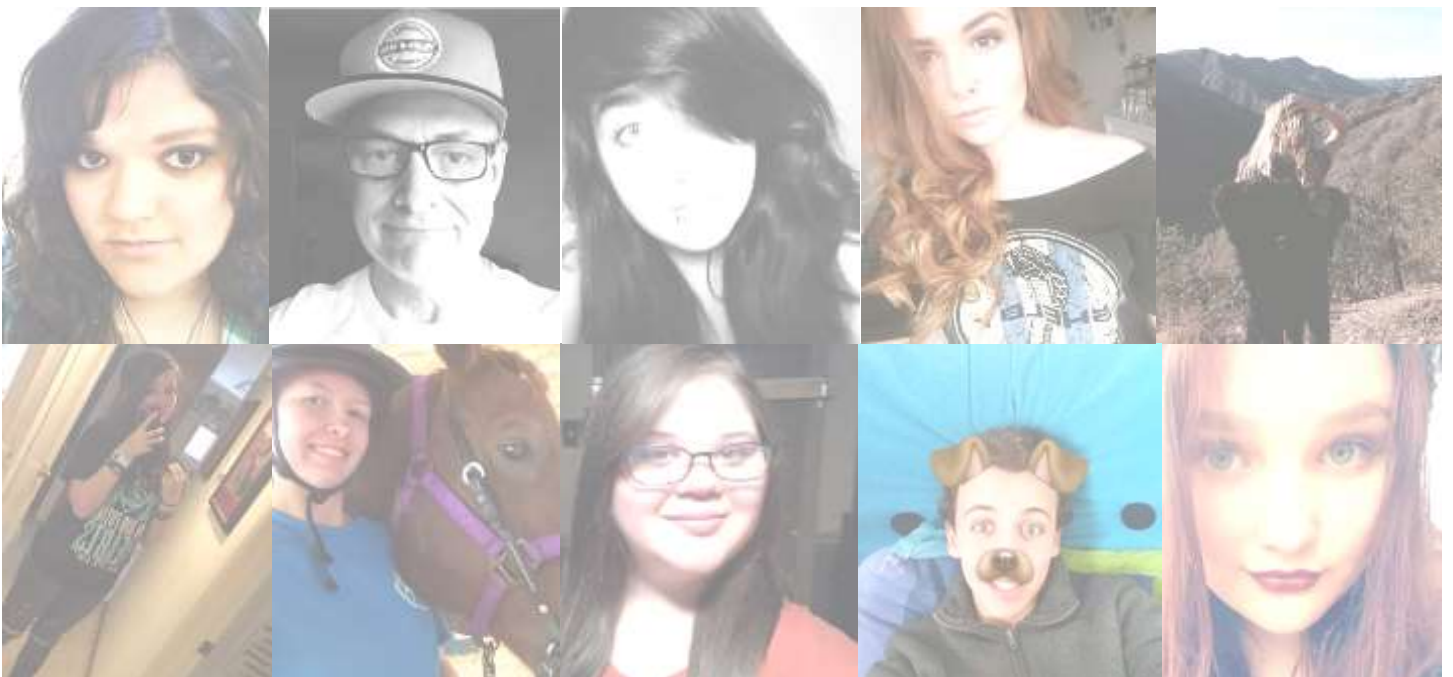




# Our Life Project



# Dedication

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This book is dedicated to the past, present, and future Life Project members.

To those who are not here anymore—we miss you.

To those still here—thanks for staying.

To those who have yet to cross this family's path—we look forward to  
meeting you.

# My Message to You

Did you see all those faces on the front cover of this book? Those people are from all over the world, different countries, time zones, languages, and lives. However, there's one thing that connects them all together. *The Life Project* (TLP). If you've never heard of it, that's okay, because we're going to tell you what it means not only as a collective group – but for each of us individually.

As you may as well already know, everyone has a past – it comes with living and breathing and being human. You're meant to grow from your past, learn and remember so that if ever faced with those same situations further on in your life, you can make the conscious decision on how to work with it differently than before. Not only that, but I think it's important to share your past with people.

I know sharing stuff like that is hard and it does take a lot of will power to do so. I am hesitant to talk about things that have happened to me when I was younger but if there's one thing I know, it's this; somewhere else out there, whether right next door or on the other side of the world, someone has been through the same thing as I. Maybe not exactly the same, but chances are my wisdom from my own past may be the stepping-stone for another who is struggling.

So what does this have to do with *The Life Project*? Well, you see, the very thing that makes up TLP are people learning and moving on from their pasts while working to better their present and their future. That's why we're here, why this book has been

made a reality, so that we can share our pasts with you. The purpose of this book is to open up what our lives were like, what was done to overcome them and how TLP was our own stepping-stones.

May you find lessons to be learned, similarities to be comforted, and words to be motivating.

**- Mary Lou**

# What *The Life Project* Is

*The Life Project* is an online community where you learn a lot about aspects of life that school cannot provide you in an everyday curriculum. Some of these things include; overcoming sadness, building self-esteem, forming good habits, and facing your demons. The founders of this online community are Sam and Colby. Originally vloggers, these two boys created the site with the hopes of helping other peers and adults learn tactics of life that can help them “beat the system” of society.

However, not even the boys realized how much this site would affect those who joined. The members grew closer to Sam and Colby, to one another and slowly – Sam and Colby’s little Life Project morphed into something incredible.

This is Our Life Project.

This is where we came from.

This is where we are going.

# When We Knew

By Sam Golbach

*"You got this, Onward and Upward."- Sam and Colby*

Colby and I knew we had something important to do when we sat in the corner of the lunch room every day in high school talking about this system of life that we had finally figured out. There was a way to beat the system, overcome your insecurities and finally figure out who you were as a person. Yet some of these things are not taught in school, so we needed a way to teach people the things we had learned over the years in a way that wasn't just sitting in a classroom. So, this is where the idea of *The Life Project* was formed.

First, we needed an audience, so we started social media and worked a system that we knew so well: people. We knew how people reacted and what people liked because we dealt with them every day when figuring out all our philosophies. With this strategy from the beginning, social media started up quickly. We were able to gain over one hundred thousand followers on all main social media platforms within two years, and then moved out to Los Angeles. In California, it was made easier for us to collaborate with companies that would make this project happen.

However, in this time we found out that we weren't teaching an audience, we weren't spreading the word to just our followers. We realized that we were talking to our family. Colby and I have actually become very close to this family we have formed

through social media and in return, we wanted to continue with *The Life Project* even more feverishly.

After launching *The Life Project*, we were amazed with its success. The number of people participating greatly exceeded our expectations and we were barely able to keep up. In just a few weeks, we could tell that this project was changing lives. From a few years back sitting at that lunchroom table to now, we had done it. We had started a platform that would teach young adults the life lessons that they do not always learn from school.

As of now, Colby and I plan to extend the reach of *The Life Project* and make it as appealing as possible to our members. We want *The Life Project* to be controlled by its members, as well as being overseen by us.

Personally, I was encouraged to create *The Life Project* by two specific moments in my life. The first moment I realized I wanted more was in eighth grade. I really didn't like the way I was because I was basically afraid of everything: grades, bullies, fitting in, talking to adults, even talking to my girlfriend scared me. At that point, I knew my comfort zone had gotten so small I was suffocating. There was more to life than I was living, and things needed to change.

Flash forward a few years after I had indirectly applied the lessons of *The Life Project* on myself and I thought, "I did it." Sitting in Colby's room on a December night, I told him that we truly beat the system. I was proud to say I was ten times the

person I was before. I wanted to tell the world that they could do it too. This is when I knew I was meant for a bigger purpose than just myself.



# Our Stories

*Warning: Some of these stories are long, but worth the read.*

**“When I look back on life, I see pain, mistakes and heart ache. When I look in the mirror, I see strength, learned lessons, and pride in myself.”**

**“The past is where you learned the lesson, the future is where you apply it.”**

**“Learn from the past, plan for the future, and live for the present!”**

# My Life Project

By Anonymous

*The Life Project* may be a community site where people go on to talk about their problems, but for me it's much more than that. To me, it's the place where I feel loved, where I am able to become friends with people all over the world, and it's a place where I don't feel judged or left out. Everyone is so kind and caring and it makes me happy to be a part of such an amazing group of people. At school I've always felt left out, like no one wanted to hang out with me or talk to me because of my disability. It made me angry and stressed out with myself because my disability was this huge road block in my life. Except when I'm on *The Life Project*.

When I'm on *The Life Project*, all that stress and worry just goes out the window in an instant. I'm that type of person that's never been able to talk about my problems or what's going on inside my head, which is why I'm grateful for *The Life Project*. I can hide all of my emotions and feelings behind the screen but I can also say anything in the forum with the freedom of knowing that members of *The Life Project* are not going to laugh or judge me. The reason for that is because someone on there, maybe not everyone, knows and understands what I'm going through. They're able to help me achieve a greater sense of love for myself and grow comfortable and more confident in my everyday life.

Ever since I joined, I've been smiling more. Even on the days when I'm in really bad moods, at some point I find myself grinning. For a while now, I've been walking around in school with my head held high and I'm no longer embarrassed to do so. I now know that the ground isn't the only thing I have to see when I move. I've now become less upset with how I look and I'm starting to wear less make up out in public. I realized I don't give a crap about what is on my face, whether that's acne or scarring. *The Life Project* really has helped me a lot, it's become a part of my life.

# High School Story

By Daniel John Felix

*“Forever and Always” – (Unknown)*

Life is hard. Life is a struggle. At various points throughout this time of life on this Earth, we all experience hardships one way or another. The hardships are diverse and they could include examples such as losing loved ones, bullying, studying for exams, heart breaks and legal issues. The list could possibly be never ending, however there is one thing that counts in the long run.

Persistence, this word is so important. Especially when following through with a specific hardship or challenge that one encounters in order to overcome the obstacles that life throws at us. The road of persistence is not necessarily an easy one, it is known in fact to be relatively treacherous. Yet in my opinion, it is a road worth travelling down in order to arrive at success and happiness.

I'm about to tell you my personal story of persistence and what I had to overcome as an observantly gay, Scottish sounding and individualistic teenager that lived in New Zealand. My hardships occurred at a Catholic Boys High School that I attended for five years. I underwent an amount of horrid comments and harassment, as well as insecurities and a lack of confidence due to the abuse. I have briefly mentioned my experience surrounding this on *The Life Project* forum. However, in

this book I shall go into this experience a lot more thoroughly and how I overcame my hardship with persistence and the valuable lesson I learned along the way.

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland in the year of 1994. My parents, who have been married for nearly thirty years, as well as my younger siblings and I moved to New Zealand in 2005 when I was eleven. The middle school I went to in New Zealand was also a Catholic school, my parents sent us there because they personally believed Catholic schools entailed proficient discipline towards their pupils.

