

A Tough Year by Olivia Mahnic

You know that Nationwide commercial “Life comes at you fast?” Well, that was the motto of my sophomore and junior year. My sophomore year started out with my cat Gabby passing away. Which was horrible because sometimes I felt closer to her than my own brother. A few months later, on the second day of my finals, we got the news that my Nana had had heart failure and passed away.

Life seemed to be going downhill pretty fast, and I cried myself to sleep more often than ever before. At that point I was sad, but still looking at life relatively positively because I knew that’s what Nana would have wanted. Time went by, and it was the second day of second semester finals. That was the day my mom and dad announced they were going to split up and get a divorce. Let’s just say, going to school the next day to take those last finals... that was not easy.

During the next few months I really struggled. I felt alone and hurt. I didn’t know how to move on and keep going. My friends were great, and always there, but I still couldn’t get over it. Life had certainly come at me fast. I was finding it hard to accept the changes in my life. Months passed and I kept living, though definitely not happily. I wasn’t dealing with it, so I couldn’t move on. I wasn’t able to endure, so for me, life didn’t progress. Then at the youth retreat, it all came down before me. I saw that by ignoring my pain, I was making it worse. Learning to endure life and what it threw at me allowed me to keep going. You can’t stop life, so don’t try. Enduring the bad things in life is how you move on to the good part of life.

Running by Marissa Solini

It’s 40 degrees outside. I’m in a tank and shorts. Running. Racing. There are goose bumps on my arms, but I’m drenched in sweat all the same. My heart is pounding through my chest. I hear voices...of parents, of coaches, of teammates. Their voices all slur together into a foreign tongue that adds to the chaos. I check my watch. 8 minutes in. 2 miles to go. I feel spent already...struggling to breathe, the pain in my side sinking deeper. With each step, my legs grow weaker. This is when the test really begins. Which will I be? Weakness or strength? Thoughts swirl through my head like poison, “I’m tired. Everything hurts. This isn’t fun. This isn’t easy. I should stop. I should just give up...” The finish line seems worlds away. It’s tempting to take the easy way out. But I know the only way for me to move is forward. If I’m not moving forward, then what am I doing? Giving up? Staring at the ground, ashamed, as I watch the shadows of people passing me by? I know that’s not me, and it never will be.

When you feel at your weakest, that is when you truly need to find the strength to rise above life’s challenges and keep pressing on. In a way, life is like a race. But your only competition is yourself, and the finish line holds happiness. There will always be obstacles in your way, trying to prevent you from living your life. There will be people who hurt you and try to drag you

down. But the endurance comes from resisting the urge to drag yourself down. The endurance comes from finding the strength to stand up and push forward. The endurance comes from you.

First Job by John Rarick

Twelve applications and four interviews later, I got a job at Taco Bell. It took many hours of work, but I finally found a job. After all my hard effort, I started out making minimum wage at a fast food restaurant. It was not the ideal job, but it was what I could get in a struggling economy.

I started as a cashier and through determination I slowly climbed my way up the ladder until I started preparing the food. I have learned life lessons at Taco Bell.

For example, dealing with people in a kind and polite way gets better results than being angry. When customers come into Taco Bell angry, I try turning around their attitudes with politeness.

Also, my job has taught me that education is very important. I don't want to be wrapping burritos and cleaning tables for my whole life. Waking up at 7 is no small feat, especially when you stay up all night skiing or doing homework. Getting yelled at to come up for breakfast that early also is not pleasing.

However, enduring the morning to have a long day of learning is worth it. Five days a week for eight hours each day is the time I have to spend at school. It is worth it because it puts meaning in life. Enduring long classes and homework might be annoying but you have to put in time to get anything out of life. Enduring parents, schoolwork, and the morning may be hard, but it is so worth it.

Adoption by Shelby Roell

Do you know those times when you're in a group and you're doing some "get-to-know-each other" activity involving questions? Usually the questions are about yourself and your family...and sometimes the question is "how many siblings do you have?" Most people would answer that with no problem, but me? I never know what to say. That's because I'm adopted.

