

12th Grade
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When I was 7 years old, I saw a movie called "A Dolphin Tale". Ever since then, I had it in my mind that I was going to be a dolphin trainer. As I turned 8-10 years of age, my home life was quickly deteriorating. Growing up in Alabama, things like marijuana and nicotine were prevalent with my older sisters, mother and step father. At one point, my sisters, mother and myself were living in a hotel room due to financial issues, because of poor choices with drugs. To escape my horrible reality, as a child I stayed heavily focused on my dream to become a dolphin trainer. I did research at school and spent lots of time in the library to stay out of trouble. I wasn't sure how I was going to make it happen but creating a life "under the sea" seemed like the perfect escape to my bleak reality. When I turned 11, the truth about my circumstances set in, and in my preteens I experimented a couple of times with nicotine and marijuana. The experiences didn't make my problems go away. I quickly recognized patterns when marijuana and nicotine were involved, the negative consequences caused a spiral of things to get worse. I came to live in Kentucky with my Step-mother to escape the grips of my situation in Alabama. At the time I moved, I still had dreams of being a marine biologist but with everything I had gone through it seemed out of reach. I watched my older sisters give up their dreams of working in the music industry and as a makeup artist because of drugs and alcohol. My Step-father unfortunately became incarcerated. Watching it happen from afar, I knew that life was not for me. Choosing to be sober and join the Drug-Free Club offered me support that I didn't receive in my own family in Alabama. Being with my family in Kentucky and the Drug-Free Club brought back light to my future dreams.

Choosing a drug-free life has also brought me closer to my siblings. As I mentioned above, with my older siblings our home life was unstable, and things were constantly shifting with my Step-father's addiction. Even though I'm one of the youngest, I've noticed my older siblings look up to me now. Seeing me sober and living a healthy life has shown them that it's possible for them to do so as well. I've become a role model, not because I'm perfect, but because I took responsibility for my actions that I made in my preteen years and made a positive change through my high school years. I represent resilience and the possibility of change, not just for my older siblings, but also for my three younger ones who can see that I have made positive choices. I've become someone my older siblings can confide in and ask for advice. They no longer see me as someone they need to protect, but as someone they can trust to handle things with maturity. I've found a balance between being the younger sister and a source of strength for my entire family. This change hasn't just affected my immediate family. My friends have also noted that I am "that friend" they can come to in confidence for advice or support. My actions to remain drug-free allow them to trust that I am capable of making wise choices and that I am a reliable person. I'm more engaged, dependable, and supportive than their other friends who may be making poor choices. They've seen the positive impact of my decision to stay drug-free and it's made our friendships even stronger. I've become a person of encouragement for them, and their friendship has been invaluable to my own growth.

I have mentioned my past, but now allow me to share the excitement of my future. Choosing a drug-free life has allowed me support to dream again. Because I was clear minded and focused on science, I have made straight A's in science preparing me for post high school studies. Throughout my senior year, I've been focused on making my Dolphin Tale dream a reality. In August, I hope to attend the Dolphin Academy at the Dolphin Research Center in Grassy Key, FL. Since it's not a traditional school, I won't receive FAFSA Aid. Instead of partying with my peers, I've stayed committed to sobriety and worked two jobs to save for tuition. Every shift I attend, I think about my mission and remember how working now will pay off when I am in FL and it makes the work worth it. Post completion of the program, I will apply for an internship at Marineland in St. Augustine, FL to work with conservation education and training for marine life.

The reality of making my dreams come true is in my grasp. Without the clarity of sobriety, of being a Drug-free Club member, I am not sure I would have ever been able to make moves to make my dreams come true. This journey with sobriety and my faith has not only helped heal old wounds but also allowed me to build stronger relationships with the people I love most and love my future self enough to make wise choices now. I've found my identity in my relationship with God and I confidently make life decisions free from self-doubt. I lead by example, proving generational change is possible. Being drug-free has

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made me a better sister, daughter and friend. More importantly, being drug-free has taught me with clear sobriety, ALL DREAMS are possible.