I had no real friends at my middle school for two years. I was considered a freak because of who I was. I was taunted by students. I was considered disgusting by a majority of the girls. At one point I was taunted multiple times every day by one student who hated my guts. It was a repulsive experience, but for some reason, I pretended like it didn't exist even though it was hurting me inside. When you are around the age twelve, you are more vulnerable to issues like that and are less likely to know how to handle the situation.

So after that experience I was about to go into a Catholic Boys High School and I knew right off the bat that it was going to be a horrible experience. On the first day I hung with a group of friends and at first it seemed to be quite good. But then the same boy that used to go to my middle school and harass me every day was now at my high school harassing me twice as much.

My first year in high school was hell, to put it bluntly. We had a composite class that year in which we took core subjects such as English and Math and in this

class we had the same students. Some were okay, but others were absolutely vile towards me. I realized there were some rude, arrogant people that resided in the class. One person lived in the same town as I did and he would constantly behave like an irritant within class and on the bus home. Another guy would lock eyes with me constantly to humiliate me. The worst one of all, who let me tell you was an absolutely disgusting person, would majorly harass me, then say he was sorry, and then repeat his abhorrent behavior again in order to protect his back if I tried to tell on him / report him.

I'm not going to lie; I was nervous of this guy in particular. He was one of the main reasons for my upset in this part of my life. Not to mention I lost a good friend that year because another friend of his took a dislike to me and threatened me when I tried to hang with my friend whom did nothing about the situation. Nevertheless, I found a new group of people to hang with in that year.

As a result of this treatment of people within the school, I felt petrified. I felt worthless and a lot of regretful, negative thoughts were passing through my brain. I was a weird kid who was observantly quite effeminate and sounded different because of my accent. I thought that if I had come across differently or behaved differently, I would have been taunted less. I was sensitive and I cared what people thought of me. I remember locking myself in a cubical and sobbing because I couldn't handle the insults that were thrown at me within the school yard.

I did try go to see the counsellors at school but they weren't any real help as the people with bad intentions still continued to be around me. I didn't really tell my parents either as I was too ashamed to tell them I was being bullied. I basically bottled it all up and pretend it did not exist, which is something which I do not recommend you do. If you are being harassed, you need to tell someone and /or deal with the problem because it will only get bigger. Believe me.

So as the school years went by the bullying did die down a lot, but it still existed. A lot of days, I hung out with nobody. I felt lost a lot of the time and sad. I also found that people younger than me were also being really rude to me. Teasing me for being observantly gay. I took this treatment for five years, until one day I decided I was done with it, that I didn't care anymore.

I developed this mindset within my last year at school and it was a real turning point for me in my life. I could not care less what people thought and I was a much happier person. I also came out this year too and that's something that I'm proud of. I knew that I was a great person and that nothing was going to change who I really was.

Fast forward to the present and I am an extremely confident individual with high self-esteem and have learned not to give a crap about the haters. I have the ability to wear what I want in public and behave how I want to. I'm not disrespectful, but I'm not afraid to be true to who I am either and it's all because of that one change in mindset I incorporated within that last year of school! Yes, I know I have

experienced some ups and downs in life but I'm willing to work through them as I have the confidence necessary to get ahead in my life.

I now come back to the word "Persistence". Persistence is key. I faced a problem for several years of my life and I persisted until I formulated the mindset to cope with the issue, which then no longer became problematic to me. This is a trait which I think everybody should have, if you have a problem within your life – persisting can help you lead to solving the issue because everything can be overcome if you are positive and if you have the right tools to deal with the issue at hand.

I'm personally glad that all those things happened to me throughout middle school and high school now that I'm looking back. It has made me into the person that I am today and it has taught me how to deal with the haters and people that may judge me throughout my life. Without these occurrences that happened in the past I would not have learned what I learned. In this case I do believe in fate, what happened to me as a teen happened for a reason, it was so that I could learn from this event a very valuable trait that would make me an incredibly happy person as well as one who exudes confidence.

I want to pass my traits on to the members of *The Life Project* and to all of you. To help you find the confidence that I have and not to let the negative overshadow who you are as a person. I hope this story helps you see light at the end of the tunnel if you are going through a similar situation as me, because in every dark situation, there is always hope.



# The Bully from Hell

By Phoenix

*“You, me, or nobody is going to hit as hard as life, but it isn’t about how hard you hit, it’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward, how much you can take and keep moving forward. That’s how winning is done.”*

*–Rocky Balboa*

For the purpose of this story, names have been changed.

I’m sure you’ve all heard stories of people getting bullied. One thing leads to another and stuff gets bad. So what? Well, not only did I hear these stories, but I lived one of my own.

It all started way back in elementary school. There was a new girl in my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class, Isabella. Isabella seemed kind of bossy and was always pushing people around, but everyone loved her, so I decided to try liking her too. For the next three years, we would have a love-hate relationship. Isabella was mean to me, but I had to like her because everyone else did. I guess I was stuck in the middle.

One memory that I have that is as clear as day is when we had a substitute at school. I was in 5th grade and it was lunch time. I was in the cafeteria, hunched over, with the entire table to myself because nobody wanted to sit by me. When the class was done eating, we lined up in the hallway so that we could go back to the classroom together. I was in the middle of the line when the substitute walked by. I was looking

at the floor, avoiding eye contact with everyone, when he looked at me with curious old eyes.

“Well, are you having a good day?” I looked up at him and couldn’t help it when I burst into a cascade of tears. It was as if a huge damn had been split wide open and everyone was watching me lose it.

“No,” I wept, “Everyone is being mean to me!”

I couldn’t pull my face from my sweatshirt sleeves and Isabella, who had been new a couple years ago, smirked and started laughing. I cried the rest of the day, even once I got home the tears continued to roll down my cheeks. Isabella was beginning to hurt me and I had no idea what middle school was going to bring.

However, 6th grade year wasn’t as bad as I had first assumed. I was that weird kid that liked anime, *My Chemical Romance*, and was socially awkward. I used to be “popular” back before Isabella arrived. Now, I was just a shadow in the hallway. The lack of friends and human interaction during the day really started to wear me out. I was a shell of a human. I would talk to my school counselor almost every day because I didn’t know what to do.

One thing that always makes me cry was when one girl would throw a class party and invite everyone over to her house. I would never know about the party until I saw it on everyone’s snapchat stories. Of course, it’s a class party and everyone was invited, except for me. Nobody cared. Nobody asked what I was doing, how I felt, if I was okay, or if I wanted to hang out.

7th grade was just about the same. I was a wallflower and a band geek. I played trombone all throughout middle school and I really enjoyed it. Playing in band was the only way I could get people to listen to me without having to speak. I even went to Honors Band and got to play with hundreds of other kids from all around. Then, 8th grade came, the year of living hell. Isabella did so many nasty things. This torture lasted literally all year, and nobody did a thing.

First off, Isabella got her girlfriend, her best friend, and her girlfriend's best friend to stand by my locker every single morning before school. I was really depressed at the time through all of this. I wore baggy sweaters and hid in the lunchroom every morning reading my book just to run away from it all.

Eventually, I had to go get my books for 1<sup>st</sup> hour. They would be there calling me names and laughing at my looks and things I did. They called me a lesbian several times and talked about how gay I was. There's nothing wrong with being gay, but I wasn't gay so to be called something I was not, was greatly domineering. These girls would do whatever they could to wake me up at night for me to find a horrible text message on my phone, even though they were blocked on all my media. They were cyber bullying and as well as torturing me at school. There was no escape.

One day I remember well; we were in the locker room after P.E class. It was quiet while we were getting dressed out of our P.E. uniforms. Isabella started calling me names and making crude jokes about me. I looked around at everyone's faces. They looked calm and relaxed. The very few friends I had at the time didn't stand up

for me. I knew they could hear her yet nobody did anything. I was scared...

Speechless. I couldn't believe that my friend wouldn't help me. I was lost at that moment.

It was right then that I knew I didn't have any true friends. They were all just worried about their makeup and who they would be dating that month. I thought there was something wrong with me. I didn't know why it was so hard for me to fit in. Was I ugly? Did I need to lose weight? Was it because I had dreadlocks? Nothing I did could fix my loneliness.

These events and the many more that took place were all immediately reported to the principal by me. My mother also telephoned the school multiple times but nothing was done. The principal loved Isabella and he refused to take any sort of action on the situation. Isabella got away with everything, even when she told me she wished for me to go and kill myself.

In April, after eight straight months of being bullied every day, I had to transfer schools. I couldn't even finish my last month of 8<sup>th</sup> grade year there because it was so bad. I had to get away. Luckily, I was accepted into a wonderful school not too far from my old one. There are so many things I could have told you, but it would have taken forever to explain, so let me tell you about what is happening right now:

After switching to a fantastic school, I can say whole-heartedly that I am so excited to be a freshman. All of the students are so nice and helpful. I'm very grateful for this school. Without it, who knows where I would be today. It was the best change

I've made so far in my life. Being the new kid is scary, but I won't be the new kid forever. I know that not everyone has the option to transfer if you're getting bullied. It's tough out there, when it feels like the world hates you. But you are strong and I am always here for you. Never be afraid to stick up for yourself and ask for help. You got this.

I just wanted to say a huge thanks to my old science teacher. He stuck with me through most of the bullying. He was always there for me and I knew that I could talk to him about anything. Thank you for being amazing. You'll always have a special spot in my heart.

# No More

By Dina

*"I may not be the best, but I'm not like the rest."*

Shy girl, shy girl,

That has always been me.

Watching life flow on in a whirl,

As I sat back and let all be.

Kids in my class,

Why is it that you mocked me?

Treating me like trash,

Unable to run and flee.

Friends of mine,

Scarce and few.

None of the kind,

In which to tell my sorrows to.

Time to grow up shy kid.

Become someone new.

Ignore what those children did,

Simply be you.

Silly me, silly is she,

Let the shyness disappear.

Always a part of me,

Yet not controlling me with fear.

Piece by piece,

Let the internal silence crack.

Until the real me is all you see,

Until I no longer hold myself back.

Poem composed by: Mary Lou

# The Good Kansans

By Doug

I was lying by the road.

I was sick of my heavy load.

Many people passed me by,

They didn't try

To help me.

They'd say, "It's your own fault."

Or, "Just try harder."

But I could not

Be my own starter.

Two lads from Kansas

Happened on by.

They must have fallen

Out of the sky!

They made me laugh.

They made me cry.



I didn't need to try

In my own power.

I'd found kindred spirits,

Who didn't judge.

Happy as larks,

And sweet as fudge.

I'd finally found

What I was looking for.

I joined the fam,

Of Colby and Sam,

Not giving a dam,

For what people thought.

