

## **Luke Brightcliffe - 10th Grade**

*Springfield Township High School; Philadelphia, PA*

It was 6:26 am on a Wednesday morning. I had just stumbled out of bed, ready to go back to school. Unlike most kids, I was excited to wake up and go to school. I couldn't wait to be wandering through the halls of this new high school. I got ready like every kid does before they go to school. I took a shower, brushed my teeth, chose an outfit to wear, and devoured as much breakfast as I could that morning sitting at my dining room table.

The walk from my house to the bus was one of the scariest and most nerve-racking moments. I was thinking of how excited I was to see my friends and couldn't wait to have the high school experience I dreamed of and always wanted. But for some reason, I was still scared. I knew that this year would be completely different from last year. I couldn't stop thinking about last year and how I was so miserable that I wanted to die. I remembered how I had to eat by myself in the halls because I was too scared that everyone around me would hate me. I wasn't like anyone. I was different. I was failing every class and crying myself to sleep every night because I hated everything about myself. I was pretending to be someone that I wasn't. I had to be someone else, though. I knew I would never be able to survive if I didn't act like everyone else. I was horrified every day that they'd find out something that I wasn't just hiding for them but was hiding from myself too. I had to look forward, though. I wasn't going back there. And I knew I never would.

As I'm typing this now, I wish I could tell the person who was thinking this that it does get easier, but honestly, it doesn't. This will never be the high school dream you see in the movies. I'm not going to get that. This year is beyond comparison, not just because of this global pandemic that has taken a course. But because this year has so far been one of the best experiences I've ever had. This transition back to school has been tough, however, especially not knowing what could happen in your life. One day you could be fine, then suddenly, you're a close contact or get covid and have to miss school for a week. It is the scariest thing about this reentry to school. You don't know where others have been or if they have it. You just have to hope that those around you listen to the experts. The anxiety is still there. It still could just happen. Then, your life as you know it stops. You can't leave your bedroom without doubling up on masks, and even then still can't talk to or see those around you.

Walking into my current school, I felt happier. Seeing those I've missed helped me realize that I can be myself. I no longer needed to use a fake personality to survive. Instead, I need to use my true personality. I don't need to think about when I ate alone, cried myself to sleep, or wanted it to be over. Now, I think about the fact that I'm surrounded by amazing, unique, hilarious people who make me smile every day. This transition is hard, but what I've wanted is exactly what I have, and I wouldn't change a single thing because what I have is spectacular in every way.