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IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING AND YOU DON'T WANT TO OPEN UP ABOUT IT TO ANYONE, FIND A WAY THAT YOU CAN OPEN UP TO YOURSELF. BUT DON'T JUST GIVE UP, WHETHER THAT BE HARM YOURSELF, STOP TRYING IN SCHOOL OR STOP TRYING IN LIFE PERIOD.

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BROOKLYN ADAMS

JUNIOR BROOKLYN ADAMS OVERCOMES HER STRUGGLES WITH HER MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH 'WILDERNESS CAMP'

Numb. I feel numb.

Rushed footsteps against tile, hushed voices bouncing off white, thin walls, high-pitched chirps from the machine sitting next to her.

Where am I?

Then-freshman Brooklyn Adams fluttered her eyelids open, just a crack. A small crack, but wide enough to look down and get a blurry view of her limp body.

She could barely focus her eyes on the baby blue hospital gown covering her from her chest to her knees – its sleeve just short of the crook of her elbow where IVs stabbed into her veins. She couldn't feel them.

Her parents stood over her hospital bed. Their blurry faces wore weary looks. Then, in a hushed whisper, for a reason still unknown, Adams said seven words to them before crashing back into numbness:

'I want to be in the mountains.'

Adams had struggled with her mental health for as long as she could remember. Even when she was too young to place the feeling, it was there, lurking, whispering in her head.

"I've spent my life just trying to have self-love," Adams said. "I would give so much of myself to others and not be able to give anything to myself, which completely mentally drains you."

By the time Adams was 14, the whispering in her head became louder. It began to take over everything in her life. She started hanging out with the wrong kids, doing the wrong things. She was no longer in control of anything. Not her mental health, not her relationships, not her own life. All of them were falling apart right in front of her.

"I didn't even know who I was and I just lost myself over and over again," Adams said. "I felt so alone and I couldn't be by myself because then I was stuck in my thoughts again."

Finally, discharged from the hospital on Jan. 13, Adams went home. Her first day back, her dad told her she would be going to Utah for 'Wilderness Camp' the next day. With only 24 hours to process, he drove her to the airport at 3 a.m. on Jan. 14.

Once they landed, they drove two hours to somewhere called 'base,' listening to Noah Kahan's "Stick Season" the whole way there. Thoughts flooded her brain, but not negative ones. Instead, Adams imagined what the camp would look like – a big stone castle, bright green grass, wild horses and rainbows shooting out of the sky.

At base, she said her goodbyes and her dad left. Adams was now on her own – except for the two strange men driving her to camp.

After what felt like hours into the drive, a different view stretched over her window. A snowy, white, familiar view. Her parents had listened to her seven-word wish.

She was surrounded by mountains.

"I've always loved the mountains," Adams said. "Seeing them while driving and being able to have that clarity, to have something familiar around me, brought me peace and so much comfort."

The car door slammed shut behind her. And immediately Adams's foot sank into the knee-height snow under her.

It's freezing.

Adams took in the campsite. Snow coated every inch of the ground, sleeping bags sprawled across its surface. No stone castle, no wild horses, not even a bathroom – it was nothing like she imagined.

She was scared. She was cold. And she was exhausted.

The only familiar things were the faces worn by almost every girl there. It was the same face that looked back at Adams in her reflection.

All the girls were just as tired, just as scared and just as lost as her. And she could tell – they needed her just as much as she needed them.

"Everyone began to like me a lot," Adams said. "I knew that was going to happen when I went in there because I was happy, unlike most other people. My mindset was 'Why would anyone want to have someone come into something they've been at for a while bringing more negativity?'"

"Stick Season" by Noah Kahan blasted out of the makeshift speaker – made with an empty can and small tablet – at max volume, stretching miles, unheard by any human ears besides the 10 girls dancing up the trail. They yelled the words at the top of their lungs – the first time the girls had heard music in weeks.

Another long day of hiking 10 miles through waist-height snow, with a 70-pound backpack on her back – Adams was exhausted. But their hard work that week didn't go unnoticed. The counselors rewarded her and the rest of the girls with a night-time hike and music.

Her days for the past 12 weeks all the same – waking up early, eating oatmeal dry or with hot water, packing up all her belongings into one backpack and hiking seven to 10 miles to the next campsite.

After their hike, they sat around a fire – a fire they made themselves using nothing but flint and steel – and did group therapy. Adams was never one to sit around and 'talk feelings'. 'Talking feelings' was new to her, foreign even. But she still did it, every day, anyway.

And by her third week there, she wasn't afraid of sharing her emotions anymore. It

was no longer something she had to do, but something she *wanted* to do.

With every feeling she shared, every mile she hiked, every breath of cold Utah air, Adams could feel herself changing. She could feel herself getting better.

Maybe she was ready to go home.

The crowd was jam-packed – 'Noah Kahan' spread across the glowing backdrop on the stage in front of her. She was seeing her favorite artist. He was performing her favorite song. And at that moment, everything felt okay.

Her life was going back to 'normal'.

Now, 14 months out of wilderness camp, Adams was starting to feel like herself again. The group of 10 girls and three camp counselors – replaced by her family and friends. The bright, barely out-of-reach, stars – replaced by the white light bulb hanging from her bedroom ceiling.

But the past 14 months hadn't been easy. Recovery wasn't just listening to Noah Kahan and hanging out with her friends. It was therapy. It was tears. And it was hard.

With every week home, came another challenge. And with every celebratory family dinner came another discussion for restrictions on seeing her friends and her screen time.

Adams started with four therapy sessions a week and eventually worked her way down to none. Talking and opening up were hard. But with time and effort, they got easier. Talking about her emotions, spending more time with her family, self-affirmations – all were progress.

Soon enough Adams was back at school – relearning how to balance school, social life and family life all at once.

And now she was at a Noah Kahan concert listening to the same song she listened to 14 months ago. The one that followed her through her recovery.

As the lyrics of "Stick Season" rang through the audience, tears filled Adams' eyes but they were unlike the ones that filled her eyes before – this time she wasn't sad.

"All I could picture was driving into the mountains and how scared I felt," Adams said. "Then I realized, 'Oh everything is actually ok. I'm here now and I'm ok.' I never realized that this song had such an impact on me. It's really what made me at peace with everything."