

As my high school career comes to a close, I've looked back, time and time again. I've wondered about where I came from, how I've grown and changed, all the lessons I've learned along the way, and how I've blossomed into the person I am today. I've seen a lot, had once and a lifetime opportunities, and learned some real ugly truths about the world. One recurring thought in my head, second to "my parents are always right", is the bus stop. You may be asking yourself why? Or think "maybe she had a boring childhood", but the real reason is that it's taught me life lessons, and has shown me how people, things, and time change, all so fast.

The social changes for kids in the 21st century and learning how to socially navigate ourselves in the world has shown me that being nice, especially in today's world, is crucial to how people see you.

From elementary school until about fifth grade my parents always walked with me down to the bus stop in the morning. I loved it, they'd chit chat with the other parents, and although lame, I loved watching them do it. Seeing how other people talk and be nice to each other always made me happy as a kid. The other kids and I would talk and run around while the parents did this. Sometimes we'd join in on the adult conversation, and feel very grown up. My neighborhood was closer than most. We always knew what was up with people; we always were supportive and helpful to everyone. Once a month we had potluck dinners, and we called it "Soup Night". I loved that. We would always talk and be a supportive community. During the warmer months, the whole neighborhood would stand in the road all talking, while our dogs played together. I was raised to be nice, treat everyone with respect, and be social with the adults in my life that talked to me, especially the neighbors. I was taught the term called 'community,' and there at Oakland Lane, that's what we had. A community, where everyone was social, helpful, understanding, compassionate, and supportive.

There at the bus stop of Oakland Lane, were Meghan and I. A year apart, we were inseparable growing up, playdates, running around during summer, always asking to play with one another, pestering our parents for 15 minutes more of play time. We played hangman on the bus, and were always sitting together. Eventually our parents let us walk to the stop together. But little did my 12-year-old mind know that our friendship would rapidly come to a halt. It wasn't because our parents stopped walking us, or drove us to school, and it certainly wasn't that we were growing up. It was that Meghan got her first flip phone, and that changed everything.

Meghan stopped talking to me at the bus stop and had her headphones in; she was too busy texting or was on the phone with someone. She completely ignored me as if I wasn't there, or as if I wasn't as cool as her for not having a phone. I vividly recall thinking I was lame, I didn't have a phone, and just stood there alone and quiet. This of course drove me nuts, I didn't know what I did wrong to "wreck" our friendship. But then something happened to my dad, someone who has known Meghan her whole life. He said, "Hi Meghan", as he waited for us to get off the bus, and she just blatantly ignored him, as if he were just another rock in the gravel road. Eventually, her parents drove her every single morning to the bus stop until seventh grade. My once childhood friend had been replaced with an idling car. She never said a single word to me. Every time I tried to speak, she'd turn her headphone music up, and ignore me.

I still walked to the "stop" every morning, no matter the weather, or how cold it was out, "and that was final" according to my mother. Meghan, no, with her hair down, and ripped American Eagle jeans, on rainy days, snowy days, humid days, and too cold days, always had her mom or dad drive her to the "stop". Whoever was in the car never put down the window, or said "hello," and hardly ever waved. This was all so odd for me, considering how good of family friends we were.

By seventh grade though, her parents made her take the bus, instead of driving her. My mom always had me leave ten minutes early to go to the "stop" to make sure I always made the bus. Meghan, on the other hand, was always tardy and boy did she make it clear. The bus would be waiting for her to do her "strut walk" down the street. I coined the term "strut walk" because it was as if she knew she was late and didn't care that she was holding other people up, while making no clear effort to get there on time, and she'd walk with lots of attitude while doing something on her phone. Often times the bus would pull over and have to wait for her. "She was late for the bus and not even running to catch it!" was a thought always running through my head. Every time this happened, which was almost daily, I sat and watched in disbelief and started to realize how rude and snobby that was. I could see her garage door open from the bus and, always would be nice and say to the bus driver "hold the bus, Meghan is coming". She actually thought the world revolved around her, and that people would always wait for her. But one day I was tired of being nice and waiting, and I went for rugged justice. I watched as her garage door went up, and I didn't tell the bus driver. We drove off from Oakland Lane, leaving her behind. This occurred a couple times, and sometimes I even got risky by seeing her at the end

of the driveway and didn't say a thing. I made the bus every single morning, and was hardly ever late, and when I was, I ran to catch the bus, so what was her excuse?

By eighth grade, we had two new boys join the "stop". As the boys got on and off with us each day, they also never said a word to any of us. Every morning we all just stood there in complete silence. Every single day of the school year. Now imagine that, four kids, one bus, and one road that connected us all, and no one said a word. All of them, but me, on their phones, with headphones in. As I tried my hardest to fit in, I joined in, and just stayed silent everyday. While focusing on fitting in and being quiet, I picked up on a strange pattern that still occurs to this day: no matter who got to the bus first, which was always almost me, I was the last one on. I was the one who stood out in whatever weather Maine threw at us the longest, why should Meghan, and the two other boys push past me to get on first, while not saying "excuse me." It's not because I think "I need to be first," no, it's because it's an unspoken rule, whoever gets there first, should get on first, out of respect to the other person. Bored without a phone unlike the others, I turned this into a game by making sure if I was first there, you could bet I was getting on that bus first.

As we all got older and became high schoolers, we still didn't say a thing to each other. By now I had a phone, and finally felt like I was fitting in. I joined in and put my headphones in every morning now. Now we had about six kids at the bus stop, and still, there we all stood in silence. By my sophomore year Meghan had stopped taking the bus and got her license. This didn't change much, and she was still anti-social. She never waved to anyone; she drove past on the street when they smiled or waved at her first. Again this is an unspoken rule of friendliness: if someone waves or smiles at you, you do it back. When you follow this rule it's a gesture that shows you're nice and friendly. I remember one day, my sister and her brother were walking home from school and were walking in the center of the road, and she just honked at them.

Unlike Meghan, in the community aspect I was thriving. She just sat inside all day hanging out with her boyfriend, while I got jobs, such as lawn mowing, pet and babysitting. I was social with all my neighbors, old and young. I was always at soup night; Meghan never showed up anymore.

From a young age, watching my parents socialize with other neighbors at the bus stop or while our dogs played, instilled social values in me that I believe are crucial in today's world. Despite the fact that I use my cell phone everyday, I kind of wish it wasn't around. I sound like a hypocrite with my phone next to me, but I have witnessed a phone change the way someone acts

towards another person, their life sucked into a screen. It just seems sad. Although cell phones are in our everyday lives that doesn't mean our social values such as friendliness, kindness, and niceness have to be compromised.