

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

The Person I Left Behind

(Original)

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Imagine getting a brand-new pair of jeans that you've been eyeing for weeks, only to find out that it wasn't your size. Even though it was slowly suffocating you throughout the day, you wear it anyway just to receive compliments for your brand-new piece of clothing. This is what it feels like to be a people pleaser, just like me, alongside millions of other people.

Right when I stepped foot into middle school, I started my journey as an actress. Not the ones you see on television screens nor the ones who paint her face green, singing Defying Gravity in front of a crowd of thousands. But the one who wakes up every single morning to put on a mask of someone she is not, hiding her true self even from the people closest to her. People around me loves the facade I put up, the fictional character who came to life. I received the attention I needed from my peers, got the admiration I wanted and became popular in the public eye. Through the help of social media, my ego grew bigger as my follower count exceeds that of my close friends. I was hungry for validation.

After years of playing this role, I started losing fragments of myself that was eventually plunged into the deep black hole of oblivion. Beneath the radiant mask I put on was a void of empty space, only the memory of someone who lost herself to become someone else. When I was away from friends, I would feel so numb and lonely. Lonely not because I was not physically surrounded by people, but because I had no sense of individuality left inside of me. The girl I see in the reflection of my bathroom mirror was nowhere near recognizable, just a familiar face without a name. I became a miserable hollow being walking through the school halls, with no purpose nor final destination. Eventually, I was too exhausted to keep up an act on a daily basis, and everything in my life went downhill right after.

Since the mask I put on become less apparent, people started drifting away because I became someone they are not familiar with. With the stress of a degrading social life and

public image, my grades started falling rapidly, so did my emotions. I fell into a routine of late-night breakdowns, getting the minimum amount of sleep and either overeating or consuming the bare minimum.

In one miraculous night, I was sulking alone in my room when a sudden pang of realization washed over me. I realized that I no longer needed to keep up an act to hide who I truly am but embrace it instead. With that thought in mind, I vowed to myself that I will make a change instead of continually waiting for one because clearly, it wasn't coming anytime soon.

Even though it took a lot of time and effort, I slowly peeled off the mask that was almost permanently embedded in me. It was a journey filled with excruciating pain but was worth it nonetheless. I pushed the agony of having to throw away something I've built for years in the back of my head and soon realized how my life can be way brighter without it. I would not force myself to go out if I did not want to, spending the time to pick up the missing pieces I left behind. As I was learning new things about myself, I expanded my horizon in terms of passion and hobbies. I taught myself new and foreign things, like how to play the guitar and improve my writing skills. In no time, my life took a steep U-turn for the better.

From this whole experience, I learnt that we should not change ourselves to make someone else happy. Unless that someone is yourself. This may seem like a minor change compared to those writing about transforming the politics of a nation or solving mass extinctions of animals, but as cliché as it sounds, substantial changes starts within yourself.