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Girl on the Streets

A project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in Literary and Intercultural Studies

By
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San Rafael, California
May 3, 2021



Thomas Burke
Assistant Professor, English and Cultural Studies

A Novella: Girl on the Streets

by

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April 28, 2021

San Rafael, California

Abstract

This novella is a story of a young girl living on the streets of a strange city. The story began as a writing assignment for an undergraduate Creative Writing course taught by Professor Thomas Burke several years ago. Now, the assignment has transformed into my final thesis project, a novella, with a reflection and study of the novella and authors that have influenced my writing along the way. I have truly enjoyed writing this piece; it is a work of love and a story that I feel passionate about and want to share with others.

To my son William and my significant other, Steve.

Acknowledgments

To my family for all of their support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you, Winston, for your guidance along the way. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Professor Burke for his belief in me as a writer, and in this project.

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Contextual Essay

For my thesis, I have written a novella. This type of writing is a fictional piece of literature that can be referred to as a long short story. The novella is seen as longer than a short story, but not as long as a novel. In looking at the meaning of novella, the word realistic can be used to describe the tone throughout the story. A realistic tone is the lens through which this story is presented. The story represents a real young person having to acquire the skills needed to survive alone, without friends or family. As a writer, I wanted to present to the narrator a fork in the road that she must choose. The decisions she makes will affect the rest of her life

Within a novella, there is a protagonist who deals with the same antagonist throughout the story. This antagonist might be society or perhaps an individual, but it remains the same throughout. In the case of the protagonist within this story, she must deal with her mother, and all the negativity that she brings to her and her younger brother. This can be seen through much of the time line of this written story. The character within the story about this girl on the streets is constantly battling the guilt of leaving a young brother, with the need to get away from the unhappiness that her life has been up to the present time. This girl will fight her feelings and the reader follows her on her path through her encounters and relationships as the protagonist in this novella.

This long short story as it can be referred to is definitely a piece that can be considered Young Adult Fiction. Since this category of fiction is written for readers from 12 to 18 years old, the character within this story is definitely considered to be a young adult. Fiction written for young adults puts a great deal of focus on the many different

types of challenges that a young person might face. These particular obstacles might arise in instances of first love, relationships and finding one's identity. Many of the problems found in fiction for young adults can also be found in adult fiction as well. One can witness a young girl trying to find her true identity, as well as her struggles with some of the closest relationships in her life.

I was influenced first of all by a short story that I had written several years ago. I felt that I needed to pursue this young girl's journey further, and find out where I might take her and where she might land. I became fascinated with this character, and I wanted to write about a particular and vital part of her young life. Along the way, I found books, and authors that influenced my style of writing and gave me enlightenment to continue this writing journey. I needed to learn about this young woman, and each line I wrote I felt a kinship and wanted to do the best I could for her in the future that she was to face. The young girl in this short story felt the need to run away from her life hoping to find something better away from friends and family. What she found was not at all what she expected, and this story follows her as she learns the real strength within her.

The book that gave me some influence to continue with this particular story was *Runaway Girl* by Carissa Phelps. I had decided to continue a story about a girl on the streets that I had already began, and wanted to look through the eyes of someone who had experienced somewhat the same life experience as the character in the story I was writing. The book, however, was very intense and the young girl in it was younger than my character, and was on the streets longer and faced much more adversity than the character faced in the story I was writing. . The girl in *Runaway Girl* faced more than her

share of emotional and physical abuse. It made one cringe. As the reader follows a young runaway through more than one can imagine, dealing with in a world of drugs and seeing the seediest side of life happening before her very eyes. However, this author was able to turn her life around, and was able to graduate from UCLA with both a law degree and an MBA. Although she left the streets behind, she found herself again on those same streets helping young people to find a path that might lead them to a better life, away from the life that almost destroyed her.

As I sat down to continue the story I had started, I realized that the girl I was writing about, Lenore, was older, and that she was able to control her own destiny in a more positive way. From the beginning, she was able to use her own instincts to stay away from the most destructive areas that living on the streets might bring about for someone lacking the experience of living on their own. Falling into drugs or befriending the wrong people could have sent her down a path that might have destroyed her and one she could not have come back from. When approached by a person who might have taken her down the wrong path, Lenore stood her ground and moved away from a bad situation deciding that this was not her road. In comparing these two girls, the sixteen year-old within this short story had the opportunity that the author of *Runaway Girl* did not.

The narrator within the short story I am presenting was able to find her way back, before she became so lost and alone that coming back might have been harder, or perhaps even impossible.

I have enjoyed reading the works of many authors over the years. However, I have chosen specific authors who I most admire and who have given me the inspiration to continue to write. These writers influenced my writing of my novella. These writers bring creativity, balance and a sense of the emotion needed to hold the interest of the reader throughout their writings. For me, as a writer, grabbing on to the interest of the reader and keeping it going to the very end of a story is the job of any writer.

From the moment I read Jean Rhys "*Wide Sargasso Sea*" one could see the strength and the emotional substance that this author brought to each character from page to page of this book of passion and complicated characters. This author brings out a story with a story within a story that brings a depth and degree of meaning that cannot be matched with her end of a crazed woman trapped in an attic. Rhys brings the strength of one woman fighting through adversity and her own insecurities, as she herself did throughout her own life. This sense of fighting the odds and trying to move forward was an inspiration for my writing of this story.

The female within this story lived in a time when women were not always respected or their emotions and feelings taken into consideration and often felt a sense of displacement. Displacement was also a subject that I looked at in my story of a runaway teenager. The character within the story I have written had a feeling of loneliness, but also a lack of belonging due to living in her dysfunctional family situation.

Another great author who wrote with a sense of great emotion and passion was Ernest Hemmingway. A short story I admire, that he wrote, is *Hills Like White Elephants*. This particular writing was a piece showing an emotional connection between two people as they met to talk in a restaurant. The symbolism and metaphors that were

used throughout this short story brought a sense of strength to the writing, and made this piece powerful for the reader. His writing might seem simple, yet his stories, such as this one, are complex and with this story no easy answer is at the end. His dialogue is vital to his stories, and learning how he connected those within his works through their speech.

While re-reading this story, I found a connection to the subject matter that I was writing also complex. The complexity and emotion within his works became of great interest to me as I continued writing a story about a girl who also needed to find some answers; but needed to search within her before dealing with the other people in her life.

