

Hide-and-Seek

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Often, I would look back to the times where I sat in the little break room enveloped in the shadows, hiding away from the spacious classroom. This little room was my sanctuary, where I would find some peace and quiet, around me, and within me. My secondary teacher, Ms. Colombo, would often find me in my lonely game of hide-and-seek. In those moments, I'd find solace in her calming voice as she helped me realize that I didn't have to play alone - that I didn't have to hide my vulnerability from everyone all the time.

My first day at this new school left me petrified. I got out of bed completely sleepdeprived and trembling, and could barely eat anything during breakfast. That morning, I turned off the alarm after a long, sleepless anticipation. I tried to convince myself that I would hide my anxiousness once I made it to the breakfast table. My only plan, "Fake it 'til you make it- and you'll be fine," had engulfed my mind completely. I sluggishly put on my school attire as I attempted to face my feelings by myself.

About 10 minutes later, I ended up bawling my eyes out in front of my family during breakfast-time.

I have always seen vulnerability as "weak". Expressing difficult feelings to the people I knew supported me always seemed to be an impossible task, so I've learned to find comfort in a dark room, some tissues, and my pillow, all by myself. Behind the classroom was a small storage room for those who needed a time-out, and that was enough to suffice.

I often found myself in that little room, either fiddling with a rubber cube of cheese the size of a palm, or have my face buried between my knees. On a few occasions, the door would suddenly open. Instead of an unpleasant, ear-splitting lecture, Ms. Colombo crouched down to the ground. With her gentle voice, she would ask me what the matter was, and my initial response would be to keep quiet about the situation. However, I found her expression too kind to dismiss, so I reluctantly opened up about my feelings, and she would give me her full attention.

I remember sitting under the maple trees during my first recess. Taking in the sights of the sunny playground as I watched everyone play with one another, I couldn't help but wonder if I would connect with any of the people here. Just as that thought ran by, Ms. Colombo sat next to me and asked me how everything was. The gesture felt refreshing, so I told her my honest feelings on my day so far. Somehow, I ended up crying, possibly because I remembered how miserable I felt that morning. It was awfully difficult, keeping all those

emotions bottled up to where it could no longer be contained and helplessly overflow. I felt ashamed about the fact that I had just cried in front of someone that has still yet to know me.

Suddenly, I found myself in a warm embrace as she let me know with a comforting voice that it was okay to cry. I looked back at that thought wondering if I could meet anyone in my emotional state, and Ms. Colombo gave me hope for that possibility just with that hug. As time went by, I began to open up more about my feelings whenever I felt like I needed someone to hear me out, especially to my family.

In time, Ms. Colombo began to help me acknowledge that I wasn't the only one who felt that way. Knowing that other students also had difficulties with their emotions, Ms. Colombo always found time to lend an ear, despite being busy with managing class and helping to plan the future of our little school.

While vulnerability may involve a feeling of weakness, it's better than to keep all those hard feelings all to oneself. As long as I know that the people I can share my feelings with are people I know I can trust them to, I should find no shame in expressing those feelings to them if I know that they are willing to listen.

Though my early days at school may have been sad in many instances, there were times where hope prevailed through my despair. By the end of 8th grade, I ended up with many friends that were able to support me during difficult times because of how they had reached out. I am proud of how I have come so far, and without Ms. Colombo and her ability to listen, the relationships I have now with these new people in my life would be non-existent. I hope that as I grow, I can let others know that vulnerability isn't such a bad thing after all if someone can listen and provide support, just as Ms. Colombo did.