

## Telling Tales Performance

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People describe me as quiet, responsible, dependable, patient. That's how I would describe myself, too.

So, it's hard to believe what happened the day of March the 7th, 2014. It's hard for people to believe I was expelled from high school. Nobody believes me. But it happened.

It all began the night before, on March 6, 2014, on Twitter. There was another student, let's call her Monica. We had 1 class together, but we'd never really talked. I didn't even know her last name. We got into an argument on Twitter about her leggings, because I said they looked like Skittles. We argued a little on Twitter, nothing too much. She started talking about how she'd see me at school the next day, to confront me. I wasn't too worried about it.

At school the next day, everything was fine. I didn't really see her, but when I did see her in the hallway, we didn't say anything to each other, so I figured we were kind of over it. But when 7th hour came around, and that's the one class we had together. She was with some of her friends, and I don't know if that had something to do with it or not.

We saw each other in the rotunda. I had to walk towards her to get to class, but she started walking towards me, too. She was talking smack to me, but I can't even remember what it was about now. And in a matter of 2 seconds, we started fighting. And then some boy came and tried to get me off of her, and then I fell. She kept hitting me. The teacher came and she kept fighting me. And then finally the fight was broken up.

I got sent to the office. I sat there for like 20 minutes. And then the assistant principal got my phone to see my Twitter account. They wouldn't let me call my mom. Eventually, I called my mom and she came to the school. I was still really angry. We met with the assistant principal and eventually went home.

After being out for 10 days, the school told me I couldn't go back. And then they called, and said I had to go to an expulsion hearing.

I was sad and mad. I wasn't so sad about leaving that school, because I didn't really like it. But I sad about not being able to go to school, because I like school, just not that school.

I had just started at this school, and only finished 1 semester.

My mom's job forced us to move and adjust our lives a few times. We moved to Milan from Chicago in 2013 during my sophomore year, and I'm not going to lie it was a hard adjustment, but I came with open eyes and was willing to give it a chance. Starting a new school can be scary already, but when you're thrown in a new state, and being in high school, makes it 10x worse. Plus, going from a big city to the middle of nowhere and no one I knew, made it even harder.

I started school in September, and it wasn't all that bad, but I wasn't really in my comfort zone. When I got to the school no one really talked to me, even though I put myself out there. I thought maybe I just had to give it some time, and they would come around. Maybe I came off the wrong way, but I didn't really know. I gave it a few months, but nothing really changed, so I stopped worrying about it and decided to stay to myself the rest of the year. But obviously, that didn't work.

Before the expulsion hearing, my mom and I met with the Student Advocacy Center and Peri. I didn't know what to expect from that meeting. I was feeling nervous. But I left thinking SAC would help me stay in school. I felt more hopeful. We talked about my story and what to say at the hearing. My mom worked on getting letters of support to share at the hearing. Peri says she had never seen so many letters of support.

The night of the hearing was long and stressful. We waited for hours to go before the board. It was something like 10 p.m. before we got before them.

At the hearing, a dean of students said that I pushed him out of the way and made him lose his balance when we were in the office. My mom was there and couldn't believe what he was saying. In her statement, she said, that absolutely was not true. At one point, school staff said that an officer had been in the office the whole time, but we pointed out that she was out talking to my mom's friend. School staff eventually apologized and rescinded that statement.

But unfortunately, despite all my letters of reference, my good grades, my clean discipline record, my apologies, despite Peri arguing that this was not a mandatory

expulsion and that I should be allowed to come back to school right away, the board voted to expel me.

I didn't know what I was going to do. I felt like I was not going to graduate. Ever.

Peri and my mom worked with the WAVE program to get me into school within a month. WAVE is a year-round, self-paced learning program, at a computer lab in downtown Ypsilanti. I was going 4 days a week half-days for a while, and then 3 days a week. I went there for a year. But then after a while, sitting at home so much made me not want to do work anymore.

During the year at WAVE, I became involved in two other SAC programs. I started going to Youth Action of Michigan after school at Ypsilanti High School. It was a place to help and stop other kids from being pushed out of school. Being at home, not in school, doesn't motivate you. No one should have to do that. Youth Action would do events to raise awareness -- like one at the Ozone House with Rep. Adam Zemke, one in Lansing on the Capitol Lawn, a conference in Lansing. And there was a panel at Ypsilanti High School, where I met the high school principal at the time, Justin Jennings. He started recruiting me to come to Ypsilanti High School. It felt good. I had felt like no one would want me, but Mr. Jennings made me feel hopeful.

So for my senior year, I enrolled at Ypsilanti High School and started with another SAC program, called Check and Connect. Anell is my mentor and he tries to make sure we're always on top of things. Anell was the one who helped me get into Ypsilanti High School, because the new principal didn't know me, and it took awhile for them to review my application. If we need help with anything, like my senior project, college applications, papers, staying on top of my grades, Anell is there to help me, and is always encouraging me.

So here I am. Ready to graduate in June from Ypsilanti High School.

Just like everybody else, I can't believe sometimes that I was expelled and kicked out for something that started as a comment about leggings looking like Skittles. This became so much bigger than I imagined. Even when I was applying for colleges, Michigan State and Depaul haven't yet accepted me, but instead asked me disciplinary records.

But Western Michigan University has accepted me. I want to study business administration and some day I want to get a law degree.

Even though I'm doing well now, don't be fooled. Expelling students is ineffective. It makes students lose motivation and risk getting off track. It doesn't get to the root of the problem and it doesn't work.

Instead, schools should look at all the circumstances going on, and come up with a support plan to keep students in school. Instead of 180 days, removal should be shorter. Even 10 days for me was enough time to get how serious this was.

I want to thank my mom for being my support system throughout this whole experience. I would have been lost without her.

And I want to thank Student Advocacy Center. We need the Advocacy Center, because they give hope that families don't have.