As seen in Hemingway's short novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, there is aging Cuban fisherman, he fights the sea with his own strength to bring in a giant marlin. Again, can be seen the emotional strength and digging deep into the heart of his subjects that is vital to bring strength to a piece of literature. I found that this author gives permission to a writer to bring to the surface the imperfections of the human spirit. This style of writing gave me the encouragement to write about someone who was in the midst of emotional turmoil, but at the end found her own sense of strength and vulnerability.

Emily Dickinson's writing is filled with imagery and metaphorical comparisons as seen in her poem. "I Like to See It Lap the Miles." In writing prose, or poetry the best images hold the reader's attention and make one hunger for more. As a writer, making one hunger for more is certainly an attribute that any writer aspires to.

Although recognition of her work did not come during her lifetime,. Dickinson is considered one of the most original and greatest of American poets. As a writer, there is a strength within her writing that transcends throughout the words within her poetry.

This strength is an important aspect of writing. Every word has such meaning and her writing is considered to be unique in its style. Her sense of vivid imagery was for me an important aspect of any story. A reader needs to relate to a wiring and imagery is a vital part of bringing life to the writing. The written piece may be a piece of poetry, or a character that one needs to bring alive and present to the reader. I found the descriptions that this poet was able to give brought a sense of importance to her strength and love of the written word that is always apparent when I read her work. I have read her poems over the years, and found them purposeful and this gave me a sense of purpose when I started to write about my own character.

Charles Dickens is a writer whose stories are those that I have read over and over, both as a young person and an adult. His fictional characters are some of the most famous names in modern writing. Each character had their own burden to carry, and his descriptive words of the harsh treatment and poverty experienced by many of those within his books are the most famous in the history of any writer. His great style of prose and ability to relay a message is one that is a great addition to any writing piece. Dickens had the ability to bring out the traits of any character. This is bringing a character to life, and for a writer that is a most essential additional to a story. Telling a story about one person, bringing out their true traits enables the writing to give a sense of meaning and life to the character or characters of the written piece.

One modern writer that I have enjoyed reading over the past few years were the books of Michael Connelly. He is a writer of detective books with several main characters who are strong and fierce within the pages of this author's writings. He is a journalist turned author, who used this expertise within the pages of his books to bring

realism and a sense of understanding the heart of each of the characters that were portrayed in each of his books. He used his skills of journalism to set up great descriptive scenes throughout each of his novels. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Connelly several years ago, and after meeting him I understood how he was able to write and bring relevance to each of the main characters within his books, as well as the sense of passion throughout his books. His journalistic ability also gave him a sense of detail that that brought more relevance to the story he was telling.

An important aspect of writing is to want the reader to continually hunger for more. Each of these writers made me as a reader; want the story to continue in order to learn more about where each character was going, and well as where they might land at the end. Also, as a writer one yearns for those reading to yearn for more. Thus for me, each of these authors gave a specific writing style that both encouraged me as a reader, and gave me inspiration to write and share my words with others. These writers also gave me inspiration to write a story that I felt had passion. Passion is an important part of any writers work, and each of these authors showed a great passion for their work. One must care and delve into the hearts of those within a story in order to bring the emotions and feelings to those who are the readers.

Each of the above authors brought a sense of meaning, and maintained a style of their own in each piece that they wrote. As a writer, one must find their own style and bring a sense of who their characters are into the piece that they bring to the reader. These authors were an inspiration to my continuation of my story and the portrayal of my character. Their different styles of writing and portrayal of characters gave me the courage to write. Whether it be poetry or prose, authors need to have a sense of

connection and meaning to their writing. Each of the above authors brings their own sense of style and a relevant sense of uniqueness that all writers want to bring to a piece of written work.

The story about Lenore, a lost girl on the streets of a strange city, was a work of love and one that I cherished each time I wrote about this young lost girl who somehow was able to find her way.

Girl on the Streets

My first day back to school was supposed to be exciting and fun. I had not seen most of my friends for the whole summer. I was busy trying to take care of my little brother, and working to keep a messy house clean. My mother told me that it was my responsibility since she was working to support my brother and me. She always complained of being tired and not having the time to do any thing around the house.

I woke up on a Monday morning to the sound of my brother crying in the next room.

“I’m hungry and I want breakfast,” he said.

I was walking out of my room into his bedroom. My mother, as usual, had not come home until long after I was asleep. By the time I had put my six year old brother to sleep the night before, she still had not come home from work. (But for her, that was not unusual) The phone rang around 9: 00, and my mother informed me she would be late because she was going out with her friends. No surprise there! My mother only thought of herself, never caring about the needs of her children and over spending time out with her friends,

I always looked forward to going back to school after summer vacation was over. I missed hanging out with my friends, and not having to think constantly about what was taking place at home. However, I realized the excitement that I had felt last night was soon to be over as soon as I heard my brother crying in his room. I suddenly realized that my mother had stayed out most of the night, and was now in bed, probably suffering from a night of drinking and experiencing a major hangover.

I had been through this scene so many times over the past years! But for once, I thought my mother could at least act like a real mom should. Be there for her daughter! I got my brother his breakfast and helped him get ready for school. He moved into the living room to watch cartoons on TV, and this gave me a chance to find something to wear after I took a quick shower.

We couldn't afford to buy me any new clothes for the start of school, but I thought at least my mom would wash and iron the best dress that I had so I could look decent on my first day back to school. I ran to my closet and found a skirt and blouse that I had ironed a few days before. I decided since I didn't have much time to get ready, these clothes would have to do. Other kids my age went shopping with their mom for new clothes for the beginning of school; but our mother spent every extra dollar we had on herself, and going out with her friends!

After I took my shower, I dried my hair and put it into a simple bun on the top of my head. I had bought some mascara, light brown eye shadow and a new pink lipstick with my babysitting money. I looked into the mirror after I was finished dressing and putting on some make-up and actually felt good about how I looked. I was proud of myself, even if I didn't have new clothes to wear to school.

Suddenly, I heard the phone ring in the kitchen, and I ran to make sure I answered it before my little brother. It was my good friend Jennie who lived across town wanting to know if she and her mom could give me a "first day ride" to school. Jennie was a really good friend, and always listened whenever I needed a friend to confide in. Jennie's home life was the opposite of mine. She lived in a nice house with a green lawn, and a white picket fence that her dad had built the year before. Her mom and dad were always

nice to me, and I had many dinners at their house over the time I had known Jennie.

When times were rough at home, these family dinners brought some brightness into the sad life I was experiencing in my own home.

