

Mattie Steinberg
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Dear Liz Murray,

I first read your book "Breaking Night" five years ago, sitting in a classroom at the expensive private middle school my parents emptied out their pockets for me to attend. Although your story of hardship, morals and determination was something I could never fully understand, especially at that age and at that point in my life, it resonated deeply within me. I am now a junior in highschool, and recently decided to reread your book. It shocked me how much more I understood your story, not only due to my progression as a reader, but due to the things I've experienced since then. Through your book, you taught me that I am capable, smart and motivated. You taught me that I hold the power to make my own decisions, that even good people make mistakes, and most importantly, that I am the only one who gets to decide what I will make out of my life.

Over the past year, I ran away from home, I got caught shoplifting, and I dated a depressed and emotionally abusive drug dealer. I am not proud of any of these things, but I don't think I'd be the person I am today if they had never happened. I never thought I'd sit in the back of a grocery store getting interrogated by the police, just like I never thought I'd sit in the passenger seat of someone's car, watching them weigh out drugs to hand through the open window. I've learned from these experiences, and in a way, I am grateful for them. I am beginning to learn right from wrong, what kind of person I am, and what kind of person I want to become. I understand now how it feels to see someone you love trapped in a world of greed, drugs, and unhealthy decisions. I feel like I can finally sympathize with your feelings regarding your highschool boyfriend, Carlos. With the help of "Breaking Night," I am finally learning to grow from my mistakes and the mistakes of people around me, and I do my best to use them as motivation to become a better person. Recently, I filled out an application to become a volunteer at the police station, and I hope to find a career in law enforcement when I'm older. I want to help people with lives similar to how yours was as a child, and I want nothing more than to make the world a better, safer place to live.

My mom had me when she was eighteen, and she married my dad shortly after, just before she turned twenty. For the majority of my life, this is all I knew about their relationship. When I asked my mom why they got a divorce, she'd tell me that she did it for my sister and I, and that she didn't feel like my father knew how to be a good dad. In the beginning of your book, while looking at a picture of your mother, you wondered whether the two of you shared any similarities besides your physical features. Neither my mom nor I were homeless at sixteen like the two of you were, but now that me and her are closer, she's been able to open up to me and I am surprised at the many parallels I see within our lives. My mom has been here for me

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throughout the many rough times I've had this year, and I think we've both learned lots about each other because of it. I've gotten to hear about her past and her experiences as a teenager, something that we never could talk about before. She was here for me throughout my relationship with a boy who shares lots of similarities with the person my dad was when they were young. She helped me stay strong when I decided to breakup with my boyfriend, and helped me maneuver my way out of that world full of illegal, scary moments. With a dad that got caught up in things similar to what your parents did, I am thankful that he found the strength to get help and that I am able to have a relationship with him today. Even more so, I am thankful that I have a mom that doubles as a role model, someone who took her life into her own hands and turned it into something great.

I have always done well in school, and up until this year, it was easy to get good grades with very little effort. I decided over the summer to enroll in the IB diploma program, and for the first time in my life, I feel like I am being challenged in school. This is a new feeling for me, and I have found that it is easy for me to become distracted, waste my time, and drown in the stress of everything. There have been so many days this year where I am left questioning why I decided to enroll in such difficult classes, wondering why I couldn't have just let myself take it easy these last two years until college. It is times like these when I think of your story. You were able to get yourself to school everyday without a place to call home and throughout huge, jolting changes in your life. Because you could survive that, coming out of it as successful as you are, I am filled with hope for the bright future I know I can earn for myself.

You've helped me through more than you'll ever know, and I look to you and your story for motivation in times when things seem unbearable. You have given me so much hope for my own future, and have taught me that it is okay to make mistakes. Because of you, I know that I have the power to become the person I want to be. I want to thank you for everything you've done for me, and congratulate you on the life you've made for yourself.

You are an inspiration.

Sincerely,

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Mattie Steinberg Grade 11

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