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UWP 1

December 15, 2017

Just Write a Letter

“Just write a letter!” I told my friend Talal, as he paced back and forth in the corner of my dorm room. Talal, my floor mate, just came running to my door, begging to be let in to hide in my room. Flustered, he began to quickly explain that he just walked in on his roommate and his roommate’s girlfriend busy in bed... I uncomfortably laughed at this story. I had no idea how to comfort him or what advice to give; high school may have taught you about health and sex-ed, but they certainly didn’t teach you anything about these situations. What made the matter worse was that Talal was one of the most pure-hearted, soft, good natured, shy, and considerate person I had ever met. He had an innocent facade to his character and he even played with Bionicles (legos) still. In his room hung pictures of his girlfriend and his amazingly creative artwork. He was the guy a father would want their daughter to marry. Granted, I only knew him for two weeks so for all I knew he could have been a really deceiving psychotic man. It’s always the quiet ones... He confessed to me that he never wanted to face his roommate ever again or even enter his own room, so I advised him to write a letter. Talal stopped pacing and stared at me like I was crazy. Confused by the words that came out of my mouth, he questioned, “Write a letter? To who? Why would I want to write a letter?” I sat there silently thinking, trying to gather my thoughts. I had to carefully word my argument since I knew that the simple idea of writing a letter sounds absurd and archaic to almost everyone and I didn’t want to scare Talal away with

the idea. So I began to reminisce on all of the moments when writing a letter has helped me tremendously...

During junior year of high school, one of the most stressful year, I already had three breakdowns and by the time spring came around, I could sense another one coming soon. Homework was loading up, the ACT was around the corner, the thought of college was constantly looming over me, and my grandmother recently passed away. I became incredibly tense and stressed out of my mind, and I had no idea how to manage all of these tasks and emotions that I felt. What pushed me to the edge was when my French teacher, Mrs. Jensen, assigned a very ambitious group project for our final. Instead of a straight forward multiple choice test or even an essay that students could at least have google translated, we were asked to perform a 10 minute skit based on the book we'd been reading, *The Three Musketeers*. She explained to us that she wanted to have an "entertaining" final that she would enjoy grading. I was fuming at her craziness and I felt like the class and I were her puppets. Just because Mrs. Jensen wanted a "fun" final, she forces the class to suffer and do more work than necessary. But I could never argue with her. She was a sweet old hippie lady with colorful streaks in her white hair, about to retire, and would always love to talk about life and philosophy with you. She was always willing to share her past experiences and all of the life lessons she learned with us. However, she did not teach French very well, and the whole class knew it.

When I got home from school, all I knew was that I needed to let out all my rage. I decided to write a letter to Mrs. Jensen; and all of my angry thoughts seemed to have poured from my mind to the paper. It was a never ending stream of black ink. My pen was glued to the paper and it could read my pain before my brain could even process what I was writing. Eventually, my

hand began to feel sore and the recognizable ink smudge marks appeared on the side of my palm, the sign of an intense writing session, but I didn't care. Sometimes I would pause and reread everything that I wrote, making sure that the letter flowed and conveyed all of my feelings. I put so much thought into the organization, the argument, and every word that I wrote down. When I finally finished, I felt like my whole day was spent towards this single letter. The only goal and purpose of that day was writing my letter. Everything besides my letter felt irrelevant; I didn't finish any of my homework or do anything productive the entire day. My mind and hand were still throbbing from all of the anger that surged through me, but I felt a lot clearer. It was like the pen and paper were my detox that cleansed my whole body. I could finally breathe without the urge to break. Although my frustration with Mrs. Jensen and life was still there, I understood it better because I was able to sit down, examine every jumbled thought in my head, and decide how I felt about it. It was like an intense jigsaw puzzle inside of my mind, I just needed to focus my energy on how to put it all together. Instead of keeping everything inside and allowing my anger to build up, I acknowledged what I was feeling and why. The act of simply setting aside time to write a letter allowed me to direct my thoughts towards one piece of paper. It gave me the ability to slow down, breathe, think, and put pieces of my disarrayed life back together. This was something that I never do because I love to get caught up in the moment and run with life, but then I always forget to stop and take a break.

