



"Honestly, How Are You?"

By Riley Spires

I'm crazy... how can anything good come out of someone taking their life? I believe that every experience we go through, has an impact and offers something to be learned for future reference. In this case, by living through this tragedy, I became more aware of the destruction that drugs and alcohol can cause and the signs and symptoms of suicide. I promised to try my best to reach out to anyone I thought was alone and did my best to make sure drugs or alcohol couldn't harm myself or my friends. During my junior year of high school I had a friend who continued to show subtle signs of a suicidal person. Although we weren't close enough for her to confide in me, we were close enough for me to see she was yearning for help. After a couple of weeks of scrolling through her distressing social media posts and seeing her grave demeanor at school, I called a meeting with some of her friends and planned an intervention. One Sunday afternoon we picked her up for what she thought was a casual lunch date. The power of asking her, "Honestly, how are you?" proved to be extremely powerful.

Over the next few weeks we met with her, constantly being by her side. Originally in denial about her mental state, it soon became clear she was grateful for our help. Two months later she admitted that when I had called the intervention, she had a suicide letter written and was contemplating taking her life. I've since received a letter, thanking me for calling that meeting and for saving her from death. She actually gave me a gift. I wasn't able to save my aunt, but helping my friend has been one of the monumental accomplishments in my life. This has not only taught me about the battle of depression and reaching out, but also the devastating consequences of drugs and alcohol. ❌

I solemnly stood there, shoulders limp, staring at the ground, trying my best to hold in the tears that were fighting to be free, fighting for air. That's what I wish my aunt did. I wish she fought. Suddenly the only noise I heard was silence. That's all my aunt heard when she slipped that contaminated needle into her vein.

While growing up, I had perceived my aunt as optimistic, always playing on the swings with me, helping me learn to ride my bike, and more. I was blind to the fact that feelings of severe despondency and dejection were eating away at her. Little did I know that the demon she was battling against was known as addiction. My aunt was an emergency room nurse, having access to any medication imaginable. Throughout the course of her profession she would stumble upon leftover bottles of pills in her medical coats which ended up accumulating in her medicine cabinet. You would think while administering pills to patients, there shouldn't be any way to gain access to extra. At least that's what my fourteen year old self thought. For years this went on, nobody questioning it.

Little did I know the definition of depression I was reading about in health class, were the feelings my aunt was keeping locked inside. I later

learned that during her "using" episodes my aunt had thrown around the word suicide and threatened it occasionally to my uncle. As a precaution he locked up his guns and ammunition separately so no harm would come to his wife, however it never occurred to him that the prescribed medications, as well as the over the counter medications, stocked up in that medicine cabinet would take her life. My aunt knowingly crushed a combination of medications into a fine powder and injected them into her vein in her left arm. The arm I used to hold, running through the park latched onto her, never imagining she would leave me. Shortly after, her heart stopped, laying on her bed with a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) letter on the bedside table.

When I was informed about this inconsolable event I was broken. The first feeling that crossed my mind was anger. How could she be so selfish to abandon her family and friends? Over the years I've learned suicidal people are already so detached from the world they don't see their own actions as harming anyone else. My aunt truly believed death was her best and only option. I became determined to never let another soul slip out of my hands. I had to redeem myself and make up for what I let go.

I did redeem myself. You may think

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Riley Spires is a high school senior from Oregon. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.