Jennie and I had met in fifth grade and had hit it off from the beginning. She was bubbly and outgoing, and I was rather shy. Jennie never judged me, even though our families were so different. For example, my mother barely wished me happy birthday, let alone celebrating my special day. To show the absolute difference in our mothers, Jennie's mother not only wished me Happy Birthday, but offered to take me shopping. The day of my birthday, she took Jennie and I out to lunch and bought me a new blue sweater (my favorite color).

What was I going to say to Jennie's mother to a ride on the first day back to school? I knew that I had to take my brother Jake to school. His school was only two blocks away, but I couldn't just let him walk by himself. "Thank you Jennie for the offer, but I think my mom wants to take me since it is the first day of school." She told me that she understood, and that she would look forward to seeing me at first period. We had been able to get most of our classes together and I felt really good about that at least.

As I was getting off the phone, I heard my mother getting up to go into the bathroom. She sounded like she was getting sick. I knew that meant she had drunk a lot the night before, so I just ignored it and finished helping my brother get ready so we could leave. Now I would have to get him to school, and walk to my high school which was about five blocks further. I had lied to Jennie because I was so ashamed of what was really going on in our house.

My mom really could care less about my first day of school, even though the first day back after a long summer at home was important to me. Some times I hated my mom for the way she neglected my brother and I. But, I mainly felt bad for my brother. He really loved my mom and was always trying to vie for her attention. Once in a while, she would read a story to him, but generally it was my job to put him to bed and read one of his favorite books to him before he feel asleep.

“Jake we need to leave. I need you to turn off the TV.”

I knew he was in the middle of his favorite cartoon show, but he turned off the set and I helped him put on his jacket. As we left the house, I turned around and I almost started to cry when I thought of how my best friend was beginning her day. Her mom cared enough to share a first day ride to school with her daughter, unlike my own mother. I actually felt the tears starting to well up in my eyes. I was already emotionally drained, and I hadn't even left the house.

As we finally approached Jake's school, I realized I needed to be strong for him. He was only a little kid, and he was stuck with a mom who didn't care, and an older sister who was feeling a lot of pressure about the pressure of her life. I felt guilty that I couldn't give him the attention and love he was lacking from my mom. I gave him a hug goodbye, and told him I would stop and pick him up on my way back from school. Luckily, there was a free after-school program for working parents so I could pick him up any time before five.

I looked at my watch, and realized that if I didn't hurry I would be late for my first period class. I started to run down the block and slipped on a wet spot on the sidewalk. Luckily, I caught myself and did not hurt myself when I fell. But the worst

part was I tore a hole in the arm of my blouse. I would have to keep my sweater on for the entire day so no one could see the hole. At this point, there was nothing I could do but keep going. One more block to go then I would finally be there. .

Finally walking into school, I realized that the bell had already gone off, and I was late for first period. What a drag! Right now I really hated my mother. Everything was her fault! If I didn't have to worry so much about my brother, then I could have made it to school on time. I didn't blame my little brother, but having to get him to school was the reason I arrived late for my first day back. My mother was the most irresponsible person I knew!

I walked into first period and sat in the back of the room. Luckily, it was English and my favorite subject. The teacher in front was writing on the board, and turned around and asked me my name.

"Lenore Tate, mam," I answered quickly.

I could feel everyone's eyes staring at me. I felt my cheeks getting hot, and just wanted to crawl under my desk.

"You're late young lady!"

I apologized and said it would not happen again.

After class ended, Jennie came up to me and wanted to know what happened. I was too embarrassed to tell her the real truth. I made up some story about my mom not feeling well, and me deciding to walk to school rather than bother her or her mom at the last minute. I felt so guilty, but the damage had been done so I just had to continue with the lie I had told.

Jennie had a funny look on her face, but didn't say anything else. The rest of the day went pretty smooth. I was on time for all the rest of my classes, and tried to enjoy lunch time and not think about what had happened earlier in the day. Jennie was friendly during lunch, but I felt that she was looking at me differently, and I realized she knew I had not been truthful with her when she turned and gave me a disappointed look and said: "My mom and I saw you walking down the street with your little brother this morning. If your mom wasn't well, then why didn't you ask for a ride for both you and your brother? My mom would have given you both a ride." Then she got up off the bench and walked away in a huff. At that point, I realized she felt I had betrayed our friendship by lying, and this lie had taken a toll on our close relationship. I had always been truthful with her about my circumstances before; but I just felt so ashamed I couldn't tell her the truth this one time.

After the last bell rang, and the day was over, I ran out the door to go pick up my brother. As I walked down the street, I had a bad feeling about the lie I had told to my best friend, but I just couldn't let her know what had happened with my mother this morning. Her family knew my circumstances, but I really wanted to pretend that just this once I had a normal home life, with a mom who loved and cared about her daughter and young son. I thought if I said my mom was going to drive me to school, that it really might happen. "Why couldn't I have a normal life"? I thought to myself.

I finally got to Jake's school, and I could see him sitting on a bench in the hall crying. One of the teachers came out and said that they had been trying to call my mom for several hours because Jake said he had not felt well. I explained that my mom was probably at work and could not take calls. The teacher gave me a stern look. I explained

that we didn't live far, and I would make sure that Jake got home and I would get a hold of my mother at work. The teacher hesitated, but let me take my brother.

"I feel better now!" Jake yelled out.

I couldn't understand why he had told his teacher that he was sick, and all of a sudden he felt fine.

On the way home, he explained that in the morning he had found some candy and ate a lot of it when he was watching his cartoons. I felt guilty that I had neglected to care for my brother, and had only been concerned about myself. It certainly wasn't his fault that my mother was such a selfish and uncaring person who didn't care to give her children the love and nurturing that most mothers did. I needed to take on more of the responsibilities as the older sibling. I would certainly try and do better in the future.

When I arrived home, my mother greeted me at the door with a lot of anger, and just started yelling:

"Why didn't you clean the kitchen before you left this morning?" she asked.

I was so upset that I just ran past her into my room and slammed the door! My brother was crying and I felt really bad for him. I was so upset that there was nothing I could do but lay on my bed. I thought about how bad my life had become, and I burst into tears. My mother started banging on my door and yelled at me to come out.

I opened the door and saw her out in the kitchen slamming dishes, pots and pans around the sink.

Finally, I summoned up the courage to talk to her about what I had been going through.

“Mom, didn’t you even realize that this was my first day back to school? I am a junior this year. This is a very important time in my life .I had to lie to my best friend about you today. I also had to walk my brother to school, and practically had to run five blocks in order to get to school on time. Jake’s teacher was trying to call you all day because he needed to come home.”

She didn’t hear a word I said. All she could think about was her own stupid self. This woman had no guilt in the way she was behaving as a parent. This was no love or nurturing in this house.