It's been nothing but bliss,

With bro's and sis'

I'll never miss,

My old so-called life!

# Ten Days

By Emerald Hearts

*"For I know the plans that I have for you," says the Lord. "Plans of peace, and not of destruction, to give you a future and a hope." - Jeremiah 29:11*

Ten days.

When it began,

It was supposed to be only ten days.

Her family split up,

Father stayed with his sister,

The rest stayed with her aunt.

Ten days.

Turned into a month,

Before they left.

Brother went to live away,

She and her family found shelter in a van,

Found warmth in a fast food bathroom.

Ten days,

Became much longer.

There was so much pain.

No longer was it easy to see her family,

She wept,

And so did they.

Ten days.

Shifted to seven months.

Memories bringing ache and pain.

She learned from it,

That you have to be strong.

That family – isn't always blood related.

Ten days.

Transformed into a lesson.

Family, comes from all around.

Her family grew closer.

Learned that they could survive anything.

That they were stronger than they ever thought.

Ten days.

It all began with ten days.

Poem composed by: Mary Lou

*\*Note: When I received this story, I had two options; make a sing-song poem out of it or let the story speak for itself. No rhyming – just her being raw and being truthful. – Mary Lou\**

# Interviewing Hope Gann

*“Every day may not be a good day but there is something good in every day.” - Alice Morse*

*Earle*

**If you could teach the world one lesson, what would it be?**

Although it is cliché, I have to say always be honest. I had a bad thing happen to me repeatedly for 7 years and I didn't tell my family until the 6th year. I regret not telling anyone. If I had been honest and told my family sooner, I would have gone through a lot less pain.

**If you could describe yourself in one sentence, what would it be?**

I am a quiet girl who likes to make people happy.

**What's something that happened to you when you were younger that shaped who you are now?**

My cousin used to be my best friend. When I was 7, he started acting weird and he wanted to do weird things. I didn't understand what it was at the time but I knew that I didn't like it. He did bad things to me for 7 years and I didn't tell anyone until I was 13. After I told my mom, we thought that the situation was fixed but then he started doing the bad things again. When I was 14, we talked to his parents and it hasn't happened since. When I look back on it, I think it made me a stronger person because I feel like if I could make it through that, then I can make it through a lot of things.

**What's the best piece of advice you want to give someone?**

Always be strong. You can make it through anything.

**Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**

Hopefully, I have met a guy and have a small family. I would like to pursue an acting career and if that doesn't work out I'd like to be a detective.

**Is there a person in your life who pushed you to keep going?**

When I finally told people about the cousin situation, I had a few friends and my family pushing me forward.

**What's one mistake that you made in your life that you learned from?**

I trusted the wrong people and I got deeply hurt. Now I am more aware of who I should put my trust into.

**Why did you want to be a part of this book?**

I felt like it was a good opportunity to share my story. After I prayed about it, I felt like God told me that it was the right thing to do.

**If you had a chance for a "do-over" in life, what would you do differently?**

I would talk to more people and I would be more outgoing. I used to be really shy but ever since *The Life Project*, I have talked to a lot of people and I've made a lot of friends.

**Unfortunately, there are no such things as going back in time and doing something over, so what can you do to prevent the same thing from occurring?**

I could be more confident and not be scared to talk to people. God puts people in your life for a reason so if it doesn't work out, then it's okay.

**What is something you have done that you feel most proud of?**

Thanks to *The Life Project*, I have allowed myself to become more open and confident.

**What was one of your most defining moments in life?**

I think it was when I found God. It has greatly shaped who I am today.

**What do you most admire in life?**

God's grace, beauty, and forgiveness.

**What is your biggest accomplishment?**

My new-found confidence. It has helped me become a more open person.

**What is one insecurity that you once had in yourself that you learned to overcome?**

I was very insecure about how quiet I was. I felt like nobody liked me, but after I joined *The Life Project*, I decided that I wanted to make friends and I started talking more. I am still quiet, but not as quiet as I used to be.

**Now that you've answered these questions and had a chance to think about some of the things involved in this Q and A, is there anything else you would like to add for future readers of this?**

Always be strong, confident, and have faith.



# My Deliverance

By Joana

*“Stop wishing and start doing.” - Unknown*

Like any other childhood, mine had its ups and downs. The downs were covered with being bullied at school, which began when I was in first grade. I was called fat, ugly, and stupid because of my dyslexia. For a young kid, hearing such things was very hard, and not understanding why was even worse. I didn't realize that having dyslexia made me different, until they began to taunt me with it.

By the fourth grade, the bullying and abuse was almost non-stop. I was told there was no way I was a girl, because girls weren't supposed to be as fat as I was. I was lucky that the abuse didn't reach a physical level, but that doesn't mean the verbal hate was any less painful. Physical bruises can heal, but when the brain and mind are constantly hit with verbal abuse, it takes so much longer to recover from. A part of me will never fully go back to normal from that.

Through my seven long years of torment, I went to three different psychologists. However, they did nothing for my bullying problem or my mental state and my pain didn't end until my tormentors moved to a different school. After that, my friends gradually began to return and my grades skyrocketed. I was in a very happy state and felt as though I was on top of the world, except that content state didn't stay that way for long.

In 2014, I had to have emergency surgery. My appendix ruptured and I almost died. The scars marring my skin lowered my self-esteem greatly, and I added another reason to the list of why I disliked my body. Now the person who bullied me was in reality myself. How could I run away from the person who tortured me when I was inevitably her?

On Christmas Day of 2014, my world was shattered. I got a call from my father telling me he wanted a divorce from my mother. I found out that he had been cheating on my mom for five years, and she had known about it all along. She refused to tell me until Christmas Day. What a gift it was.

My relationship with my dad went quickly downhill, and I lost all respect for him. He had been my hero, but he destroyed that by hurting my mom. I am still in contact with him but it's not the same, and it never will be. How can it? On the other hand, my mom and I became really close, and our bond grew strong. We were still mother and daughter, but now with some best friend aspects thrown into the mix.

Yet even with her in my life, I was still broken. I thought it was my fault, and I allowed myself to fall into a state of terrible depression. It got so bad that by January, I was cutting myself in hopes of forgetting my problems. The pain had suddenly become my only companion in the blur of life. I suffered this way for a year and a half, facing high and low points through the journey.

In 2016, a miracle happened, called *The Life Project*. I cannot express how glad I am that I took the plunge and joined. This community has become my second family.

I may not know them in person, but family runs deeper than that. At least this one does. I am always meeting new people, learning about new cultures, and creating new bonds of love and friendship. They have helped me become more positive and content, and in return, I get to help others to achieve that. It turns out that I am not as alone as I first thought.

# **This Is My Story**

By Khera Carter

*"I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we'll never know most of them. But even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there." - Stephen Chbosky*

In a world where people suffer from depression, suicide, sadness and death, it makes me wonder if I'm any different from the rest. I suppose that when I hear the terms; "You don't know how good you have it" or, "People have it worse than you." I realize how fatefully right and wrong those people are. They're right, there are people in this world that in some way are faring a lot worse than I. Yet they're also wrong, there is no way I could consider my own woes and memories "not that bad" compared to another's because I have no idea what it feels like to be in another's shoes. So if you read this and you find yourself thinking that my story "isn't that bad" or, "is not unique" then my friend, you are wrong. This is my story, it is all I know for hardship and to me – I am unique, I am my own person, so this story is special to me.

I suppose I should start right off the bat with the first thing I remember as child. Well, more like was told as I grew from baby to toddler and from toddler to child. At the age of two, my parents decided they no longer wanted to be with one another and signed the papers that officially announced them as "no longer married". That's right – they changed their Facebook status to single and moved away from each

other. That left me in sort of a limbo, bouncing back and forth from one parent to the next for many years to come.

I'm not sure if it was the divorce or for other reasons but in the space of time since I was a baby to now – I moved more than 15 times. I went from house to house and before I was even in eighth grade, I had made eleven transfers school wise. It was hard, very hard, because I was continuously the new girl. I didn't see a good point in making friends when there was no guarantee in my life that I would finish the year out. It became routine for me, I passed by many faces in the hallways and as time progressed, and I stopped trying to put a name to the face before me.

The stress of the divorce and the strain it put on my family was overwhelming and with each and every move that I underwent – something inside me started to fold under all the pressure. At my new schools, even with the mysterious new kid aura surrounding me, I was still the shy, and meek kid. So, when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I received an anonymous note telling me to kill myself, I thought it would be best to do as I was told. That night I pulled all the medicine down from my mom's cabinet and swallowed them. I don't remember much until a few days later when I was waking up in a blinding white hospital room.

After my incident, I suffered with a large bout of depression. The moves and the school transfers continued to make the depression worse and now thinking back on it, I think I would have attempted suicide again. But that wasn't my fate, at least

that's what I think. Why? Because I stumbled across two boys that helped me help myself.

Everyone knows this story, the one where Sam and Colby from Kansas came into my life. They've helped many people and I'm proud to be a part of that group. Meeting them and the people of *The Life Project* have been my anchor since I joined. I still have to move, and I don't know as to whether or not the school I'm at will be the one I graduate from. But do you want to know that good thing about *The Life Project*? It doesn't matter when I move or what school I go to, these are friends that I can put a face to and not worry about losing. Finally.

# Now She Is Joyful

By Kerri

*"You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough."*

A girl sits in the corner of her room,

Tucked between the walls and the bed's sheets.

Images of her lonely moments waft around her like a perfume.

Fear pumping her heart with hammering beats.

She's waited for the air of shyness to clear.

She hoped the anxiety would flee.

Yet inside she dreaded this is how she would always appear.

A small town girl lost in society's vast sea.

Except this was not how it would stay,

Even though she could not do it on her own.

Two boys created a way.

A site where for once she felt at home.

It grew and when it came to try,  
She joined a strange, new family.  
They heard her helpless cry,  
Worked through her pains with a sense of clammy.

No more wariness.

Now she is confident.

No more dread.

Now she is brave.

No more solitude.

Now she has company.

No more grief.

Now she is joyful.

Poem Composed by: Mary Lou



# For A Long Time

By Rachel

*“Stand up for what you believe in, even if it means standing alone.” – Andy Biersack*

For a long time,

I let society put a hand over my mouth.

“Don’t speak your mind.”

“Don’t let people see.”

For a long time,

I believed keeping my feelings in was right.

“Stay silent.”

“Hold the pain in.”

For a long time,

I let myself drift away.

“I am alone.”

“I am worthless.”

For a long time,

I –

*“Stop that.”*

*“Stop telling yourself that.”*

They came unexpectedly.

The people I now call my family.

*“You are important.”*

*“You are incredible.”*

For a long time,

I had forgotten.

“I am not alone.”

“I am not alone.”

