

I was a jolly kid in elementary school. I loved reading *Rocket Mouse*, *Captain Underpants*, and *Magic Tree House*. I loved Pokemon, sports, and hanging out with my cousins. Every year, I loved meeting my new teachers, greeting the new kids, and socializing with my friends at school. I welcomed everyone with open arms and toothy grins.

In third grade, I moved into my cousin's garage. To me, this was great! I was able to play with my cousins every single day! Who cared if five people had to sleep in a single bed in a tiny garage? It was fun...until fifth grade.

Fifth grade year brought many new things: a townhouse, a stepfather, and \$100,000+ of debt. My new life was filled with ear-blaring music, drunk adults, and violent fighting. I couldn't stay after school, didn't have any friends, and constantly lived in fear. I gave up reading, playing sports, and socializing. I isolated myself from the world by spending countless hours engrossed in video games. I dominated my classmates and went onto playing internationally. In Clash Royale, I was a part of the fifteenth highest clan in the world and the first "free to play" player across the globe to reach the highest league! But, these ranks barely deciphered the depths of my despair.

Not only did I become a champion at gaming, but I also became a champion at hiding. I hid under my covers and cried until my eyes went dry and my body trembled. The number of times I'd heard glass break, thuds against the wall, my mother's cries of agony and her pleading "STOP!" became too many to bear. I didn't have the guts to get up from under my sheets and barge into my mother's room and say, "Stop... please stop."

I refrained from taking action because my older sister's presence in our house had always reassured me that my mother would be alive the next day. I believed my sister wouldn't let her die. But, in tenth grade, my sister left our house, leaving me all alone. I was terrified. I feared for my mother's life. I hated seeing her bruised arms, neck and face on Monday mornings. I knew I couldn't let this continue.

I kept getting up from my bed, trying to push back my fears and walk towards my mother's (and stepfather's) door. However, my fear always caught up to me, forcing me to turn back. I didn't want to be dragged in and beaten. However, my fear eventually gave way to determination.

One night, I'd had enough. When I walked up to my mother's door, my breathing hastened, my legs shook, and my face quivered. I may have been a tenth grader, but I was still a fifth grader at heart. I heard my mother's pleas of "STOP!" I wanted to run back into my room and hide, but I couldn't turn away. My sister had left; I had to grow up and fix my own problems.

It was time to put an end to my eight years of despair. I wanted my new life to have an ounce of familial love, seeing as every other aspect of my life was spiraling out of control. I lifted my arm and finally knocked. Her room went silent, then I heard a "Go away!" I continued to knock, over and over again, until she finally opened the door. I entered the room and started talking. I told them how much their actions hurt and scared me; how I hated hearing the music, thumps through the walls, and most of all, my mother's screams of anguish.

My voice may have been feeble, but that night, it spoke volumes as it reverberated in my parents' ears. My voice helped defuse the insanity that had plagued my life. While there wasn't any immediate change, there was definitely progress. I stopped seeing drunk adults coming into my house, hearing deafening music, and most importantly, seeing my mother hurt. As time went on, I realized the power of my voice. I had ended my suffering by using my words before my fist. I had won my fight. My situation isn't perfect, but I'm proud to say it has gotten better.

Now, I am focused on other aspects of my life. I am not only tackling the issue of garnering the finances to attend the University of Virginia to pursue my everlasting love for knowledge, but also resolving the future generations' issues similar to mine by volunteering.

I began volunteering at the end of eleventh grade. My responsibilities as a volunteer were to aid the children through their frustrations in mathematics and science. As I invested more time into supplying my local community with knowledge, my responsibilities started expanding.

I not only became an example of what a person who had many odds against him could become, but also the person who a twelve-year old girl could share her deepest secret of familial abuse with. Her struggles, dilemmas, and sorrows immediately became mine as I knew of the horrors of being a young kid wanting to be involved. On this fateful day, I dealt with her upsetting circumstances by not only bringing the issue to the President of the Center of Help. But also sharing my story of using my voice to defuse the insanity that had plagued my life.

Now, I continue to be a leader in my local community as I want to continue fighting against this inevitable battle for the sake of the future generations. At the University of Virginia I am going to continue my education and contribution to my local community by starting a non-profit. By applying to The Kristina Flores Overcoming All Odds Scholarship, I can garner the financial support to pursue my established and unestablished passions!