Having a conversation with this woman was pointless. She only talked about how sick she had been, and how she had to miss a day of work. I knew that the reason she was sick was her own fault. She was suffering from a hang over after being out most of the night drinking and partying with her friends. After she finished yelling at me, and left the room, I fed Jake, and made myself some dinner. I cleaned the kitchen, and there wasn’t a dish or pot left in the sink.

My mother finally came back into the kitchen and asked how my day went. I was so angry about how she had treated me when I arrived home from school, I told it was fine, and walked out and started watching TV with Jake. Anytime my mother started to talk to me I felt tense, and my stomach started to hurt. She very rarely acted interested in any part of my life. When she did, I never reacted well, and choose to just clam up, and leave the room. The time; however, I told her that I had to spend extra time in my closet just to find something decent to wear. I emphasized that her failure to take me clothes shopping like all the other moms had caused me to have a horrible day.

When I finished my story, she looked at me with cold eyes and said that I was lucky to have a mother who worked hard every day to support her two kids.

She said in her stern voice: “I can’t afford to take you shopping for new clothes.”

I got to hear for the hundredth time how my father had walked out, and had not sent any support money in several years. The truth of the matter is my mom cheated on my father, and he left her because she was a drunk and a terrible person. Now don’t get me wrong, there is no excuse for him not helping to support his family. He moved to another town, and I heard my mom tell my grandmother that he got married and started another family. My father never even sent my brother and I a birthday or Christmas card, let alone sending support money, or spending any time with us.

I know that my grandmother gives my mom extra money for food, and to buy my brother and I clothes. Most of the time my mother uses this money to buy herself clothes. Aside from buying groceries and paying the rent, any extra of her “hard earned money” as she puts it is used to buy the fancy clothes she wears when she goes out drinking with her friends. My brother had a hole in one of his shoes for a month before she even took the time to take him shopping for a new pair.

After her tirade, my mother informed me that she was going to bed and needed to get some rest so she could get up early and go to work. She had no vacation coming, and so she lost a day of wages. This was her own fault, but she talked as if it was mine. She was fired from her last job for not showing up for work because of her constant going out, and not being able to get up for work the next morning I hoped that she could at least keep this job!

At this point, I was so exhausted that I told my brother to go get undressed and I gave him a bath and put him to bed. I felt so bad for the day my brother had experienced, that as tired as I was, I read him his favorite story before he nodded off to sleep.

After hugging my little brother, as he was falling asleep, I covered him, shut out his lights and went in and took a hot shower. I just stood under the water for a long time. I wished I was somewhere else where I didn't have to deal with all the garbage going on in my life.

I was so tired, that when the alarm when off, I almost turned over, and went back to sleep. When I got dressed and went out into the living room, my mother's door was open, and I could tell she had left for work. Thank God for that at least! I was in no mood to have any further conversation with her. Jake was up getting dressed for school. I went through the same thing I had gone through the day before. I walked him to school and walked the next few blocks to my own school. I realized that this would probably be the pattern for the whole rest of the year.

As I approached my high school, I saw Jennie outside talking to some other girls. When she saw me, she turned around and walked the other way. I got a lump in my throat when I saw that my best friend was ignoring me. If she was really was my friend, she would have understood why I lied to her yesterday. The bell rang for first period and I ran to make sure I was on time for class. I was so tired last night that I didn't even read the chapter that we were suppose to do for English homework. My English teacher called on me, and I had no idea how to answer a question from the chapter we were to read. After class, I was asked to stay behind. I explained that I had not felt well last night, but would do the homework for both last night and tonight. Miss Andrews explained that if I

got behind, I would not do well in her class! I can still hear her saying to me “Young lady, I expect class assignments to be turned in on time! If not, I will deduct points accordingly!”

After class ended, I had a free period so I did some homework in study hall. As I was doing my math, Jennie came up to me and I presumed we were going to make up and I would still be going to her house for dinner as we had planned. We talked about having dinner together several days ago, and I was really looking forward to a visit with her so I could explain why I had not accepted the ride she and mom offered me. All of a sudden Jennie looked at me and coldly told me she would be busy and cancelled our plans for dinner that night. She turned and walked away without even looking back. I was devastated! None of the other girls I knew talked to me much that day either. What was going on! Had my best friend been talking to other girls about me? I felt alone and betrayed. However, I knew that I could do nothing to change anything right now. I needed to get to my other classes, and I had told my mother I would stop and get Jake on the way home.

When I got home that afternoon, I called Jennie, and when I asked to speak to her, her mom said she wouldn't be home till after dinner. How could that have been! I figured she went to someone's house, and she had decided to change our plans to punish me for the lie I had told her. My life just keeps getting worse by the moment.

My mother called around dinner time, and said she would be home later. I knew what that meant. I had to take care of Jake again. I had lost my best friend, and I was behind in my classes after only two days at school. Every aspect of my lie was a total mess! There is no going back to change the total wreck I have made of my life due to one

lie. I have no one to talk to, and at this point I have lost the only person who truly understands, and cares about my home situation.

I made a decision as I went to bed that night! I would make sure that I got Jake to school safely tomorrow; but after that I needed to get away from all the sad things in my life. My mother didn't care about me, and without even a friend to talk to or comprehend what was going on in my life, I had no one. I would pack my backpack with as many clothes as I could carry, and get away from all the craziness. I had hidden \$125.50 of my birthday money, and money I got babysitting in a jar under my bed, and would bring that with me so I could take a bus out of town and not have to deal with a mother who didn't care about me or anything that was happening in my life.

I heard my mom come home late, and knew that she might go to work after I left for school. I was really quiet, and when I shut the door, I closed it very quietly so my mother would not wake up right away. I dropped Jake off, and gave him a big hug. "You are squeezing me too tight!" he said. I started to cry but I wouldn't let him see the tears that were streaming down my face. I had a sinking feeling mixed with guilt, as I left him off that day. Yet, I knew that I couldn't take care of him any longer. The only person I could take care of was me! I had to leave! No one cared about me, and I was not Jake's mom. I was his sister. I couldn't handle all the pressure of taking care of my brother, school and running the house anymore.

There was a bus station three blocks away, and I decided to walk there to find out how far I could go with the money I had with me. When I finally reached the bus station, I saw three buses lined up ready to go! I found a sign with different cities on it. There was one that was seventy-five miles away, and the ticket cost \$40. That didn't leave me

with much money, but I just wanted to get as far away as I could, so I figured I would deal with any other problems when I got to where I was going.

