



W.H.E.E.L.

Scholarship Contest Winner

Tess Poynter

Topic:

New Career Choice, Your Inspiration, and Why Now?

I sat on my bed, tears streaming down my face the night I first realized that my life would never turn out the way I planned. It felt like my world had been flipped upside down, and all of my future hopes and dreams had been ripped from beneath me. I was overwhelmed with emotions, all of them very negative. I felt hopeless. It was the night I decided I had to drop out of high school.

Every child has dreams for what they want to be when they grow up. First, I wanted to be a teacher, then an architect. During my high school years I developed a strong desire to become a psychotherapist. I planned and hoped to graduate high school with good grades, attend college, then start my exciting new journey by taking psychology classes. At the start of my junior year of high school I was taking some classes I was really excited about; I absolutely loved learning. Then mental illness hit. The disease started slowly for me; I was merely sleeping too much. Then it progressed to feeling sad and hopeless. I went to the doctor and they diagnosed me with major depression and generalized anxiety disorder and prescribed an antidepressant. I thought that this would be the cure and I would quickly return to normal. I was very, very wrong.

The medication I was prescribed triggered what I now know as a full blown manic episode. I couldn't differentiate fact from fiction, almost completely losing touch with reality. I was unable to slow down my brain or protect it from racing thoughts. I was more terrified than I had ever felt before. I felt like I was suddenly going insane, and I kind of was. I specifically remember sitting in the living room with my dad. I had pulled a chair up as close to the TV as possible, and was flipping through shows on Netflix at lightning speed, too fast for anyone to follow. My words were scattered, and my explanations made no sense when I tried to say what I was searching for on TV. Everyone, including my friends and family were scared for my well being. A manic episode is a period of time with elevated mood or irritability, racing thoughts and impulsive behavior. They usually involve very intense energy and actions. It is found to occur in people with bipolar disorder. This episode began the long road to my diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorder. This period of my life contains some of the scariest things I have ever endured.

By the time I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I had been in and out of high school frequently, unable to attend most of my classes due to crippling anxiety and the fear that I'd lose control of my mind again. Between psychiatrists, therapists, med changes, and battling my own mind, I had to make one of the hardest decisions of my life. I dropped out of high school. I had so many goals for myself and it felt as though my dreams were ripped out from under me. I eventually went on to get my GED while continuing treatment for my bipolar disorder. It has taken upward of four years to stabilize my medications and learn to manage my condition. I am thrilled to finally be ready to take my first steps toward my dream of becoming a psychotherapist. I look forward to reconnecting with my love of learning that got violently shoved aside and four years ago. I hope to put my knowledge and experiences to good use and pursue a psychology degree at Lansing Community College.

My hope for the future is to make a difference in people's lives, especially those who may have gone through similar experiences as me, or who may be struggling with mental illness. I now see how my horrific experience puts me in a unique position to help others. I want to help erase the stigma surrounding mental illnesses, especially bipolar disorder, and show the world how capable we are. I've found hope in the idea of continuing my education at LCC, and will be attending in the fall to finally start taking the psychology classes I've always wanted to take. I can't wait to see what my future holds.