

Unmatched Socks - Rose, Year 6, NSW

Closing the cupboards, turning off the flickering light, making sure my bedroom door was at a perfect angle. These were just a few of the many obsessive rituals that I did before bed each night. Mum thought I was crazy, procrastinating to stay up later.

“Anne, get a move on! You’ve got school tomorrow!” she would scream impatiently at me, while reading a bedtime story to my baby brother.

Little did she know that each night before bed I wrestled in my mind with worry, ensuring that every single miniscule step of my nighttime ritual was completed.

Mum never understood me or my ways. These compulsive acts I had to complete each night to set me up for a night of sleep. If they weren’t done in a certain order, that’s when the fighting and tears began. As I drift off into my deep sleep, I ponder what life would be like if I didn’t have all these peculiar habits.

As I woke up the next morning, I felt like a sponge that had just had water squeezed out of it, drained. My thoughts were vague and the dark circles under my eyes made me look like a dead person walking.

As I looked for my school socks, panic took over as I could only find one. I froze.

“Leaving for school in three minutes!” shouted Mum as usual.

Pairs, socks needed to be in pairs. I could never even leave the house, let alone start the day, with unmatched socks. Then I heard that dreadful familiar sound: Mum’s footsteps.

“I am sick and tired of all this acting up. You know better. Grab your shoes and meet me in the car now, otherwise there will be consequences!” Mum screamed while putting her hair up into a messy bun.

I wiped away the tears on my face, staring blankly at my one sock, unable to move. Mum barged into the room and raged with anger. She picked up my school shoes with frustration and ordered me into the car ready to go to school. As I hesitantly walked downstairs, sobbing, the cold pavement beneath my unsocked foot reflected my Mum’s cold and heartless concern for my problems.

On the drive to school, Mum lectured me on not being so fussy about such insignificant things. Walking into school, all I could feel was the difference of my sock’s textures. One thick and fluffy cuddling my foot, and the other found on the car floor with an odour so strong that even the flies stayed away. I needed to fix my strained relationship with my Mum. But how?

When the bell rang of lunch, I tried to avoid my friends, who would always pester me for a game of handball. I needed to use this time to once and for all tell my Mum about how my secret internal controlling thoughts had twisted our once peaceful relationship. A letter would solve our problem.

Dear Mum,

It would mean the world to me if you just took a few seconds off your time-poor job and just listened to what I have to say. I am not choosing to be so worried all the time; it is something I can't control. I need your help as I feel my 'worries' are taking over my thoughts.

Please don't be angry.

Love Annie xoxo

When I arrived home from school, I placed the letter on the greasy kitchen bench where Mum would be sure to find it, as she too has her set ways.

I waited.

Sitting up in my room, I heard the familiar sound of the car door close, and her steps coming up the hallway. Then they stopped. She was at the kitchen bench. What was probably a minute felt longer as I didn't know how my Mum would react. I expected her steps to continue down the hallway, as she did every day to watch her favourite afternoon trivia show, but today she walked in a different direction. Towards my room.

We sat on the bed and Mum questioned me about why I didn't tell her sooner about my worries. She even apologised for not being more understanding of my feelings. Coming up with ideas, Mum suggested that I go to bed ten minutes earlier to ensure that my bedroom was 'ready' for me to sleep. I told Mum about my other habits, and we came up with a chant to boss back my worries and take back charge.

Baby steps. That's the best way to describe my progress. One day at a time. Worries are normal, but when they escalate and take over your thinking, I realised help was needed.

Now when I look in the mirror I see a different, more stable version of myself. You could say I am like the stinky old sock found on the floor of my Mum's car. With a little love and care, I can be made whole again.