I was pretty tired, but I heard the bus driver yell out my destination, so I pulled the lever and got off the bus. I looked around, and suddenly I felt scared, and really lonely. What was I thinking? I had not much money left, and I was in a strange town. I was not prepared for all the mixed feelings I had as I started walking down the unfamiliar streets of this new city I had landed in. I knew I had to get away from the life I was leading; but I had no idea what to do now that I had left my family and friends. I needed to make a conscious decision as to what would come next. I was alone in a strange city with little to no money, and nowhere to stay.

I had not given much thought to what I would do once I had finally decided to run from all the misery I had been living under and landed somewhere by myself. I just had to believe that living on the streets alone would be better than what I had been experiencing for the past few years. However, the changing of seasons never entered into my mind as I ran to catch a bus out of town. Fall was changing into winter, and the nights would be cold. The fact is with the cold weather soon approaching, I would need a place to stay when the temperature begins to drop at night. I started walking down the street not knowing what I should do or where I should go. I passed a coffee shop that had a sign in the window "Help Wanted." I knew I would have to get some kind of job to survive on my own, so I made a note of where I saw the sign, and kept walking. I turned the corner and kept moving down the street.

I was really hungry and tired and decided to stop and have a taco. At least that was cheap. It was getting dark, and I had to find some shelter. I found a place in an alley

that seemed safe, so I took my coat and bundled up the best I could. (At least I brought my warmest coat). When I woke up the next morning, there was an old man staring at me with his hand out.

“Got any spare change?” He said.

I got up and started to run down the street as fast as I could. I had heard that there were places that people could stay over night if they had no shelter. Being safe was vital if I was to survive by myself.

I was running so fast I almost ran past a sign that said: “North Street Shelter” Just what I needed, a place to stay for the night. I stopped and slowly walked through the door. As I entered the building I saw a lot of sad people with old dirty clothes standing in line getting something to eat. I remembered I had only had the taco the night before, and I welcomed a chance to put some food into my empty stomach. I was stunned to see a young girl with a crying baby in her arms. She didn’t seem to be much older than me, but she looked tired and sad. I felt bad for her, and as I walked past her and she turned the other way as if she didn’t want to look into my face.

I kept walking into the building that seemed to never end, and I finally spotted a desk where people were standing and signing in. I got into a line that seemed to have to end. When it was finally my turn, the woman checking people in asked me if I had been doing drugs or had been drinking. I said I didn’t drink, and I certainly didn’t do drugs.

“How old are you?” she asked me.

I replied that I was sixteen.

She gave me a strange look, but still handed me the sign in sheet that explained the rules of the shelter. Of course, the first rule was no using drugs, or alcohol while

staying at the shelter over night. She explained that there were several showers in the back of the building. Everyone was allowed to take one shower a day. After I signed in I got a blanket, and pillow.

I wasn't exactly sure how the whole sleep thing went, but I knew I would soon find out if I stuck around much longer. The food smelled so good that I headed to the food line as soon as I was finished signing in. There people serving eggs, toast, fruit and some kind of juice. Since I was really hungry, everything looked good to me. When I turned around to see if I could find a place to eat, the young girl with the baby came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder.

Her name was Cindy, and she was seventeen, but seemed older to me. She found me a place to sit and eat, and asked if she could join me.

“How long have you been on the streets?” She asked me.

I told her I had arrived on a bus the day before.

“Why did you run away?”

I really didn't want to get into some discussion about my life with a complete stranger, but I had no one else to talk to, so I told her a partial story of what had been going on with me.

“What about you?” I asked her.

She explained that her step-father had raped her, and she ended up pregnant. I didn't want to appear shocked, so I just listened to the rest of her story quietly. All I could think of was that I wanted to leave and not hear any thing else about this stranger sitting in front of me. Her mother made her have the baby, and said that they were going to give it to a couple for a great deal of money. This couple had been trying to have

children, but could not and they just wanted to have a child of their own. So, at this point they were desperate, and willing to do anything to get a baby, even if they did it illegally.

Cindy had been living on the streets for about three months. The baby had just turned ten months old, and she was able to earn enough money singing on the corner to buy a small amount of formula. The shelter provided donated clothes, more baby formula, baby food, and blankets. She explained that at least she had no worries that someone would try and take away her baby. She also told me for that both her step-father and her own mother hit her, and kept food from her if she didn't do as she was told. This was a sad story, and I felt so bad for this person I had just met, and what she must have gone through.

I finished my breakfast and decided to take a walk outside so I could just be by myself, but this girl would not let me leave alone. I said that it was nice talking to her, hoping against hope that she would just walk away. She followed me out the door, and down the street.

“Hey, wait for me.” she yelled, as I rounded the first corner.

I had come to another place hoping to find some peace in my life. Connecting with someone with such a disastrous life was not what I wanted to do. I had just made a conscious decision to away from my own dysfunctional family. Yet, I still felt sympathy for what this poor girl was going through.

She explained that she knew that there was a place to get clothes really cheap! I really didn't need anything at the moment, but she seemed so lonely that I found myself feeling sorry for her and just let her guide me to where she was going.

We walked into the door of a second hand store, and started to walk around looking at the clothes on the rack. I asked the woman behind the counter if she had any makeup that was not used, and she smiled and led me to a glass case that was locked. While I waited for her to get the key, I turned around and saw Cindy stick a blue blouse under her sweater and walk out the door quickly. I was able to buy some blue eye shadow, with a lipstick for only \$5.00. As soon as I walked out the door, Cindy came up to me and patted me on the back, and explained how great it was that I kept the woman busy so she could take the blouse.

“Is that what you thought I was doing?” I asked.

I explained to her that what I was doing had nothing to do with the fact that she stole something from a store.

“What are you thinking Cindy?”

I tried to explain to her if she got caught; she would be arrested and would probably lose her baby. She said that she had been stealing clothes since she was in grammar school, and had never been caught! I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at that moment, but I realized that this girl was trouble, and I didn't need hang with anyone who by her own actions get me arrested or thrown in jail.

I explained that I thought she needed to be really careful and think of the consequences that her actions could cause now that she had a baby to take care of.

“You have a child now and you need to think about the consequences of your actions.”

She gave me a cold look, and I quickly walked away from her down the street as fast as I could.

Suddenly, I felt bad. I knew that she was probably not a bad person and was dealing with so much for someone so young. Yet, I had my own problems, and knew that I could not take on anyone else, especially someone who insisted on stealing from stores to get something they could not afford to have. I was certainly not going to be “the cover” for someone who claimed to be a habitual thief.