I was adopted as a baby, and it was an open adoption. Adoptive parents and birth mothers have to go through a lot, and you may not think so at first, but adopted children like me also have to endure a lot of things. Like, for example, answering that simple question of "how many siblings do you have?" What do I say? I have 4 birth siblings, and 1 half-brother from my adoptive family's side, who is an adult now, and has never lived with us. Do I say all that? Do I say I have 5 siblings? Or do I just say I'm an only child? Simple questions like that can be hard to answer. But there are much harder things than that. There are so many misconceptions about adopted children, like that they were never "wanted" by their birth mothers and that she just simply just

“gave them away.” It’s hard when people say things like that to you. It’s hard when people tell me that I’m just like a *little worthless puppy* at the pound which some random family decided to adopt because they felt bad for me. It’s hard when you hear those things enough times. And it’s hard when you actually start to believe them.

Those are some of the things that adopted children hear. But I know. I know my birth mother made the best possible decision for me, and I know that she placed me for adoption out of love; she didn’t just “give me away.” And of course, situations where I get bashed on for being adopted only really occurred when I was older. But when I was younger, I had to endure a lot too. You can imagine how weird and confusing it must have been for a 4 year old to be explained to that they were adopted. With time, though, I understood. And I actually thought being adopted was a really cool thing! And it definitely is; it just comes with some challenges as you get older.

Two summers ago my birth mother and her fiancé got married. It was really cool because I got to be in the wedding, and before then, I got to meet her husband, who was really nice. Everything was really good until they told me that they were thinking about, yes, *adopting*, a little baby boy. Whoa. Hold on. She placed me up for adoption when I was a baby, already having my older birth sister. Then later on she had my other two birth sisters and now? Now she’s adopting another child? So what am I, then? She’s *replacing* me. She has 3 kids, placed me for adoption, and is now adopting another child? She could have kept me. She really didn’t want me. I was just being replaced. That’s all. At that time, I felt like she did just “give me away.” She got rid of me, only to get something better. A “better child.” Were people right? Was I just a worthless puppy? Thoughts were going crazy in my head. I felt like I had been stabbed in the chest. It hurt to hear that news. It hurt only because they were so happy, and I was just raging. This is probably the time in my life as an adopted teenager where I’ve had to endure the most.

Thankfully though, my mind was changed on this situation when I actually got to visit baby Andrew. He is the cutest, most hilarious baby I’ve ever seen. And I consider him to be my little baby brother. I’m very glad that my birth mother and her husband adopted Andrew; they saved him from a very harmful family. Just showing once again how wonderful adoption is. And when I later got to thinking about it more, I realized that when Andrew grows up, he and I will have a connection in our family that nobody else has. It’s pretty cool actually.

Adoption is an awesome thing, even though it comes with some tough situations that call for major endurance. Situations where I get bashed on for being adopted just make me stronger inside. Those people who actually believe the misconceptions about adopted children are just downright ignorant of everything about adoption anyway. So yeah, being adopted can be hard at times, but the amounts of good things that come out of being adopted definitely outnumber the bad. Enduring tough situations like I mentioned only made me stronger. In the end, I love being adopted, and could never ask for a better birth mother, birth family, or better adoptive parents.

Lead Shadow by Margo Bacon

Our relationships with one another are the fruit of life. But when these relationships become warped and dark, it can be a terrible burden that is almost impossible to escape from.

It is only natural for our connections to one another to grow and then recede; nothing is forever and the world of high school dating is certainly no exception. It is only when the other person refuses to exit your life that a problem arises.

Months after the breakup, he just wouldn't go away. And nothing worked. They teach you to ask nicely, but that tactic definitely had no effect and, for over a year now, I've struggled with trying to move on with this lead shadow clinging on my back. I've ignored, pleaded, threatened, yelled, and even taken action with the school.

But there are events in all of our lives that are out of our control, and eventually a time comes when you have to admit that you have done your best to make the situation right and it just wasn't enough. When this realization hits you, the only option left is to move forward. Without bitterness, without spite, and with whatever form of dignity you can manage.

Humanity possesses many qualities but our determination is the most beautiful and necessary of them all. We persevere, we endure, and we continue living the glorious, divine life while we have it.