

The Safety to Call Them My True Friends

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To this day, I hate myself for not stopping a situation where someone I cared about could have gotten hurt. Going from the kid who didn't speak any English and had no true friends, I grew dependent on others accepting me. Because of that, learning to become a hardworking and independent person has been my greatest difficulty, but it has made me the person I am today.

Elementary school was tough for me. I vividly remember being forced to leave my lunch period to join my ESOL class and begging, "not today," hoping they would let me stay with my classmates so I wasn't the only kid excluded. This experience was the first to open my eyes to how important it was to me to belong and the realization that everything good in the world will require a bit of sacrifice and hardship.

High school was a time when my mom gave me a lot of freedom and allowed me to find the person I was. I didn't necessarily understand her at the time. I took the freedom she gave me to live a life I saw portrayed in movies, where I didn't care about the consequences of my actions. Because of this so-called movie life I was trying to portray, I made many friends in high school. My friend had a different upbringing than me.

As I tried my hardest to fit in and make friends, this friend was the kid everyone knew and loved because of his open energy and confidence. We became close friends, but later on, he started hanging out with the wrong people, and I followed him—desperate to hold onto what I believed to be my first "real friend." Looking back, I get agitated with myself thinking about how much I depended on people back then because of my insecurities, which made me a follower.

Later on, my friend started experimenting with different drugs, and I watched him thinking about how wrong it was. I ended up convincing myself, however, it was ok because of my weakness to stand up and fear of losing him as a friend. Thinking it would just go away soon, Gabe ended up overdosing months later. The ride to the hospital was one of the most stressful and gut-wrenching moments. I remember telling myself that *"nothing's gonna happen to him; it's all gonna be fine."* Eventually, I got to the hospital, and he was in a coma. Relieved that he was alive, I ran to the bathroom to cry my eyes out. The next couple of days were hell for me since my family didn't know what I was going through, and I was fearful of how they would judge me. After many sleepless nights, I promised myself to live the life I wanted and not be the person others wanted me to be.

I have since moved on with my life from these many high school experiences. However, I still wish this never happened, but I'm still grateful for it. My friendship with Gabe taught me that self-dependence is key in life since nobody will be there for you as much as you will be for yourself. Most of all, it taught me about not being a follower and living a life for myself. This shows a lot now because I choose to spend most of my time on things that will better me for the future, whether it's work, school, or taking care of family. Although I have sacrificed a lot in my life, I use my small amount of free time to make those sacrifices worth it. I do so by spending time with the people who have accepted me and my past, want me for the person I am, and give me the safety to call them my true friends.