

ONE LAST TIME

It didn't work.
I tried everything.
And then I tried everything else.
Coming back from online school was intimidating.
Frustrating.
Different.
Life was different.
Everything was different.
Asking for help would show weakness
At least that's what I thought.
I tried to handle it on my own. But I couldn't.
And I didn't want to admit that to anyone – not even myself.
So I started vaping.
One small inhale of nicotine opened the doors of bliss.
The constant cycle of anxiety froze.
Time didn't exist.
It was what I had been searching for.
I craved the 10-second buzz.
One inhale, and the world stopped.
But 10 seconds later, I felt more anxious than before.
And then came the addiction.
The first hit.
Maybe another.
Then the next.
And just one more.
It was the only way to reach a moment of peace.
But soon it wasn't enough.
I craved something stronger.
Something that worked longer.
Something like weed.
It lasted for hours.
I could stay in the good moments without the fear that they would come to an end.
I told myself that it was normal.

Everyone does stuff like this, right?
Wrong. I couldn't sleep without it.
I couldn't function.
It became a nervous habit.
It was how I coped with the hardest experiences.
But soon, it was how I coped with any inconvenience.
It opened a door that I couldn't close.
It controlled me.
I didn't think I had a "problem."
My friends said I was addicted, but I just laughed it off.
I could stop whenever I wanted to.
At least I thought I could.
The moment the high wore off, everything was worse than before.
It was a fake form of confidence.
I went through pod after pod saying, "This is my last one."
But I didn't quit.
I couldn't quit.
I was addicted.
Addicted to the emptiness that consumed me.
I had no idea of the damage I was doing.
Physically – and mentally.
I couldn't concentrate on anything.
I had no self-control.
I could have asked for help – I should have.
But instead, I turned to things that made it worse.
The normalizing of vaping and weed made quitting hard.
I'd been doing it for so long, it had become mindless.
But was it worth it?
Was it worth being grounded by my parents for six months?
Was it worth letting them down?
Was it worth losing control over my life?
I knew the answer to that. I regained control.
And I didn't have to rely on a drug anymore.

STORY BY KATIE BURKE

