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The Beginning of the End

On the first day of class, I slumped in the back of the room impatiently waiting for the lecture to begin. I just knew I was going to hate this class. I have always loved reading and writing creatively, but I never could find the same passion for required texts and papers. I began to lose more and more interest in the class as my professor went over the syllabus until she got to the portfolio. I perked up slightly as she explained that portfolios are best written around a theme. Instantly, I knew what my theme had to be. Sexual assault has been a large part of my life for years through the experiences of my friends and family members, but experiencing it firsthand is unimaginably different. Having decided on my theme at the beginning of the year, my writing situation has been a bit different from most First-Year Composition students. Normally, students will base their theme around their writing at the end of the semester, but I shaped my writing around my theme.

Most people do not realize that much of the emotional torment experienced by sexual assault victims comes from the repercussions rather than the actual event. Once you have been raped, it becomes embedded in your everyday actions and thoughts. Because of this, I found it rather easy for me to relate composition one to my theme of sexual assault. It was my favorite assignment of the semester because of the engaging activity involved in the evidence. For this assignment, we were to go to a place we had never been and observe as much about the establishment as we could. My professor advised us to pay attention to the appearance, the atmosphere, and how we felt. For mine, I decided to attend a college party for the first time. I quickly learned that this was a mistake. Memories of the worst event of my life began to surface in my mind due to the actions occurring at this event. This composition was the first time I had ever written about what had happened to me, and I found it both difficult and invigorating. This was my first step to finding myself after I had been lost for so long.

For as long as I can remember, I have had an analytical mind. I find myself constantly evaluating my surroundings and scrutinize every detail of everything I see. Due to this personality trait, analyzing the advertisements for composition two was rather effortless. Because my professor knew I had already selected my theme, she allowed me to select a photo campaign rather than an advertisement, so I could better follow my theme. For my second composition, I closely analyzed the photo campaign "It Happens." This photo series challenged the silence and stigma around on-campus rapes. In my composition, I dissected every aspect of each photograph and explained the significance in relation to the Stanford Rape Case. As a survivor of sexual assault, the amount of media coverage surrounding this court case was equally refreshing and triggering.

The most important part of recovering from personal violence is having a support group. Peer reviews are like support groups for writing. Being comfortable enough to share your incomplete and flawed work to your peers is similar to opening up to someone about your character flaws. Both can be challenging for many people. The thing about sexual assault support groups that makes them work so well is knowing that those people have experienced the same or similar things to you. The same applies to peer reviews. My peers attended the same lectures as me and were assigned the same compositions, so I knew that they would be able to understand and relate to the issues I was encountering. I, in turn, was able to offer my advice to help them. Despite similar experiences, differences still occurred, allowing each person to be able to uniquely explain things that others may not have understood.

Revising any form of writing can be difficult and tiring. Similarly, recovering from the effects of a sexual assault can also be challenging. As I continuously worked on the individual flaws of my chosen passage, I realized that I was also working on my individual flaws. I found myself growing along with my writing skills. Although it seemed tedious to reread the same paragraph countless times only to fix minor errors here and there, the finished product was worth the exhausting effort exerted throughout the process. This in many ways resembles my feelings towards bettering myself after I was sexually assaulted. I often relapsed and reverted back to the mess I was at the beginning, but with a great quantity of effort I was able to get to an end result that I was satisfied with. I had to realize that I was not perfect and never would be, just like my writing.

Creative writing has always been my calling. I am not the best with words, but writing has been a favorite pastime of mine since a very young age. The wild card portion of the portfolio was by far my favorite because of the encouragement of creativity. Written word is my favorite form of art due to its ability to paint a picture in your mind that could be completely different for the next person without a single visual effect. The power of words is often underestimated. Words can save lives or end them. They can make you laugh or cry. They can do anything imaginable. For my wild card, I chose to include a variety of poetry I had written to cope with the overwhelming amount of emotions attacking my mind in the months after the occurrence. Different perspectives were shown throughout the poems. Some were based around things people had told me, but most were written from my point of view as a survivor.

My passion for the advocacy and prevention of sexual assaults has frequently been mistaken as an obsession. We live in a society with a rape culture engraved so deeply into our lives that we often do not even realize it. Sexual aggressiveness is woven into the television shows and music we are exposed to on a daily basis. Even certain conversations we participate in could contribute to the pervasiveness of the rape culture in America. There is no right or wrong way to combat these invasive standards we are surrounded by since birth. Some have taken to

written word, visual art, or more physical things like marches. The only thing you should not do is remain silent. Even if you have not been personally affected by the cruelty of some people, I guarantee you know someone who has been. To be silent is to allow these injustices. I, for one, write my way to a difference. One day, my words will change lives.