



No Longer a Hero

By Alicen Beldin

FAMILIES are made to stay together, to support each other in hard times and learn to grow and love. I knew pain, my entire family knew pain. Losing a sibling is what triggered more pain in my older brother. He wanted a way to fit in and feel numb. It was cool, accepted to do drugs. My brother at the prime age of 15 was still fighting the pain of losing one of his younger sisters. How will a family survive if one is visibly breaking? You hide the addiction that you cling to for survival.

Sam was my hero. He always knew how to protect us. He was the one to throw rocks at the neighbor kids when they yelled acidic jeers at my sisters and I. Sam often talked about how he was going to take us all down to the creek and teach us how to fish... the right way. I never saw my brother as a drug addict, or a user, I saw him as a hero. His violent outbursts, late nights out, and sunken cheeks were all due to a loss he has suffered and he will get better soon, I know it. He will return to smiling, joking, loving Sam soon, right? I would assume I was too naive to see how far off the cliff he had fallen.

It was June, a few weeks before the two year mark of my sister's demise. I arose early on a Saturday morning, mostly to beat my other siblings to the cereal cabinet. I poured myself a generous amount of cereal and milk and stalked to the living room for my morning cartoons. The sun was just above the horizon outside the large window in the room. My

mother walked in with eyes blood shot. I assumed she was crying over my sister again, once again exposing my naive nature. She looked with saddened eyes at the clock, then realizing the time, she scrambled out of the room to the basement, where my brother's quarters were.

I had finished my bowl of cereal and was going back for more when I felt a strange and tense presence in the house. My brother was standing in the doorway leading to the basement. My mother was standing—tears streaming down her face—looking at my brother. My brother's brown hair, a filthy unclean mess, covered his eyes. When he looked up, I saw behind those deep blue irises the red. A terror overcame me, my brother's eyes so bloodshot the white was missing. My mother locked her eyes on Sam, her oldest son. I was confused, not understanding what was happening.

A knock woke me from my clouds of confusion. Slowly moving my head upward, I saw a tall figure dressed in navy blue standing outside the rusted and torn up screen door. As the figure came closer I recognized him as the sheriff. He looked at my mother saying with much shame, "Is he ready to go?" My mother, too horse to speak, simply nodded. Her eyes were downcast, she was trying not to look at Sam. My mother always so strong and sure, now looked afraid and weak. The officer then took out a pair of shiny silver cuffs, and instructed my brother to turn around.

My mom, realizing I was still in the room, ushered me to the adjoining kitchen. She looked at me saying in a whisper, "Now, Alicen, your brother has been making lots of bad choices lately, and the police are going to have to take him for a little while." She looked like she was reliving the death of my sister again—the memory of losing my sister still fresh, she was now losing another child. I kept trying to look to my brother for guidance, but he was too ashamed to look at me. He was trying to keep the tears from falling. Trying to keep his tears from falling so far like he had.

I later learned my brother had been stealing liquor from stores, stealing different types of over-the-counter drugs to get high. He would sneak out the middle of the night to drink until he didn't have to feel, he would become so high all he had to focus on was walking. He wanted to be strung out. He wanted to be numb. My tender age of ignorance and naiveté was shattered once, then again when my only hero was lost. Stolen and forced down a path that would lead him to nowhere. My childhood was torn the day a cop walked into my family's kitchen, took out his cuffs and arrested Sam right in front of my eyes. My innocence was exposed to the world of drug abuse and alcoholism. The day my hero chose drugs and alcohol over me, and over his family. I realized on that day I didn't want to be like him, I wanted to be a true role model for my younger siblings. A pressure Sam was unable to withstand. His choices wouldn't become mine. I would be the hero now.

My brother did come out of his battle alive. He still struggles with the addictions that took so many of his years away from him. His heart still beats, and his brain still processes thought, but the fun-loving nature of him, had died. He taught me how addiction changes people. Addiction is the train that forces a person to choose one path. Luckily for my brother the path he chose didn't lead him to death, like it does for so many people. My brother can teach many people to accept help with addictions in their lives. ☹️

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Alicen Beldin is a recent high school graduate from South Dakota. *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.