*“Did you not know my darling?”*

*“We are here for you.”*

*“We love you.”*

*“We are your home.”*

For a while now,

I’ve expressed my feelings.

I’ve found my voice.

I’ve found my home.

Poem composed by: Mary Lou

# To Not Be Scared

By Allyson

*“Be so happy so that when others look at you, they become happy too”*

I can't recall a time in my life where I wasn't scared, considering that I have been dealing with anxiety since I was nine, it's understandable. My story begins in 2010, the second semester of fifth grade. I stopped eating lunch at school and I refused to eat a lot at home. Why? Well I promise you it wasn't a weight thing, I was just so terrified of throwing up that I refused to eat and ended up living off of Tums and Pepto Bismol. It was one of the worst years of my life.

I remember those endless nights that I would stay up crying because I was so convinced that I was going to get sick. I remember carrying a bucket around everywhere I went, besides school, so that if anything did happen it would be right there. My irrational fear caused so much tension between my family and it's really sad to look back on it because instead of happy memories - I'm left with memories of my mom yelling at me because she didn't know how to help me. Now that I think of it, I don't know how she handled me at that time. I was nine and I refused to eat. I was restless and I was constantly scared. The sad thing about this is that now I'm just better at hiding my fear.

Lucky for me that phase only lasted about four or five months. However it came back possibly worse the summer of sixth grade. It was the first summer that I was able to be home alone. This time around it wasn't getting sick, I was just scared. I

don't know how I was so mature about it because before that summer started I had my mom buy me a bunch of art supplies so that I could have something to do to distract my mind from my anxiety. Sometimes painting something would help me but for the most part I would be terrified of whatever. I remember having trouble sleeping because I was too scared to go to sleep. I would listen to music or watch movies to help me calm down.

Recently, I've been doing great, of course I've had my fair share of anxiety attacks. It's only normal. A lot of it is because I gave up and said that I needed help so my mom and I found a great therapist who I saw once a week. Then I found *The Life Project* and I'll admit that once my senior year started it's been a lot harder to get online and post things but it's always in the back of my mind when I do things. It's the reason I started seeing friends outside of school and the reason I actually went out and made new friends. Since I've joined, it feels like there is a whole community of people out there who are there for me and it feels great. I still have a long way to go but I know I can get through everything now because of *The Life Project*.

# My Story

By Ashley

*“Onward and Upward.” – The Life Project Family*

My name is Ashley. My story is the story of a girl who always seemed a little out of her element. At every point in my life, I was always waiting to finally feel like I fit in my own skin. Throughout being a kid I was always the shy girl who was scared of making friends. As a teenager, depression and anxiety started making things worse making it hard to do everyday things. Fixing my problems never really helped. I felt alone and talking to people about how I felt never seems like a possibility to me because the fear of them not understanding or them not really caring always crept at the back of my mind. Things started to escalate and as a young adult I was in a route, I remember having a moment when I said to myself, *“Is this it? Was I living a life I'm happy with?”*

Well, in December of last year I meet two amazing people Sam and Colby and in February they opened up a site that has forever changed my life called *The Life Project* (aka Ashley's life project). The day I signed up I knew this site was everything I needed. People were so friendly and so open I felt like I finally found a place called home. Over the course of the next ten months I met people, told them about myself, got a lot of positivity and in returned got to learn a lot about other people. I slowly began working on myself, stepping out of my comfort zone, making new friends and

really implementing all the advice and tools from the site. I was growing up as a person and it was showing. I found myself in my insecurities, in the fails and in the bad times. It isn't an easy journey and one I'm still on, every day is a constant battle but Sam and Colby are the ones that give me strength and courage to keep going every day and show me that it's possible to be the person you want to be. Life is out waiting for you if you willing to get it! These boys have given me everything but out of everything they given me my life back.

# Start Believing

Bailey Pelz

My name is Bailey, in my lifetime so far I have been bullied and beaten down by people. I'm currently in my first year of college and I've been bullied since kindergarten. I'm mildly deaf in both ears so I wear hearing aids but of course I can hear without them as well. I was bullied for being deaf, the way I dressed, and the way I talked because I couldn't pronounce some of the words or letters correctly. A couple girls I got in fights with because I was just tired of getting beat on.

Later on into my middle school years it got even worse. My friends treated me like I was a slave. I never really realized it and if I didn't do something they would blackmail me somehow. Most of my friends I made are very delusional because they don't think they are doing anything wrong. By 8th grade I had gone to my dark days. I wore black everyday listening to metal and punk music all day. I would isolate myself in my room away from my family. My family always had screaming moments and I never wanted to listen to that so I kept myself in my room.

As I slowly stopped eating, sleeping, or doing school work I was falling apart and my friends were blind to see it. In the beginning of high school I was treated poorly. I was labeled the "dumb" one in my friend group. Everyone was apparently smarter than me, I guess. I didn't know anything so they told me to shut up



because you don't know what you're talking about. So I would sit and be quiet. I then became a human punching bag so I would wake up in the morning with bruises. I was finally at the edge. I had made my first scar on my wrist in freshman year. I was hurting so badly.

I cried all day and night and my friends finally paid attention to me. I just ignored them because I didn't want their attention. I kept doing it and doing it in my freshman year. I was alone.... I felt like I had nobody in my life. I would sit with my friend group but I wouldn't talk to them. I stopped making scars half way through my freshman year.

In sophomore year I lost my friends because I was tricked into drinking alcohol so my "friends" thought I was going to go down the wrong path. Guess they didn't know me well. I made scars here and there. I had to see a therapist at this point because I actually wanted send myself to a mental hospital. I just felt like I was going crazy. Between my friends beating me up mentally and physically. Along with my family calling me names like "fat," "stupid," and "idiot." I just couldn't take it anymore. Hearing voices and seeing things because I haven't slept for days I just wanted to go away.

My dad used to physically abuse me but he's better now. Looking back on my life I know people have it worse than me obviously but it was hell for me. I would cry myself to sleep. I would end up having nightmares that would keep me up. I finally stand up for myself now. I signed up for a project called *The Life*

*Project* and it made me realized that what the people in my family and friends were doing was wrong and it had to stop. Now my friends are scared of me which I don't want them to be but they are because I showed them what they have done to me and now they haven't done a single thing to me anymore. I showed them that they can't walk over me and call me things. I've proved them wrong.

If can prove people like this wrong, so can you. The motto you should always remind yourself is to be *hopeful*. Things will get better maybe not now but they will just have to believe and if you don't believe it won't come true so start believing.

# Trying to Fit In

By Danielle

*“The only meaningful thing we can offer one another is love. Not advice, not questions about our choices, not suggestions for the future, just love.” – Glennon Doyle Melton*

I have been heavily involved with the arts and skiing for the vast majority of my life, mostly theater. Theater has been a huge defining agent in how I see myself and who I am. I have found out more about myself through theater than any other way. I have learned to accept myself and trust myself and my creativity through theater. I started acting when I was four and fell in love, not with the spotlight, but with how it made me feel. The pure joy I would get from being in this different world and stepping into someone else’s shoes. I think it stems from my underlying desire to understand how other people think and feel.

I am a very empathetic person. Seeing as I went to an arts school for both middle and high school, I never had to really worry about not fitting in or felt like I couldn’t be myself. I always felt that I was able to express myself to a certain extent and did not really have issues with confidence. Of course I doubt myself every now and then but that’s normal. I began to really find my artistic voice and learned that theater is more than just for entertainment, it is a whole different world and I have never found anyone besides my theater class in high school who has understood that.

I'm not going to lie and say that high school was awesome, but it was pretty good compared to what I have heard other people talk about. I had a problem with one girl who tried to blame her attempted suicide on me by sending me a video of it with the caption "good job" but that was my only major hiccup. She was essentially pissed at me because she had it in her mind that I betrayed her by trying to get with her ex-boyfriend, which was a total lie but because I was talking to him I *clearly* was trying to get with him...I just genuinely wanted to help two of my friends out who were struggling but apparently that was a bad idea.

Although I had a pretty happy high school experience, I always let people walk all over me and use me. People saw me as "weak" because of my generosity and that led me to not really have many true friends. Sure, I was friends with my theater class but I wouldn't really open up to them because they didn't want to hear it and we didn't really connect as well as they did with each other.

I always had this underlying sense of being the outsider even though they were all very kind to me. A lot of the time they were kind to me it was only because they wanted something from me and knew that I would say yes. I don't want to talk about boys because I will get very heated. Let's just say that every guy that I have been interested in or have "dated" has abandoned me when I opened up to them so I have become rather closed off.

Anyways high school went by and I was fairly happy. I was very excited to go to University and in a different country too! However, it was once I got here that things

started to go south for me drawing me to *TLP*. As I mentioned before nobody really understands my high school experience and how important theater is to me. Sure people will understand why I like theater and say that I am a good actress, but that's not the point. I can't really relate to people here as well as I could back home. While I made friends, had fine grades, moved away from studying theater and more towards studying Peace and Conflict Resolution studies, I have found that people there are less accepting and think that my outgoingness is unnatural or strange. It seems like the whole "trying to fit in" thing went in reverse for me.

I was totally fine in high school but in college I have started to doubt myself more and it seems like being who I am isn't very "accepted" here. I do have great friends that accept me and let me be myself, but the vast majority are not like that. That's what drew me to *TLP*. I not only wanted to do something for myself (I spent my entire life taking care of everyone else and don't really know how to take care of myself), but I wanted to maybe find people who understood my weirdness and my outgoing nature.

And I did. I knew that it was a step in the right direction. I learned how to better take care of myself, made friendships that I can't even imagine now what my life would be like without, and had this constant support system to back me up whenever I needed it. The overwhelming amount of acceptance and love that goes on there is mind blowing and definitely changed my life.

Yes I still have my core issues of not really letting people in and doubting myself and being “too kind”, but I am taking it one day at a time and am seeing a change with each passing day.

# **Interviewing Debra Barushak**

*“You can do anything you want but you can't do everything”*

**If you could teach the world one lesson, what would it be?**

Spread love whenever it is possible. Not only will you feel better, better it makes all the difference to other people. You never know what someone is going through.

**If you could describe yourself in one sentence, what would it be?**

Classy but sassy.

**How do you want to leave your mark on this world?**

I want to help people whenever possible. Ultimately, the goal is to start my own charity some day!

**What's something that happened to you when you were younger that shaped who you are now?**

As I mentioned, there was a lot of yelling when I grew up and my mother actually was a firm believer in giving “spankings”. Due to this, I refrain from yelling at people and I will never lay a hand on my child just because I know how that made me feel.

**What's the best piece of advice you want to give someone?**

You can do anything you want but you can't do everything at the same time. It becomes too stressful. Try to narrow your focus on a couple things at a time.

**Is there a person in your life who pushed you to keep going?**

My Dad. He is one of the most important people in my life and he helps keep me going when I need it!

