

Years 9 & 10
2nd Place: Leyla Baker
Year 9, John Calvin Christian College

Broken

Sometimes you get hurt so bad. Things stop hurting at all.

The yelling and screaming. Abuse. You can never understand where I come from. What I've seen, is something of another world to you. You ask, you listen, but you aren't really here. You don't see it up close like I see it. No details. An explanation will be wasted. You don't remember my story.

You aren't the one whose only thought is of escape. To rid yourself of this horror. Only to be dragged back to fate. One as evil as this. Looking death straight in the eye.

This is my story.

I go to school every day with a scar on my face. A bruise on my arm.

Every stare reminds me I am unheard, forgotten, not wanted. That is what I am, if I can even be anything. I am nothing.

I lost my Dad. He was the one holding us together. Strong, gentle, kind, loving. Mum was always there for me too. Sweet, caring, beautiful. My sister Kali, too young to understand, always laughing. She may have seemed too young to understand, but she knew what happened. She knew what we lost.

Mum found Roan. And everything fell apart.

He beat us. Yelled at us. Threw us with anything in reach.

If you tried to run, he was there. Dragging you back, screaming, clawing. Fighting for escape. For freedom. For life.

I was inside when they came for him. The siren's wail filled my ears. Light my vision. My heart pounded. They ran and threw him to the ground. There was yelling, fighting, and mum was screaming. They were dragging him to the back of the car.

They turned to me. I ran.

I remembered Kali. They were upon me, dragging me with them. I grabbed hold of Kali. I would never let her go. If they take me, we go together. They could destroy my

life, take my parents, my faith, my hope. But they would not take the one person whom I love. They helped me to the car. I still heard my hysterical mother. But worst, I could still feel them ripping Kali away.

Stealing the one thing I love.

I fell deep within myself. Drawn into a box of pain and misery.

I could see them talking, but I didn't hear. They couldn't save me from what I was experiencing. Who could? They were trying to help; I could see that. But asking questions and forcing me to be in session with my Mum didn't change anything. Everything was a never-ending cycle. Mum would try to be the perfect Mum. But gifts, smiles and hugs couldn't blur what I had seen. Kali saw through the act too. Mum could barely come near her before she would burst into tears and I had to calm her down. Kali would reach for me and I would snuggle her close. I had someone to count on, in this heartache. I could see her once a week, along with my mother. I had the choice whether to go or not. But I couldn't choose not to go. Kali would never forgive me. And I knew what it feels like to be abandoned.

They sent me to a foster home.

Their names were Justin and Helen. Looks of sympathy, glances of concern. Wasted words of comfort. The walls kept growing around me. The fortress of indifference. I will not care. I will not love. The cost is too great, the pain too deep. I knew they didn't love me. I could see that they only had me to boost their pride, to boast in their accomplishments. I heard them talking to the neighbours about what a pleasure I was to them, and how it made 'us' feel like a family, when at night I could hear Helen complain.

I was just a piece in their game. The game of wealth. Of pride. Of self-absorbance and arrogance. It made me sick with anger. The anger burned inside me. The wolf was prowling its cage. Clawing for a way out. The desire for freedom. It took all my strength to control myself. I knew that if I lose myself now, it'll be too late.

People saw me as the abused girl. The girl who didn't feel anything. Maybe if they looked closer, they would see how much it has destroyed me. Into making me never feel again.

I lost it that day.

The wolf escaped, destroying everything and everyone in its path. It tore. Growled. Killed.

I saw Roan hitting mum. Anguished screaming escaped my mouth. I was being torn away from Kali. Never to be seen again.

I was being pulled backwards, kicking.

Someone was screaming: "NO! STOP IT!!"

I realised it was me.

"I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!" I was hysterical. "Don't take her away . . ." I sobbed.

"Please . . . she's all I have left."

I stepped out of the car. Day 17, house three. Third time lucky? I had already been thrown out of two too many houses, and it hurt. No, it didn't hurt. I didn't feel. I was in my own secluded box. Away from all pain. Sorrow. Heartache. Deeper and deeper I fell. Building more walls around me as I went. No one was going to be able to hurt me now. No one was going to be able to get me out.

The days were getting darker. There was no silver lining, not even a brief shine. It was midnight and nightmares all the time. I didn't feel anything. I just wanted to have everything back to the way things were. I wished that I could see my mum smile again, and feel my sister put her arms around me. I wanted to go back to what we had. I wanted to be able to tell my sister that I love her.

But who will be there to tell me?

A lady opened the door. She had kind eyes, sparkling with hope. A calm smile, making you believe everything was okay.

"Hello Frankie. My name is Nadia."

Her feminine voice was kind and slightly accented. And, without meaning to, I found myself liking her. She welcomed me into the house, and I followed. She led me to my room. I felt unsure. I have never felt safe before. Always watching, always alert. It's forever put me on edge. But now I was unsure. Could I be right to call this place home?

Slowly, slowly, the sun began to come up.

It seemed as though, finally; I was safe. I wouldn't have to be pulled off my feet and thrown to the ground. Now I could secure my feet.

Light was covering the shadows. The wolf, previously prowling, was now fleeing. Almost gone. The weather was warmer. Buds were sprouting. Buds of hope. I could welcome spring. Slowly trusting this new life.

“Frankie! Come see what I got for you!” Nadia called from downstairs. I found her seated on the living room couch. She patted the spot next to her; I took a seat. She handed me a box. Inside was a mug.

Glass shatters. Mum screams.

“You think I care about your stupid mug?! I swear! I will KILL you!” Roan is yelling. I’m shaking. I watch as Mum breaks down. She’s sobbing and covering her head in her hands. Trying to get away from the one thing that destroyed us all.

“I DON’T CARE ABOUT THE STUPID MUG!!” I screamed. “I HATE YOU!! I HATE YOU!!” I was trembling; pushing her away from me. She reaches out.

“DON’T TOUCH ME!!”

I kicked and yelled. Then ran.

I wanted someone to tell me it was going to be okay. To tell me that they loved me. Tell me that I wouldn’t always be alone. That I would have a Mummy that will take care of me and comfort me. Because I couldn’t do it all alone.

Someone was crying. I stopped running. Slowly, I made my way back. Nadia was sobbing on the couch, clutching the present. She turned towards me, tears staining her face. She got up, turned and walked away.

I heard her in the kitchen. I knew she was calling the man to take me away. The world around me was crumbling, falling away into an eternal hole of darkness. I was breaking, tearing in two. And this time, nothing would be able to put me back together.

I was broken.

The car pulled up in the driveway. I knew Nadia was going to tell me I must go. I turned to her. I wanted to tell her I’m sorry. Tell her that my brokenness was controlling me. But I knew that it was too late. I couldn’t be heard. I was unseen, unloved.

I turned to the window, ready to take on my inevitable fate.

My story isn't pretty. It's not a pleasant thing to tell. It is not my fault that my life turned out like this. But I can make a choice. I can choose to hide deep within myself. Choose the way in which pain destroys me.

Or I can choose to give love another chance. To hope that one day things will be different. To try new things and try to put my life back together. To build myself back up. Piece by piece.

This is my story. But I will not let it define me. I will create my own future. I am heard. I am not forgotten. I can be wanted. I can be loved.

I just need a spark. A small glimpse is all it will take to get this fire going. It burns inside of me.

The car turned into the driveway. The man stepped out.
He was holding Kali.

My light turned on.

AFTERWORD

Many people in our world today are affected by abuse. On average, 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. This affects not only the partner, but the children in their broken families. Child abuse effects on average 1.7 billion children a year. 1 in 4 children witness or are the target of violence or abuse throughout anytime in their lives.