I still couldn't figure out how I was going to survive.. I sat down and counted my money, and I realized after paying for the bus ticket there wasn't as much money left as I had hoped. Buying anything extra was probably not a good plan. Well, I did and the money was gone! The fact is I need to earn some money and not worry about the stupid thing I just did!

I started walking and I came to a neighborhood with houses and trees. This neighborhood with the perfect lawns and white picket fences reminded me of Jennie's neighborhood and how everything looked so perfect. It made me feel really sad, and I wished I was home with my friends and my brother. No! I have to put those thoughts out of my head and I just kept walking. I walked so far, that I almost got lost. I didn't know the area, and decided to go back to the street the shelter was on. They said that dinner was going to be around 6:30. I was pretty hungry since I had not eaten since breakfast.

I got a little lost walking back on streets I didn't recognize. I was scared that I wouldn't find the street I needed to be on; but as I continued walking I began to recognize the shops and signs, and finally saw the lights of the shelter a half a block away. As I entered the door, I saw many more people in line for dinner than for breakfast. Looking around, I noticed that there were cots lined up in the back of the

building and even though it was early, some people had put what belongings they had, and their blankets on a cot. I got in line for dinner, and looked to see if I could find Cindy, but she was not in line. I thought that maybe she had eaten earlier, so I finally got my own meal and found a place to sit down and eat. After dinner, I found a cot that no one had taken, and put my back-pack and blanket on top and lay down on top of the cot

By now, it was only about 7:30, so I took out a book I had brought from home and started to read. It was one that I had read in the 8th grade. I started day dreaming about how much fun Jennie and I had that year, and how we were looking forward to going to high school together. Tears came to my eyes, but I wiped them away and started reading the book I brought with me.

The story started out about a girl who adopted a dog and how her family taught her that she had to be responsible and take care of her new pet. She almost lost her dog by not keeping him on a leash as her parents had told her to do. By the end of the book, this girl had learned about the love and responsibility she needed in order to have a pet. I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer, and fell asleep. I woke up at around 8:30 the next morning to the sounds of cots being taken down and put away. I woke up to the sound of cots being taken down and put away woke me.

As usual, people were in the breakfast line ready to eat as the trays of food were being brought out. I noticed the line had grown longer from the previous day.. I packed up my blanket, back-pack and get in line with all the others. I still didn't see Cindy, and felt bad that I had been so mean to her the day before. I felt a pang of guilt for not being more understanding of all she was going through. . Yet, I knew that she was going down a bad path for her and her baby, and nothing I had said to her made any difference. Or

maybe it did. I might never know if my words gave her food for thought. But, I felt I had done what was not only best for this girl, but also I certainly did not want anyone to think I was a thief. I had no regrets for my actions.

I had spoken the day before to a lady named Mrs. Daily regarding how things worked in the shelter. She was very kind and answered any questions that I had regarding how things were done around the shelter. . I asked her if she had seen Cindy, and she said that she had not seen her since the day before.

“I tried to guide her into counseling; and I offered to loan her some books on caring for a baby but I am not sure anything I did or said was of much help. People need to want help and if they refuse it, there is nothing else that can be said or done.”

Mrs. Daily also explained that Cindy had been arrested for shoplifting, and she had talked the shop owner in to dropping the charges.

“I had hoped that after she got caught stealing, and was able to get out of being charged, it would serve as a lesson to her.

Mrs. Daily just shook her head and looked so sad.

“Where were this girl and what is going to happen to her and her baby?” I thought to myself. Yet, there was nothing I could do to help someone going down a wrong path since I needed to worry own life choices. If Mrs. Daily offered assistance and Cindy refused, I guess for now that is all that could be done. Cindy has herself and child to think about, and she needs to change her ways if she wants to stay out of jail and keep her baby. If she continues down the path she is now on , I am not sure what will happen to her and her young baby.

Mrs. Daily said that they were short of people to serve and wondered if I would be interested in helping to serve meals. I was so glad just to have something to do; I jumped at the chance and put on some gloves. She showed me how much to serve, patted me on the back and handed me a large spoon.

After dinner, I went to my cot, and Mrs. Daily brought me some books that people had donated.

“I saw you reading the other night, and I found some other books that I thought you might like to read.”

I thanked her for the books and her kindness and settled in for the night.

The next morning when I woke up I felt more rested than I had in a long time. I somehow felt safe and secure. Mrs. Daly came over and said that I had done such a good job last night and asked if I would help with breakfast. I was really eager to keep busy and feel needed. She had a nice soft voice, and seemed to a person who genially cared about other people.

I asked her again if Cindy had come in last night, and she looked at me sadly, and explained that she felt Cindy might not return to the shelter again, I felt a little guilty that I had been so cross with her after the incident at the store, but I realized that I could have been in a great deal of trouble if someone in the store had caught her and thought if we were together that I had helped her steal the blouse that she had run out of the store with.

I remembered the sign I had seen in the window of the coffee shop the first day, I arrived so I decided to go by and see if they had already hired someone for the job. I walked down the street until I found the place I had seen. I was anxious to find a job, and

luckily the manager was available for me to talk to. It was not much of a problem for me to convince her that I was a teenager just wanting to work on Saturdays and maybe some work on week days after school. I didn't want her to wonder about who I really was, or anything remotely pertaining to my personal life, so I told her I just wanted to earn some extra money to buy clothes and to help pay for college tuition.

When she took the "Help Wanted" sign out of the window, I felt relieved that perhaps I now would have a real job. Lucky for me one of her employees needed to return to school and had left a few days earlier. All of a sudden, she was caught short handed. Since this was Saturday, there was no question of my starting my new job right away. She took me into the back and introduced me to several of the other employees. A girl named Sally showed me around and gave me an apron. I was to follow her around and learn about the menu, and how items were to be cooked on the burners. Although this was the learning phase of the job, I would still be paid for my hours that day.

The manager's name was Linda Frank, and she gave me some paperwork, and told me that she would probably need a phone number to reach me in case she had to cancel or add me on to a day. I just shook my head, and said that we had just moved, and I didn't know the number yet. I realized that I needed to get a charger for my phone. I had packed my bag so fast, that I had forgotten to put in my phone charger. That would be the first thing I would buy when I got paid. Maybe, in the meantime I could borrow a charger from someone at the shelter,

I got off work at around five and I was really tired, but Mrs. Frank seemed pleased with my work, and said she would look forward to having me as an employee. I seemed enthusiastic, and that is what she wanted. Thank goodness! I had a job!