**What's one mistake that you made in your life that you learned from?**

I actually used to always let people use me. All throughout school I let people use me because I confused being nice with being weak.

**Why did you want to be a part of this book?**

I believe any way you can get your story out there is an amazing outlet. I'm happy to share my story if there is a chance it can benefit someone.

**What do you most admire in life?**

I appreciate the little things life has to offer. The way the wind slightly blows on a spring day, watching the stars, sunrises, etc...

**What is one insecurity that you once had in yourself that you learned to overcome?**



I have always been really insecure about my weight! All my life I have been overweight and always thought of myself as ugly or worthless due to this. Only recently did I realize it doesn't really matter. It's a number on the scale and if I'm working on it, who cares what other people think about me?

**Now that you've answered these questions and had a chance to think about some of the things involved in this Q and A, is there anything else you would like to add for the future readers of this?** Never limit yourself to what you think you are capable of. Continue to push the boundaries of your comfort zone on a daily basis but also never fear failure. With each act of failure comes a wonderful opportunity for growth! So fail fast and fail often. Let this world teach you.

# Finding My Positivity

Baba Kuhani

From my last year of elementary school to my first year of high school and all throughout middle school, I was completely alone. I never saw friends after school, in fact, I didn't have any friends to see. I've forgotten how to socialize and how it feels to be comfortable around people. I was bullied almost on a daily basis, called various not so original names like “fat” or “gay” or many synonyms of the word “stupid”.

The truth is, at first, I just ignored them and stayed silent. I wouldn't tell anyone about the bruise on my belly from the very strong kick this girl gave me. I never told anyone about how this guy threw me-and all my stuff- in the garbage. I kept quiet and waited for it to be over, but the thing is, I lost all trust and hope in people. Back then I thought everyone was horrible, except the people on the Internet, who were the only ones I could talk to.

When I started high school I wanted to change, to start over, it was a new beginning for me and so I did just that, with one major setback - I had *no* idea how to make friends. I tried to be funny with no success, I tried being normal and bored everyone, I didn't know where to start and what to do. For the first two years of high school I wasn't friendless anymore, but I still wasn't confident enough to be as social as I wanted to be.

Luckily, all that changed a few days after I started my senior year. I made a new friend outside of school, and we connected instantly. It never happened to me in the past and I was beyond thrilled by this strange turn of events. That friend taught me something I never knew before, and that was positivity.

All these years, I thought everyone was cruel, deep into their core and I refused to give anyone a chance. I would judge people so fast and imagine the worst of every situation and person but the moment I understood what positivity was, my life changed. I became happy, genuinely happy. I had and still have ups and downs but I can actually be in good spirits nowadays!

The next step for me was learning how to be happier and stay happy. One day I was down so I went and looked at all vines compilations on YouTube in an attempt to make myself feel better. That's when I saw Sam and Colby and discovered *TLP*. For the first time in my life I made an online subscription to a website, and it was one of my best choices. I watched their videos and learned how to get out of almost any bad situation if I put in the effort.

I started becoming an expert in happiness, and suddenly I found myself actually helping others be happy! It was unbelievable. That I, the sad, depressed, pessimistic kid that always sought help everywhere, became the happy positive guy that lands a hand to anyone who needs it.

# What I Hold Onto

By Jennifer

*"Never give up, because you don't know what tomorrow will bring"*

The idea of losing a loved one has the ability to send chills and nerves into the person who thinks about it. Yet, that's what it always is, just a thought. People, though it may be contemplated, never really expect to lose a loved one suddenly – but it happens.

I lost my mom back in June of this year and it has been so painful since it happened. I used to cry for hours on end every day and I was so unhappy because everyone knew me as the happy little girl. When I could no longer be that girl, I put on a facade of a happy person even though I was a horrific mess on the inside. For other people's benefit, I would try to seem as happy as I could all day and then cry myself to sleep every night. I was so worried about talking to my family because I was embarrassed about it, but everything changed when I joined *TLP*.

I started talking to everyone on it and they were helping me. In a matter of hours, I made so many friends, learned from everyone that it's okay to cry, to be sad. It's not okay to dwell on the negative things of losing my mother, but rather the positive things. You see, she had a lot of medical problems and a lot of health issues that made her be in pain all the time and in the hospital constantly. She used to call it her "second home" because she had to be there so much. She was the sweetest, most spiritually strong person even though her body was weak. Eventually, it got to a point

where my momma was ready to go home to God up in heaven so that's where she is now and that is what I hold on to now to keep me happy. Thank you, my Life Project family – for helping me see that.

# Finding My Real Family

By Kaitlyn Swaine

*“The thinking that got us to where we are is not the thinking that will get us to where we want to be.” - Albert Einstein*

I've always felt like I lacked having a strong father figure in my life, or had a somewhat “together”, functional family. Ever since I could remember, my dad was an alcoholic. It was so bad that on one occasion, he'd almost died from alcohol poisoning. He flat-lined in the ambulance, but luckily, the paramedics were able to resuscitate him. He has always been a relatively angry person. Constantly yelling and fighting with my step-mom when he's drunk late in the evening. Sometimes I was so unsettled by their constant fighting that I would call my aunt and uncle, no matter how late it was, just bawling my eyes out. Then, one of them would drive an hour to come and get me.

My dad was very verbally abusive, and even sometimes mildly physically abusive – more so towards my sister. I remember one time he was abusing my sister. It was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to witness. I was relatively young at the time this happened, but the memories I do have of this incident were pretty bad... It wasn't as bad as it could have been, but let's just say it was bad enough that the police were called on my dad (for a second time.) Had the red smack mark left on my sister not faded by the time the police arrived, my dad would have been arrested and

gone to jail. I don't know what about this incident hurt me the most. Witnessing it happening, or the fact that my dad got away with it.

My family and I have had to witness and go through a lot because of my dad. Not only did he physically abuse my sister, but he also sexually assaulted my step-mom when she tried to leave him. I didn't even know what rape was around the time this happened. I was probably about eight or nine. All I remembered was my step mom and my dad got into another huge fight, and my step mom took her daughter and I to her brother's on the other side of town, and went down the road before calling a cab because she wanted to avoid him knowing where she was taking us or tracking us down. He didn't have any clue that we had even left.

It was around 11 at night, and I was the only one awake, but I pretended to be asleep when I heard my dad barge through the front door – he was infuriated. Hearing him rape my step-mom, along with the other physical abuse, was one of the most awful experiences in my life. After only witnessing this. To this day, I still don't understand why my step-mom is still with my dad. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I feel like she feels trapped. That she's either being forced to stay with him, or that he guilted her into staying with him. Then causing her to believe she wouldn't make it without him. I also believe she's just waiting until she has enough money saved up to leave him again – and this time, far away, for good.

But this father figure story does somewhat have a light at the end of the tunnel. In 2009, my mom got married to another man, and he was absolutely amazing to say the least. He wasn't an alcoholic like my dad, but he was still a social drinker. It was somewhat shocking to me though, because with my dad I'd always associated alcohol with violence. But unlike my biological dad, my step-dad genuinely cared about us. He was always concerned if we came home looking unhappy. And even when I WAS happy, and my face just wasn't showing it at the time. He was always paying attention.

Unfortunately, he was involved in an accidental shooting incident when he was intoxicated and he didn't think the gun was loaded. I wish I'd spent more time with him before he passed on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 after two or three days in the ICU. My final moments with him was in a hospital, five hours away. Saying goodbye to him was one of the hardest experiences of my entire life, but I can only imagine what my mother must have been thinking – she was the one who had to sign the legal documents to have the doctors pull the plug. I miss him so much, and my life will not be the same without him. He's the only true father figure I've ever had.

But through my step-dad, even though it was later in my life than I would have liked, I finally had that missing father figure filled. And through *The Life Project*, I have my “together” family. *The Life Project* has taught me a lot. There are things that I probably never would've considered if I had not joined this incredible family. The biggest thing I've learned so far is that it's important to live in the now. Don't dwell on



the past, because it won't take you anywhere – it will leave you stuck in a time you will never be able to get back. The past is the past, so don't let it get to you. Accept that what's done is done, and you can't change that no matter how hard you try.

# Making the Difference in Myself

By Alexis

For a lot of kids, it was around the grades of second to sixth that it seemed someone's parents were splitting up. I was never sure if it was because of the way everything seemed to go hay-wire at that moment or if maybe the parents all gathered together and decided it was good idea. Whatever the case was, I was one of the kids whose parents decided they had had enough of one another. I was nine years old at the time, and when they split up, it was as if the ground beneath me had been cracked in half as well. Suddenly, I was in two separate worlds with two detached families.

Because of the divorce and the broken connection between my parents, I found myself unable to form relationships with new family members filtering in. With two sisters, a half-brother, and a step-dad, it seemed that my family ties were completely severed. Three years ago, I broke communication with my father and have yet to hear from him. The strain was only made worse, however, I was suddenly being dragged every which way. I was on the move constantly and unable to wrap my head around the new house I was in before having to pack up again and leave. It was hell.

Once high school started, it only got harder and harder on me. I was new to the school district and rumors about me were suddenly spreading like wild fire throughout the school. How could a new kid, with no relation to any other peer, suddenly be put under other people's thumb so quickly? The names I was called and

the abuse I suffered led me down a dark path. One of the darkest paths I've ever gone down.

I began to suffer from severe anxiety and depression. The damaging thoughts of others suddenly became my own and all I could think about was how fat I thought I looked. Do you know what it feels like to look into a mirror and be disgusted with what you see? If you have, then I pray you can one day step in front of that reflection and see how truly beautiful you are. But at the time, I couldn't see it and because of that tunnel vision, I gained another thorn to my bush of bad memories. This was my eating disorder and self-harm. I thought I could cut the ugliness out of me, starve the fat from my body. But I was wrong not only for thinking that was solution, but also thinking so lowly of myself.

It was during my senior year that I discovered Sam and Colby. I actually met them in person before learning about who they were. They showed me how I could help myself break out of the shell I had wrapped myself in. Senior year I got a lot more involved. I joined a leadership club, created a project based off of Onward and Upward, and developed a spirit week on YouTube that hit one hundred subscribers in the first three weeks.

I lost a lot of friends due to everyone else's opinions of me. Getting involved with two of the biggest clubs on campus helped me meet new people and grow more confident. I found a passion for writing and photography and those distractions led to

a big thing in my life, staying clean. It has been one year since I last cut myself and since I let the idea of what other's thought of me rule what I ate.

I am now eighteen years old, a graduate of high school, and heading to college to be an expressive art therapist. In the future, I want open / start a program for kids and teens to come in a use different mediums of art in a form of therapy to help express themselves as well as meet new people their own age.