Another time writing a letter genuinely helped me was when I got into an argument with my mother. During the summer before my first year of college, I wanted a part time job to start saving up money, but for some reason my mother was passionately against me working. I thought she was insane, whose mother wouldn't want their child to work and earn money. Every

time I tried to reason with her, she would start listing ridiculous reasons why I shouldn't work: "You need to focus on college", "You can't afford to get distracted", or "It's a waste of time to work". Then, her main form of defense every time I tried to argue with her transformed into remaining silent, and this was my biggest pet peeve. My biggest weakness was that I'm incredibly emotional when it comes to arguing. I even become torn apart over the simple fact that I'm arguing because it upsets me when I get in a fight. In every argument, I quickly become overly passionate and attached to the subject and let it shred my heart and soul apart. Whenever I start to intensely argue with someone, I can always feel the heat rush up to my face and hear my voice falter and begin to crack. My mother's reactions always made me feel worse about the situation and would push me to the edge until I end up crying from frustration. I never knew how to argue with her and say everything that I wanted to say without breaking down. I couldn't speak, and much less argue, with my mother. And that's when I knew I had to write a letter.

I was never big on writing essays for English classes, I hated going back to my book, finding a quote, and analyzing it. I was never passionate about answering English prompts either. But I took all of my skills and knowledge about writing and wrote one of the most persuasive essays I've ever written. There is something much more intense, passionate, and intimate when you're arguing and analyzing something close to your heart, rather than a quote from Scarlet Letter. I was able to present all of my thoughts and actually prove why I was right in my letter. I know that I would have never been able to fluidly state all of the thoughts that I wrote down to my mother out loud. Even if I had all of my arguments in my head, I would have lost my train of thought and let my rage take over if I tried to speak out. By writing a letter, it allowed me to

voice all of my opinions in a way where I wouldn't break down. It provided me an alternative to speaking. It gave me a way of expressing myself.

I'm normally a person who likes to keep their feelings inside and either get over things quickly or pretend that everything is okay. In front of my friends, teachers, and strangers, I compose myself, trying not to show any weakness. If I can avoid talking to someone about something, then I will. But when I reach the point where my feelings are overwhelming me, then I need to write a letter. The process turns you blind to every other problem that you have and forces you to focus on the sole issue that's really bothering you. Writing a letter requires you to confront yourself and it gives you a raw self-realization experience without forcing you to talk. I don't write letters to people too often, which is why I think this process means so much more to me. **It's my last resort.**

When my mind came back to the present, with a frantic Talal in my room, I still didn't know how to answer his question of 'why he should write a letter.' I had all of these reasons, memories, and thoughts, yet I couldn't put any words together to answer Talal. All I knew was that he should write a letter to help him face his problems. He couldn't just type on his phone or text his roommate. He had to go through the raw action of taking a pencil and writing on a sheet of paper. But the only words that came out of my mouth were, "I don't know! I just know it always helps me sort out all of my thoughts whenever I have a problem." Quite possibly the least convincing statement ever. But in that moment, I couldn't bring myself to open up and share any of my personal thoughts or stories, but I should have.

So Talal, although this is formatted as an essay and not a perfect letter, this is for you. This is everything that I wish I said to you instead of blanking out and giving you a short dumb

answer about why you should write a letter. I know you told me that you don't like to reminisce about your problems which is why you think you writing a letter would never help. But once you push past that fear of facing the feeling of pain, anger, sadness, or even happiness, and put them all into a piece of paper, your mind feels like it can breathe and is back in control. Thoughts are no longer wildly running around, instead they're right where you want them to be. And it's your choice to decide what to do with the letters you write. Whether or not you want to give your it to the person, rip it up, or leave the thoughts behind forever, it's completely up to you. Personally, I like to hide and keep my letters and I always end up forgetting about them. But when I come across them in my room, it's amazing to reread my letters and see how much emotion I had in me, but also how I faced and got over the situation. By keeping the letters and looking back, you get to see what you went through. Writing a letter is an extremely personal form of facing yourself, and it can be tough facing these emotions, but it allows you to speak and think the truth that you would have never brought yourself to confront.