Yet, I felt a certain emptiness inside me walking down the street towards the shelter, and wondered what Jennie was doing right now, I imagined that she was having dinner with her mom and dad and they were talking about what her day at school looked like. Even with all the bad that had happened to me over the past few years, I still missed my home, family and friends. I started to think about Jennie, and why I had to ruin such a great friendship. But, I quickly pushed all these thoughts out of my head as I approached the center.

I was really tired from work. As soon as I walked in the door of the shelter, I realized I had promised to help serve dinner, so I grabbed an apron and got behind the counter to help the other people that had started serving the evening meal. “Sorry I’m late.” “No problem,” said an older lady with gray hair.

After the dinner rush, I grabbed a plate and went over to my cot to sit down and eat dinner. I wanted to get some rest since I knew I would be working tomorrow. Mrs. Frank had asked me when I had time to study, since she thought I was coming from school each of the days I worked. I just dodged her question, and said I had to get something in the back room. I now had a job and a work schedule, and decided I would dodge any questions and just mind my own business and work as hard as I could to do a good job.

The next day I helped around the shelter, and greeted new people coming in before my shift at work. It felt good to have a schedule and be earning my own money. I had been working for about three weeks, when one night when I got back, Mrs. Daly came over to my cot and asked how things were going with me. I said I was doing OK,

and thanked her for all the books she kept bringing to me. I went to sleep every night reading from one of the different books that Mrs. Daley had given to me.

The next morning I woke up thinking about home and how much I missed my brother and I started to think about Jennie, and how I had not shared the truth with her on that first day of school. Maybe, it was my fault she didn't want to be friends with me. I also started thinking about my little brother, and how much I was missing him.

Suddenly, I realized I was day dreaming and not serving the eggs I was supposed to be serving. Mrs. Daily came over and asked me if everything was OK. I told her yes, and continued what I was supposed to be doing. After breakfast was over, I went over to my cot and took out one of the books that Mrs. Daly had given me the night before, and began to read. I spent all of my extra time reading and started to realize that I missed school. Before I knew it, I was halfway through the book, and it was almost lunch time. Most of the people had left and gone out on the street, but I really was more comfortable just sitting and reading a book.

Mrs. Daly usually left and came back to help with dinner, but she came over and sat next to me. She had such kind eyes, and I felt very safe talking with her. She said that she had a daughter and a son who lived in another state, and her husband had passed away a couple of years ago. She decided that she wanted to help other people, so she started helping out at the shelter and it helped to fill the time, as well as giving her the satisfaction that she was contributing to the lives of others.

Then I began talking with her about why I had to leave home. I told her about my little brother, and my mom who most of time wasn't a mother to me or my brother. She looked at me with kind eyes, and wanted to know if she could help in any way. I told her

no. It was early evening so I decided to take a walk since I knew my way around the area now. I had enough money to buy a charger, so I found a store close to the shelter and found just the one I needed.

I also browsed around a store looking at the jewelry. The saleswoman in the store kept watching me. She made me feel so uncomfortable that I finally just left and went to the bookstore a few doors down. I bought a used math book, and started walking into the neighborhood that I had gotten lost in when I first arrived. As I was walking, I kept looking at all the houses and the kids playing outside. Since it was Saturday, the kids were home from school, and there were people outside talking and working in their yards. I had a schedule of working at the coffee shop, and helping at the shelter when I could. I had been living this life for almost two months, but yet I felt lonely and unfulfilled. Although things were a mess at home, living in a strange place may not be the solution for life's problems.

Suddenly, it hit me! I can't do this any more. It's time to go back and face my life, and deal with my problems and quit running away; I went by and picked up my last check. I told Mrs. Frank, I had to quit working because of too much homework during the week, and needed the weekends if I was to keep up my grades. I thanked her for hiring me and started to leave. She touched my shoulder, and told me that she would miss me and even in a short time, I had proven to be one of her best employees. I thanked her and left for the shelter.

The only person I could think of calling was Jennie's mother, but I had been so mean to her daughter that I knew she would probably never speak to me again. After all, their family had been so good to me, and I had acted so selfish and immature I didn't see

how they could forgive my behavior. I was filled with guilt and wasn't sure just what I just do.

I helped again with serving dinner, and then I went back to my cot to finish the book I had started earlier that day. As I lay down to go to sleep that night, I thought about the question that Mrs. Daily had asked. Would it be possible to go home and get help? Was there anyone who wanted to help a "runaway girl"? I had a hard time trying to go asleep that night. I came to the realization that being alone was not what I truly wanted for myself. I needed to go back and face reality. Hopefully, it wasn't too late,

I woke up the next morning and dialed Jennie's family's number. I hesitated and started to hang up before I finished dialing, but decided I needed to go through with the call. Jennie's mom answered, and I almost hung up.

"Mrs. Stanley," I stammered.

We have been so worried about you. Where are you?"

I told her it was a long story, but I really wanted to come home and we could talk then. My first question was about how my brother was doing. Mrs. Stanley explained that he was doing fine. She said that my mother was in rehab and that he was staying with my grandmother. My grandmother had called and asked if I was there. When she had to tell her no, that is when people really started worrying about me. We talked for a while, and she convinced me just to come back, and not to worry about anything. I was welcome to stay at their home until things got straightened out. When I got off the phone, I felt so much relief that I just started to cry.

A little later Mrs. Daly came in and I told her what had just transpired. She hugged me and let me know that she was relieved that I had made the decision to go back home.

“You definitely don’t belong living alone on the streets.” She told me with a kind and quiet voice. She said that she would be glad to give me some money if I needed it to get back home. I told her I had enough money to take the bus back, and I packed my things and within an hour I was on a bus and headed home.

After I had packed up all my belongings, I headed out the front door and galloped to the bus station. The man behind the counter told me the price of the ticket home. I was happy and proud about the decision I had made to go back home, even though I had no idea what might be awaiting me. I was a little tired, but too excited to fall asleep.

As the bus approached my destination, I began to get butterflies in my stomach. What was I going to say to everyone? I was really nervous. Mrs. Stanley was there to greet me. When I got off the bus, she gave me a huge hug. Jennie wasn’t with her, and I was truly disappointed. She explained that she was having dinner with a friend, and I decided not to ask any more questions. I was just glad I was home! We stopped at the store for some groceries, and then headed for what was to be my home for the next several years.

After we arrived home, I was finally able to sit and explain why I had left, and how sorry I was for my behavior toward Jennie.

“We understand Lenore. But I wish you could have confided in us. Mr. Stanley and I would have been happy to help in any way that we could have. I’m sorry you had to go through so much for such a young girl.”

