of are my grades in school. My friends and my sister were getting straight A's and I had A's and B's. My parents expected A's from my sister but they expected B's from me. It made me feel less intelligent and I felt like I had to be smarter than my sister because I am older than her. Ethan assured me that I was smart and no matter what my grades were I would accomplish whatever I wanted to do in life and that always chased away those bad thoughts. Ethan helped me to get through the day so I tried my best to do the same for him.

He would have bad days when his parents would be really horrible and I would be the person he leaned on. Our friendship grew so he felt that he could lean on me more, which I encouraged. I wished with all my heart that I could protect him from the misery that he had endured for so long. Our bond was strong and although we cared for each other tremendously, Ethan and I's friendship wasn't perfect. We fought and said things we didn't mean but would always make up. After a huge fight the night before over texting Ethan wrote me a letter. It was one page front and back with his apology. He wrote about how much he loved me, as a friend of course, and how sorry he was that we fought. He told me that our friendship was the most important thing to him and that he would do everything he could to preserve it. After reading that I forgave him completely and my fondness and love grew for Ethan. He had poured my heart out to me yet again and I poured my heart out to him that night over texting. We had our ups and downs but still I loved him. The people around us noticed that we spent more time with each other than anybody else and once again assumed that we were dating. They didn't see that our love for each other was purely based on friendship and wasn't about romance.

We had promised each other that we would stay friends long after high school. I believed every word of it and imagined a future where Ethan was free from his parents and we could see the world together. But after six months of friendship our relationship started to turn sour. I had involved myself in his life and every time he would tell me about another horrible thing that had

happened to him my heart would ache and I would become somber. I started associating that feeling of unhappiness and pain with Ethan himself. My heart wanted this pain to stop so it began to turn those feelings of pain into anger and frustration. Those feelings of anger became the fuel of the fights I had with Ethan. I didn't realize how sheltered my life was from heartache before Ethan, I had never had serious problems and I came home to loving and supportive parents. This heartache now was overwhelming me and I was starting to feel the negative effects of taking Ethan's stress away from him.

Ethan's unloading all his worries and pain onto me was taking its toll and I realized wasn't strong enough to hold his burdens. So we fought and he pushed me away and I pushed him away. We said awful things to each other and after a huge fight we stopped talking all together. We would just keep our heads down in the hallway and at school. It was like our friendship had never happened. Our friends were confused because neither of us was talking about it much but they all assumed that we would make up soon because we were such good friends. We didn't get a chance to make up though.

Ethan left our school shortly after our big fight, about halfway into the second semester. He texted me a few days after he left telling me that he didn't want anything to do with me and that he was disappointed in me because I never noticed that I hadn't seen his scars from cutting himself. I read this when I was about to go on a field trip and was talking to my friend Paul and a few of my other friends close by. I started feel tears threatening to spill and Pula looked at me looking concerned and I showed him the text. Paul read it and then hugged me and managed to distract me from it before I broke down. I was so grateful for him being there for me.

I was starting to notice some emptiness in my life, like I was missing a piece of me. I had made Ethan such a big part of my life that without him there was a hole. It was subtle at first but it grew over time into an ache that happened whenever I thought about him. I was really hurting inside after about a month but kept it quiet, only telling my oldest friends about it. They didn't know what to say when I told them about it so I took to crying in secret instead of then staring at me concerned not knowing what to do. I didn't want my friends to be upset that I was hurting so I concealed a lot of it.

I had focused all my energy on Ethan so my other relationships weren't very strong. I had neglected them in order to be there for Ethan all the time. After Ethan left, I worked to strengthen those bonds that I had neglected but without Ethan life felt so empty. Ethan who had not only

shown me the pain filled part of him but also the wonderful happy part. I missed that boy who would smile at me and let me in. Schoolwork was a helpful distraction at home and my grades went up because nobody was constantly texting me but I still ached for Ethan.

Day and night contained two very different emotional spectrums for me. I could stop myself from thinking about Ethan during the school day. The day was bright and I surrounded by people and classes to distract myself with. I would lie down in my bed, surrounded by darkness, unable to sleep. A large ache would fill my chest and I would miss Ethan with all my being and wish for the pain to end. I wished that I had never met him and that I hadn't decided to open up to him. I blamed myself for the fights we had and agonized over the fact that I hadn't noticed him cutting himself. I silently endured this pain and ache and didn't tell my friends the extent of it. My days were happy and filled with cheery conversations with people that I loved talking to and they would never guess that I felt so much pain at night. I was truly happy in the day and around my family but night always came and I always would lay awake full of pain.

I shook my head to clear it of these horrible memories and wondered, for the millionth time, about how Ethan was doing. Was he okay? Did he miss me or ever think of me? I smiled cynically at the dumb and naïve thought that Ethan and I would be friends long past high school. Our friendship didn't even last a school year. Now I sit here alone without anyone that I am truly connected to. I am constantly searching for some way to erase Ethan from my memory and finally make him stop popping up in my thoughts so much. So I have put all memories of him into a mental box and buried it deep in my mind. I beat down the thoughts of him and suppress them with distractions. It's been working and I am finally starting to move on from him. Ethan was a big hill on my road. It was difficult but I climbed to the top and I was enjoying the view, feeling happy but that hill had a steep drop. I couldn't avoid the steep drop and I fell, hard. Now I'm picking myself up and the road is looking flat.