For those of you out there who are lost in the other people's opinion, unsure of the future, or flat out unhappy with your life. Take a moment to step back and breathe and realize that you got this. No one else's opinions of you matter because in the end, it is only you who can make the difference in yourself. Much love, Alexis.

# You Are Capable

By Mary Lou

*“She is clothed in strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.” –  
Proverbs 31:25*

There are a lot of things in my life I could tell you about, except I think there’s only one thing that has proved to be the best lesson learned in my life. I’m going to tell you a story, about how I went from being alone, to being in amazing company.

I lost both of my grandmothers around the same time when I was in first grade. Before then, I had been an outspoken girl. I decided what games my friends and I played at recess, I had a big voice and I voiced my opinion without a filter. When my grandmothers died, I think something inside me melted away. I don’t think my mother knows this, but after that big loss in my life – I refused to talk to people at school. If a friend spoke to me, I was silent and I stayed that way for a long time.

I was young enough that that kind of silence affected my social skills. I became a shy little girl who was really insecure about herself. But it all increased when I was in fourth grade. There had been incidents before, but in my mind, this is when I really began to struggle.

When fourth grade came around, I had two friends. Behind my back, they treated me like trash but being naïve as I was – I didn’t know that at the time but I started to get the picture rather quickly. One day will forever stick out in my

memories. Both of them were looking for me and something in my gut told me it wasn't a good thing. I was right.

"You, Mary. You are beneath us." One of the girls spat at me, "We are levels above you and we always will be."

I remember standing there with my head bent, my hands knotted together and trying so hard not to cry. I accepted her words as the truth and my insecurity began to grow after that point. It was always in the back of my mind that she was right – that I really was dirt beneath their perfect shoes. So I sunk deeper into myself.

When fifth grade began, the girl who told me off left the school and I was happy for it. I found three new friends and it was good. But for me, good things flee so quickly. There began to be rifts in the friendships – cruel and hateful arguments. It got so bad that we were asked to start seeing a counselor every week. Despite being hopeful, the friendship pulled a part and we all separated.

Sixth grade was the year I lost all respect for myself. I made a new friend, only one, and (though I was still oblivious) she was very cruel to me. She would call me names, make me do things for her, and overall didn't act like a good friend. It was the year that I started to grow incredibly upset with how my body looked and in part – I think she had something to do with it.

She left when sixth grade was over and when seventh grade began – I lost all ties to people at my school. I sunk deep into myself and could barely say one word to my classmates without having a panic attack and literally choking on air. It made me

sick to my stomach and I dreaded school every single day. I spent my lunches in the locker room showers with all the lights off and whenever I heard someone walking by – I would press myself against the tiled wall with my knees to my chest, begging that they wouldn't see me.

*“Please don't see me.”*

I had had enough of that when eighth came around but I was still way too terrified to do anything about that. Somehow, I managed to accumulate a group of four friends and I found myself being the jokester of the group. I found who I was with them, how social I really was and I broke the first layer of my shell.

I joined the softball team, got a main part in a play my school was putting on, and even got asked out by one of the cutest guys in my class. I found out my adoration for poems and short stories – that I wanted to be known for something more than just the shy kid.

That was when I decided that I would go to a high school that was completely new to me. No one from my old school was going there and I was scared, but I forced myself to act like I wasn't on that first day of freshman year.

Now? I'm a senior at my high school, I have lifelong friendships, and I'm the Religious Vice President for my student body and gave a speech without losing myself to my shyness. A few months ago I found *The Life Project* and I've grown even more in myself, in my relationship with God, and with the people around me.

I know what it's like to have people tell you you're not worth a penny, I understand how it is to have people leave you all the time, but I also know that it's not permanent. If you want to be something more than you are, if you want to find your voice and become the person you know you're meant to be – then don't let people around you deter that.

Find your voice in the roar of society, stand up and say what you think needs to be said, don't take for granted the good things you have, but most importantly – don't take yourself for granted because you are more than capable.



## **Q and A with Maya**

*"Everything will be okay in the end, if it's not okay, then it's not the end" - Ed Sheeran*

### **What was your family life like growing up?**

I grew up on an old farm. I had 60 acres of forest around me which was amazing and allowed me to learn so much about nature. My dad and I spent a lot of time in the woods. I grew up with my mom, dad, and my brother Dimitri. My childhood was fairly happy. There weren't many kids around me and I really only had one friend, but my brother and I always found a way to have fun. My parents would fight quite a bit when I was younger. It was normally caused by drinking. When I was about 12, my parents got divorced and my mom, brother and I moved in with my grandma. At the time I thought I would never get over being a kid from a split family. I still went and saw my dad but it was hard being in a house where there were so many bad memories. Eventually I moved on from the hurt that was caused by the divorce and remembered there were way happier memories there than sad. My childhood was full of ups and downs but overall it was okay.

### **If you could describe yourself in one sentence, what would it be?**

I am a very driven person and will go after anything I want.

### **How do you want to leave your mark on this world?**

I want to leave my mark by being a live sound engineer. That business is predominantly male and I want to show young girls and just kids in general that no matter what the odds look like, you can always achieve your dreams.

**What's the best piece of advice you want to give someone?**

If something is happening that you don't like, do something about it. You can stand up for anything you believe in. I also feel like I need to tell people to stop looking at the ground when you walk, you're missing the world as you do so.

**What was one of your most defining moments in life?**

I don't feel like any moment in my life has really defined the rest of it. I think every moment and everything that has ever happened to me both good and bad has defined me.

**What is your biggest accomplishment?**

I actually think my biggest accomplishment is just being alive. I have gone through times where all I wanted to do was just lay down and give up but I didn't. I kept fighting and I will continue to because hard times don't last forever.

**What is one insecurity that you once had in yourself that you learned to overcome?**

I was always scared of being smart. I was scared that if I showed people how smart I was all they would do is call me a nerd and make fun of me. Don't hide the things you are good at because there is a problem out there that is going to need your skills and talent.

**Why did you want to be a part of this book?**

I wanted to be a part of this book because I think it's an amazing opportunity for people to hear how ordinary people can be inspiring to everyone around them.

**Now that you've answered these questions and had a chance to think about some of the things involved in this Q and A, is there anything else you would like to add for the future readers of this?**

Recently I have been stuck in a depressive slump. I started listening to this band and the lead singer said something that changed my life forever. It was to surround yourself with simple things that make you happy and can't easily upset you. The thought is so simple but it actually works. Only keep things that make you happy in your life. Surround yourself with people that make you feel good about yourself. Your happiness is all that matters nothing else does. You got this!

# The Climb

By Bailey Rose

*“Live for the human experience, not the perfect experience.” ~ Sam Golbach*

The year I’d experienced before discovering *The Life Project* was a difficult one. Warning: These next few sentences might be a little depressing, but things get better.

First off, I would just like to say that I came to *The Life Project* with the intention to preach, and give advice to others and complete the challenges posted there. I wanted to continue to grow as a person, see what others had to say, and help others who were going through the same things that I had once gone through. This right here is that story.

I was constantly facing uphill battles, and a lot of the time I just let the landslide bring me down, and keep me down. I’d just been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and depression – both of which I am in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile for. I was recovering from a combined eating disorder, trying to stay clean from self-harm, and still mourning the loss of my best friend who’d committed suicide a year and a half previously. I’d just given up on school and putting effort into the friendships that I currently had, and my relationship with God declined because of it.

The only real relationship I felt like I had and could count on was the relationship I had with my counselor. I had been seeing her for the past two years, and I didn’t want to tell anyone anything about what I was going through but her. I felt

like it made my family burdened, and it made my friends not want to be around me. I felt very alone, and I didn't want to live my life anymore.

It was one night after I had a fight with my sister while dropping her off at softball practice that I had the worst and longest panic attack that I'd ever had. It was during that panic attack that I had tried to take my own life. Long story short: I didn't die, I just lost consciousness and stayed unconscious for a while. I woke up to my mom stroking my face, telling me that she'd received calls from my friends and their parents saying that they were worried about me. Apparently I'd texted everyone iffy texts detailing my thankfulness for them being in my life before I attempted. I lied and said that I wasn't acting up, I was fine and that I had just been struck with a positive mood that I wanted to spread. I couldn't keep myself from holding it in, and I finally confessed to my counselor that I hadn't been recovering well at all. In fact, I felt helpless, and I told her that I had tried to kill myself again (I'd attempted twice previous to the most recent one).

She consoled me as I started crying uncontrollably, and told me that I was still a minor, and now that I was a danger to myself, she had to tell my mom and legally inform my psychiatrist and psychologist, who would then refer me to my state's mental hospital. All of the above happened, and I was admitted for 8 days before they let me out. While I was in there, I realized that I had felt like I hit rock bottom. I was given a journal in which I could write my experiences in, set goals and keep track of

my progress: the same type of thing that is used in *The Life Project*. As I was writing, I just took a minute and lived in the moment. Then I started bawling again.

It was like: “This is where you are right now Bailey”. I thought to myself, what comes after this? I’m desperate and if I’m going to live...if I am going to REALLY recover this time...I am the only one who can make that decision to save myself, to confide in people, and confide in God. It was then and there, praying and crying on my fourth day in the mental hospital, that I made that decision to take action. A decision I never thought I would make for myself. I didn’t want to be sad anymore. I didn’t want to be a hypocrite to myself by saying I was “trying” to recover, but going back and not actually trying. I made the decision to take action.

As soon as I got out of the hospital, I immediately put my relationship with God first. I joined my god-father and his church on a mission trip to New Orleans to try and go out and help people. On the very last day of the mission trip, I left feeling so relieved and peaceful. Something I hadn’t felt in a long time. On that trip, I realized all the things in life that really mattered. The only things that were WORTH thinking about, and pursuing. There was no reason to sulk in unnecessary sadness when there was so much joy and experiences to be gained in the world, and so many connections to make with other people. On that trip, I re-realized that living was a privilege, and I really got the contrast I needed to appreciate the good since I had *already* been through so much bad.

Ever since then, I'd continued making decisions that were the opposite of what I would normally do with my depressed mindset. I could either get up and go do something, or I could sit in my room and do nothing. I would make the decision to go do things.

When I discovered Sam and Colby, they were a few weeks away from re-opening *The Life Project*. I immediately joined once I knew what it was: A place entirely focused on *your* life project. A place to give and get advice, apply knowledge you gain, and make experiences that challenge you to become the best version of yourself.

Since being in *The Life Project*, I've not only learned new important lessons, but I've RE-learned them as well. Things I'd forgotten about were brought to my attention again, and I remember the importance of it. I've gained life-long friends, a supportive family who is always growing, challenging and inspiring one another in all sorts of areas, with many different experiences to relate to. I'm forever thankful for my experience in *The Life Project*. It's continually challenged me to exercise the mindset I've worked so hard to achieve, and apply the things I learned not through a textbook – but through experiences.

