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The Girl I Used To Be

I'm a lot different from the person who entered high school three years ago; a lot different from the bright eyed and innocent girl, not yet sure of how big the world was. Most parts of my life have changed since then: I have different friends, do different sports, and the career path I was so sure about has now shifted. But some things have stayed the same. One of those things is being part of Drug Free Club.

Going into my freshman year, I took everyone's advice and joined as many clubs as I could, waiting to see which ones would stick. But that's not what joining the Drug Free Club meant to me. I didn't really see it as a choice at all. I knew my friends from middle school, and I knew they weren't *like that*. They wouldn't be the kind of people to slip a drink in a bag before a sleepover, or offer me a blunt on Halloween. So, I figured, why would I not join Drug Free Club? Since I wouldn't be offered any drugs anyways, there were no drawbacks to the free candy and promise to get out of class a couple times a year. And for a year it remained this simple; the club faded into the background of my life as my old friends and I held onto our eighth grade fun: pool parties and pizza, with sneaking out to play tag at midnight giving us our rush.

But, through some scheduling anomalies and foolish sophomore drama I can't recall, I entered the next school year without the solid group of friends I had grown so used to. I started getting more desperate, hanging out with people my parents didn't know too well—people I wasn't so sure weren't *like that*, in terms of drug use. Soon, the realistic but ignored idea that had been pushed to the back of my head became a reality: I was offered drugs.

It was some small party on a random weekend in the fall—a detail I only remember because of the falling leaves that I spent most of my time studying, staring out the window instead of talking. I didn't know the girl hosting it, but I was promised that her parents were "chill". I had hoped that meant they wouldn't care if we were loud in the middle of the night or wracked up a bill on DoorDash, but that was only my naivety talking. About halfway through the party, it was clear what they meant.

It wasn't too hard to say no the first time. I hadn't even been thinking about Drug Free Club. Rather, all the stories of addicts that I had heard came to my mind, stories detailing the horrors of addiction and how dangerous any drugs were, especially for kids. But by the second and third time, after glances were exchanged and eyes were rolled, saying no became harder. And it was this club I latched onto. It gave me an excuse to say no, to avoid the path that could ultimately lead me somewhere that I never want to end up. It has saved me from making the wrong but easy choice again and again.

At the beginning of high school, I viewed this Drug Free Club as nothing but an addition to college applications. Now, I see it as something I owe a lot to: my grades, my happiness, my health. I know that I've changed from the girl who joined this club several years ago, but I can confidently say that she would be proud of me, and she will always be proud of Drug Free Club.