Then she explained that my grandmother had called to say that my mother had gone into rehab, and that she would be taking care of Jake for a while. At that point, the Stanley's realized the severity of my situation.

“We would like you to stay with us for a while, if that is OK with you”?

I told her I really didn't want to be a burden, but I was assured that wasn't the case. So, I unpacked my bag, and got settled. I had dinner with my new family, and waited for Jennie to get home.

She came home about 8:00, and when she walked through the door, I knew things were still not right between us. She said hello, and walked right into her room without stopping. The next morning at breakfast, she barely said a word. Mrs. Stanley offered to take us to school, and she said that she would go to the office and get things straightened out so I could begin my classes again. I would be behind, but I knew with some work, I would be able to catch up with my classes. It was really weird walking through the doors that day, but I know now that it was the turning point in my life.

That first day back to school was pretty rough. No one was talking to me, and I felt even more alone than before. Jennie had lunch with me, but I knew it was because her mom had told her to be nice since I had just come back home and needed her to show some kindness. She hardly said two words, and acted like she didn't want to be there. After school, we walked home together, but she was ignoring me and I felt that I had lost my best friend, and this realization gave me a sense of total loneliness.

“Jennie,” I finally said. “I am so sorry for the way I acted that first day of school. I was ashamed of my family life, and I didn't want to admit what was really going on with me at home.”

She replied. “I thought I was your best friend, and that you could tell me anything!”

I tried to explain what had happened to me that morning, but she wasn’t having any of what I was trying to say to her.

That night at dinner, it was the same story. My former best friend was just shutting me out. She resented the fact I was living in her house, and I knew it. Her mom and dad tried to make pleasant conversation, but that even felt wrong. Was there anything I could do to repair our friendship? I felt alone and lost just like when I was living on the street. There was an empty feeling inside me, but yet a voice inside told me not to give up on my friend just yet.

After dinner, Jennie went to her room to do homework, and I decided to have a conversation with her mom.

“Maybe, I shouldn’t be staying here Mrs. Stanley.”

She explained that things would be better if I just gave it some time.

“Jennie is still hurt about what transpired between you and she, and you just need to give her some time and space. I know with patience you and she will repair your relationship.”

A few weeks passed, but nothing changed. There was a lot of tension at school with everyone, but I tried to look at what had happened from their standpoint. I had runaway and all of a sudden I was back expecting things to be the same with everyone.

My mother finally called. and I had a long conversation with her. She started to cry, and told me how sorry she was for all the terrible things she had said to me in the past and how bad she felt about how she had treated Jake and I. I knew she was trying,

but I still felt a lot of resentment towards her actions, and how Jake and I had been hurt in the process. She said that she had a few more weeks in rehab and was attending group therapy as well. I told her I was proud of her for sticking it out, and hung up. She was my mother, but I still had negative feelings for her, and I wanted her to prove herself to me before I could truly forgive her.

It took a while, but after a few weeks of relative silence, Jennie and I had a serious conversation, and we were finally able to sit and talk out what had happened those weeks ago, and why I behaved as I did. I knew it would take some time, but I was confident we could build back the close friendship that we had enjoyed in the past. It would just take effort on both our parts.

I immersed myself into school and studying. The coldness of my friends at school soon changed as time went by. People began to accept what I had done after Jennie explained that it had to do with my family, and that I was back and staying at her house for the time being. I had a lot to make up in my classes so the library became a place I spent a lot of hours in. My grandmother sent money for me to buy a new computer, and I was really grateful for the gift. Thanks to Jennie's mom who championed me after I returned, my teachers all understood and helped me catch up with any work that I had fallen behind in.

I went to visit my grandmother and got to finally see my brother after I got settled in and felt comfortable seeing him after I had left so abruptly. As soon as he saw me, he ran up and hugged me so hard I thought I would fall over. After I talked to him for a while, he was off to play with a friend he had made next door. My grandmother and I sat at the kitchen table and I had her famous chocolate cookies and some milk. We visited

for about an hour and I told her how I appreciated what she had been doing for our family, and said I was sorry for any grief I had caused her. She just hugged me and with tears in her eyes said that she loved me, and didn't realize how hard my life had become. When I left I told her I would stay in touch and visit as often as possible,

My mother completed rehab and with a lot of family therapy, we were able to begin a relationship. She changed jobs, and made a better choice in forming new friendships. The people she now has in her circle of friends didn't drink, and she joined a meeting that includes single mothers who are in the same place that she is. She realizes that it will take time for us to build our relationship to what a daughter and mother should have, but she said she would continue to do whatever it takes for our relationship to become stronger. Jake has moved back home and my grandmother takes care of him so my mother doesn't have to worry when she is at work. My mother now comes home enjoys dinner with my brother, and does all those things that she missed doing as his mother, especially reading him stories and tucking him in at bedtime.

A great deal of time has passed and I am getting ready to start my senior year and have scholarships available for several colleges that are out of state. My grandmother had put aside money for my brother and I to have a college fund. I didn't want to accept the money, but she explained that my grandfather had left her enough to live on, with some extra she could use for whatever she wanted. She wanted my brother and I to have an opportunity for college and I could not change her mind. I gave her a huge hug and graciously accepted this generous gift. She was my father's mother, and she said she was ashamed of what his behavior had put our family through. I have decided to go to junior

college close to home this year, but if things continued to work out, I will apply to a four year college in the future.

I have grown a lot over the last year, and through counseling, I realize that running away from your problems is not the solution, and in most cases causes more problems than facing what is right in front of you. Jennie and I are closer than ever, and she and her mother convinced me to stay with them for the next year or so. I have a 4.0 average and I am proud of all the progress I have made over the last year. I intend to go into counseling of young people in some regard and need an education that will point me in that direction.

I have learned so much about myself and grown to understand about trusting and the importance of loving one's self. Loving one's self, I have learned through my own counseling is a vital part of each of us. I still think about Mrs. Daly, and all that Jennie's family has done for me over the past year and a half. I believe that I want to be that person who is able to counsel those who are lost, and not sure of where to turn to. If there is a young girl who is thinking about running away, maybe I will be able to provide her the necessary tools she needs in order to pursue a better life than a lonely one alone living on some street in a strange city. Like Mrs. Daley I want to be able to give guidance to whoever might need my help. This will be my life's work. For now, however, I just want to enjoy being a teenager spending time with my friends and family. I appreciate that I was given a second chance and I am truly enjoying who I am right now and look forward to whatever the future holds.