# I'm Tired of Hiding

By Rebecca Prudence

*"Every cloud has a silver lining."*

From as early as I can remember I was bullied and not just the usual name calling type. I had it all and it lasted up until I was around 17 years old. School was my prison, kids would physically abuse me (hit me, pour drinks over me) and emotionally abuse me. I was bullied for everything you can think of; weight, hair color, height, and the way I spoke, the way I acted and dressed. The people I went to school with were brutal.

Going to school was my worst nightmare come true. I'd sit on my own in breaks, no one would work with me in class, and it got to the point where I would make myself physically sick so the teachers would allow me to come home. Eventually, when I was about 13 I gained some friends (or at least I thought.) I tried my hardest to just fit in with them and not stand out but even with this group, I always ended up being the punchline and no one cared about me. I reached out to my parents and teachers but none of them quite understood to what extent the bullying was occurring so they did very little to prevent it and 'snitching' resulted in an even bigger backlash of insults.

Sam and Colby, always tell you to be true to yourself and not care about others opinions. I cannot begin to express how right they are in saying that. Eventually,



something within me just clicked. I'd finally had enough of all of the torment. With advice from Sam and Colby, I began to try to ignore the insults. Yes, this is extremely hard to do at first but people only insult another because they have insecurities of their own. No one is perfect. With this in mind, I didn't retaliate to the bullies. I looked above them and brushed their comments off. I started dressing how I wanted, acting how I wanted and showed people the real me, pushing myself out of my comfort zone. No longer hiding, I was ready to be seen. People began to see me and actually became interested in who I was, what I had to say. I finally had a voice.

At first you may not feel confident. You might be shy and insecure but if you put on a brave face, push yourself and try, in the end you'll find that you've made it. You no longer need to put on a brave face, you will be that strong independent person. Standing out and showing confidence in myself actually helped me gain good grades in school and at university. Even managing to get 1 spot out of hundreds of students in university to study abroad and do you know why? They said 'You have a unique perspective and a strong voice, you're going to go far'. Don't ever doubt yourself or hide who you really are, it's only going to hold you back and make life 10x more difficult.

There will always be someone prettier than you, smarter than you or better than you, it's inevitable but they are not you. Being unique, standing out and setting yourself apart from everyone else is how you can make yourself truly happy, that's the

key to being successful in life. Hold your head high and be proud of who you are. You must be confident in your own abilities, it's then that you'll go onwards and upwards.

# Work In Progress

By Cassie

*"Nothing is impossible, the word itself says 'I'm Possible'."*

My story started to take a turn for an uphill battle when I was about 5. At this age, I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which made school more difficult for me. When I was 6, I also moved to Georgia and a whole new school. New groups of people that I don't know. It was when I moved there, when I started going to a new elementary school, that all the bullying in my life started. But I didn't let that stop me from trying out new things.

I tried out for my schools talent show, and it was there that I discovered my love of singing. I took this newly found passion and moved a step further by auditioning for chorus, and I made it in! It was also here that I met a very important and significant person in my life. Another important person in my life was my best friend Jennifer in 2009 on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. She is still one of my best friends to this day.

From 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 7<sup>th</sup> grade, things got increasingly difficult for me. I started hurting myself, usually with my own hands. I would scratch and rub the skin on my arms until they were raw, and then I scratched the scabs off. I was extremely anxious and couldn't bring myself to stop. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I developed my hair pulling disorder, called trichotillomania. In 2013, I started going to a new school, and on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I discovered Sam and Colby – the very people that would later form *The Life*

*Project* and help me change my life for the better. Around this time, I had stopped hurting myself again, but I relapsed after my Grammy Lucy passed away August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Then Sam and Colby announced they were opening a platform called *The Life Project* February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I immediately joined, and it was there that I met one of my best friends, Raine. She is one of the many people on *The Life Project* that has helped me through a lot of the things I've struggled with, and I am so thankful for that.

In *The Life Project*, Sam and Colby and the members are all so caring. There are people from all over the world, and all different backgrounds, so there's always someone who understands what I'm going through. They truly are like a family, and I don't know what I'd do without everyone there. I have nothing to say to everyone there except "thank you" and "I love you."

# Interviewing Zoe

*“Never judge a book by its cover.”*

**What was your family life like growing up?**

Family life was hard for me growing up because my mum and dad split up when I was six.

**If you could teach the world one lesson, what would it be?**

If I could teach the world one lesson it would be to not judge a book by its cover because whatever size, shape or color you are doesn't mean you have to be judged for being that way.

**How was school for you growing up?**

School was also really hard for me because I got bullied quite a lot but I finally got a bit older and moved on.

**What's something that happened to you when you were younger that shaped who you are now?**

I think it was my bullies that proved to me and taught me that I didn't deserve to be treated so poorly and no one else did too.

**Is there a person in your life who pushed you to keep going?**

The person that has kept me going is my mum because if I didn't have her I wouldn't get through the day and I would never laugh again which is horrible.

**What's one mistake that you made in your life that you learned from?**

Probably having friends that I couldn't rely on because I have learned that a real friend is someone that makes you feel good and doesn't let you down.

**Why did you want to be a part of this book?**

I wanted to be a part of this book because with *The Life Project* I have gained so many new friends and this is our Life Project and I wouldn't miss that for the world.

**What is something you have done that you feel most proud of?**

Definitely standing up for myself because that was the moment that I realized all the goodness that I was missing was on *TLP* and that I didn't deserve some bully picking on me.

**What do you most admire in life?**

I admire kindness because even little things can help someone's day go a whole lot better!

**What is one insecurity that you once had in yourself that you learned to overcome?**

Probably my biggest insecurities is my weight but I overcame that by thinking even though I might be big-made I am still a nice person!

**Now that you've answered these questions and had a chance to think about some of the things involved in this Q and A, is there anything else you would like to add for the future readers of this?**

To all readers people may judge your book by its cover but your book has a lot of pages, don't change! I love you all and thank you xoxo.

Our Stepping Stone—  
*The Life Project*

ONWARD  
— and —  
UPWARD





“I found *The Life Project* through Sam and Colby’s YouTube video, and because of that I got interested and I wanted to know more about it.” - **@Joana**

“Well, from Twitter. I first heard of Sam and Colby the night of a Valentine’s Day event that they were hosting in 2015. I saw them posting about this huge project they had been working on and I became a part of it a few months after they opened up TLP.” - **@Kaitlyn3212**

“I found out about *The Life Project* when I started watching a lot of Sam and Colby’s videos. I kept hearing them say that they were so excited for *The Life Project* coming back and I wanted to find out what it was. I kept up with their updates and it sounded really cool at first but I didn't know much about it. Once I found out that it could possibly help my anxiety, I really wanted to join.” - **@Allybp**

“I’ve been supporting Sam and Colby since 2014 so I’ve been following them for quite some time. When they first announced that they been working on something big, I was so curious to know what it was! Then on February 14, when *The Life Project* officially opened, it intrigued me and I was so curious to know what it was about! So that following Friday I joined *The Life Project* and have loved it ever since!” - **@Hannah18**



“I first found out about Sam and Colby through a collab vine. I started following their YouTube channel and a while after that they made their big surprise announcement video about the project. I couldn’t help but become a part of it.” - **@Khera\_Carter**

“I heard about *The Life Project* from one of Sam and Colby's Facebook videos before I was even really a fan of them. I blew this off the first time but then when it reopened and I actually found out what it was, I was hooked and wanted to join.” - **@Maya J**

“I had been following Sam and Colby’s YouTube content and social media for a few months beforehand when they introduced the new site. I did not really see the need for it as I did not need help with my confidence and self-esteem personally. However, the second time the opportunity came around I decided to go ahead with it because I wanted to place my confidence into those who had none, so I decided to become a member.” - **@Daniel John Felix**

“From the boys, although I had no clue what the heck they were talking about at first. The day they re-opened TLP, I took a chance and joined. I kid you not – that was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my seventeen years of living.” - **@Mary\_Lou\_**

# How *The Life Project* Has Helped Me

*"You Got This."* - Sam and Colby

*"The Life Project* has helped me by connecting me to people that I can actually call my friends. It has shown me that there will always be someone that understands what you're going through and can help you. It's wonderful!" - **@\_iivxx\_**

"In too many ways to list, but mainly gaining confidence, and letting me know that people actually do care about me and my well-being. They tell me I'm not worthless and that I mean a lot to them. I have a family here that loves me, I have friends that actually want to talk with me, and I was starting to think I would never find that." - **@EmeraldHearts**

"Man ... *The Life Project* has helped me in so many areas of my life. For example, since joining TLP, I have been more productive, positive, and vocal. I walk confidently and I make eye contact during conversations. This place has simply helped me break through my scared exterior and be who I am completely." - **@Hannah18**

"Since joining *The Life Project*, I can proudly say that I am stronger, more confident, and happier than I have ever been. The things that used to get to me and would easily bring me down, don't anymore and the mindset I've built has grown stronger and stronger with each passing day."

- **@Lexi**

“*The Life Project* has helped me because for once there is no one judging me and no one being negative towards me. This is a huge thing because I never really had that sense of support. I feel like I can be myself and can do anything I want.” - **@Maya J**

“I remember coming into *The Life Project*, so excited because I really felt like I had something that I could bring to it. I love helping people, and through that, I have been able to better develop my social skills. I've also become so much more organized and have been challenging myself, and going out of my comfort zone. *The Life Project* has talked a lot about comfort, and it really made me realize that I did have a bad habit of retreating to comfortable situations whenever I wasn't sure and that kept me from living my life to the fullest. By going out of those comfort zones, I realized what I was capable of. It's only made me more motivated to start doing more things! TLP has helped me become more confident, and more daring. Overall: it has helped me start living, and taking what I learn from my experiences and *applying* those things.” -

**@Onyx101**

“It has helped with my depression a lot. I'm not shy anymore and I'm pretty outgoing now. I've also made a lot of friends because of *The Life Project*.” - **@Hopelan\_01**

“TLP has helped me work on my confidence levels and taught me not to hide. Being unique and not giving a crap what others think has truly made me happy. TLP taught me that.”

- **@Rebecca Prudence**

# What *The Life Project* Means To Me

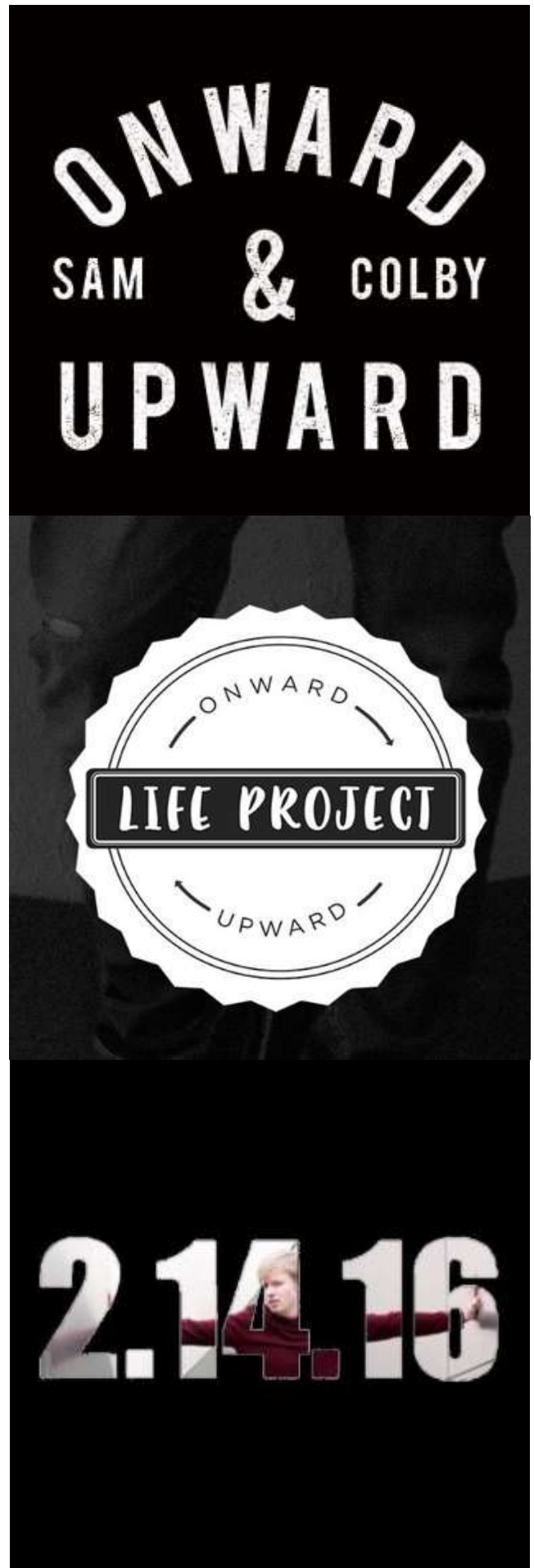


“*The Life Project* and its members have become like family to me. It has given me a place of overwhelming support, love, and a place where I can share my experiences, thoughts and struggles without any judgement: and it's not just support I receive. I also get a lot of helpful advice from people to help deal with what I'm going through! TLP has given me lifelong friends, and has helped me improve my quality of life, and all around improve me as a person. Every day I am challenged and inspired to test myself and put effort into trying!” -

**@Onyx101**

“Everything. I honestly don't know where I would be without it, and without the people on *The Life Project*. These strangers are no longer unknown faces, they're family.”

- **@EmeraldHearts**





Edit created by—@Brooke15

“*The Life Project* means family, love and joy. It is a place where I can come to meet people who are so accepting and understanding and those are the type of people that you should always surround yourself with.” - @\_iivxx\_

“To me *The Life Project* is like a big supportive family. It's a place where I can go and say “Hey! I challenged myself today!” and people will comment saying “I’m so proud of you!” It makes me feel like I can do anything.” - @Allybp

“Let me put it the best way I know how. I write – I mean I write a lot. The thing is I only write about things that hold a great amount of meaning for me. There are multiple poems dedicated this community of amazing human beings. I wouldn’t do that unless they meant something to me and inspired me in the very first place. They mean the absolute world to me, I have met my best friend through this, and all of them are cherished in my heart.” - @Mary\_Lou\_

“*The Life Project* means the world to me. I have met so many amazing people. I have absolutely no idea where I'd be without this outstanding family holding me in their arms.”

- @Khera\_Carter

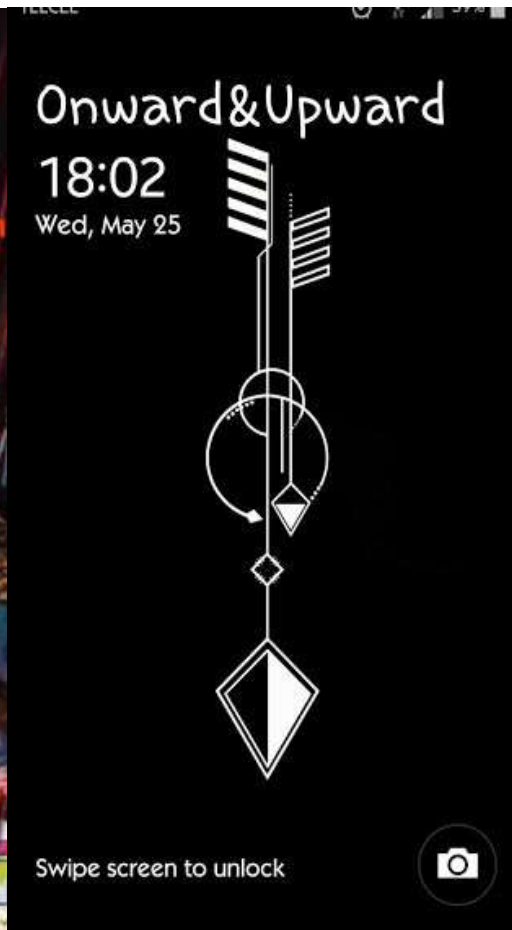
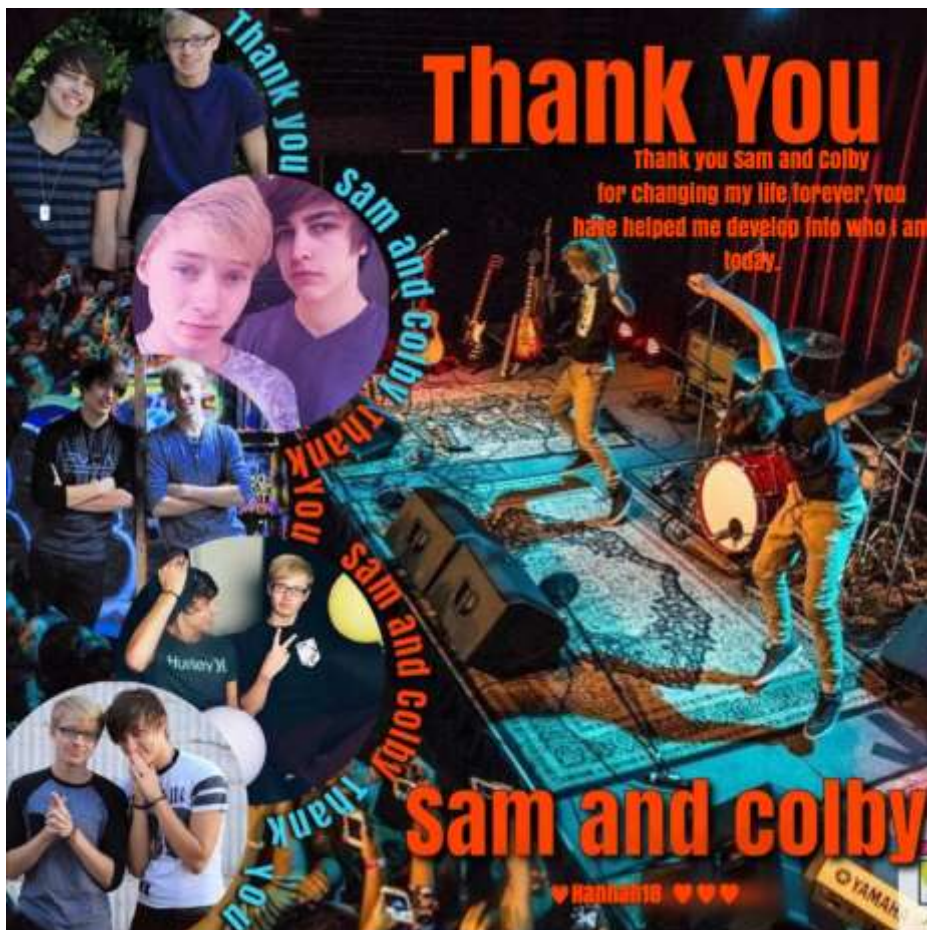


“The Life Project to me is so much more than a community. To me, it’s a family that I never had. Growing up in a broken home, I never knew what the feeling of family was really like and once joining, I discovered the true meaning of a family. It is an amazing, supportive, and safe place that I love going to when I need someone to talk to or simply to spark conversation with.” - @Lexi

“TLP is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. It has helped me so much and for me it means a better life – a happier one.” - @Jennifer

Edit created by—@Hannah18

Edit created by—@Johnny



# For Sam and Colby

Dear boys,

*The Life Project* Family

want to thank you for

showing us how to

overcome our fears, pains

and anxieties.







For taking the time to remind us of our worth, talking with us throughout the most painful memories and laughing with us through the best of them. For showing us that it's okay to make mistakes, but that it's not okay to let them keep you down.

But most importantly...

@Mya



@Kaitlyn3212



@Lexi



Thank you for *The Life Project*.  
For the family we've gained.  
For the love we've acquired.  
For the smiles we've found.  
Thank you.

@EmeraldHearts



@Lexi



## Dear Reader

You did it, you made it to the end of the book. We want you to know how grateful and humble we are that you took the time to sit down and read this story from start to finish. It was a lot to go through, a lot of emotions and a lot more stories but we hope that when you close this book, set it down, and go on with your life – you’ve taken something from our stories.

You saw a lot. You saw our pasts, the parts of us we opened up to you, but you also saw our present. A lot of us were alone for a long time, unable to have anyone to rely on in times of need and no one to talk to when things were very hard. Perhaps we had someone, but they weren’t willing to listen.

Then we stumbled upon *The Life Project*, started by two normal, teenage boys and suddenly there were people who were ready to listen. *The Life Project*, for us, became the family some of us never had the chance to have. A haven of people who understood our own grievances and were there to comfort us and help us through.

*The Life Project* was in fact our stepping-stones when the ground was shaky, the flash light when the path was dark, and the warmth when the coldness threatened to seep through. We’re proud to be a part of this project, to be considered *The Life Project* family. Now there’s something we want to tell you.

You are a part of this family too.

Do you believe us when we tell you that? Or do you need proof?

Well.

You're reading your proof right now. This book is your connection to us, every single one of us who wanted to let you in with welcoming arms. The proof *is* us because we took the time to tell you our stories so that you could learn from them, because we want you to beat this game called life and do it with friends by your side.

We've told you our stories.

Now it's your turn.

We're listening.

# Mentionable Names



Author: Mary Lou

Co-Author and Illustrator: Bailey Rose

Editors: Amy and Doug

Biographers: *The Life Project* Family

Inspiration: *The Life Project* Founders