

Dear Friends:

I would like to share with you information about an exciting new chapter in my life. Ordinarily, I would keep some of this information to myself or share it with only a few of you, but I've decided to go more public with it because I feel compelled to use my story and the knowledge that I've acquired to help others. I am also hoping that you will consider helping me in some way, be it big or small, to make a difference.

Many of you -- especially those of you who have known me for many years -- know that I have struggled with [anxiety](#) and [depression](#) since I was a teenager. Truth be told, my struggle began much earlier in life than adolescence. Thankfully, I am one of the lucky ones. My parents sought professional help for me when I was 16 years old because they feared for my life. That set me on a path of self-discovery and healing that has lasted 24 years. I honestly hope my journey never ends.

What most of you probably *don't* know is that my anxiety was greatly exacerbated by the bullying I experienced as a child. In some cases, the bullying was quite severe -- even violent at times. I believe it altered my personality in ways that can never fully be undone. It led to panic attacks and depression. It caused me to trust virtually no one for many years. It adversely affected a number of my relationships, and it cost me a handful of wonderful friendships because, as is often the case with children who are bullied, I grew up to *become* a bully in certain situations. That, in fact, was a terribly misguided attempt at reversing the damage bullying had done to *me*.

I have successfully worked through my issues, and I have learned how to control my anxiety and depression. Now, at age 40, I am ready to use my experiences to help other people facing the same crises I once faced. I will not allow what happened to me and what, in turn, happened to my family and friends to have happened in vain if I can help it. Therefore, as of today, I am spreading the word that bullying cannot be tolerated. Bullying kills. It not only leads to suicides and attempted suicides among young people, but statistics show that victims of bullying are responsible for up to 75% of school shooting incidents. Something must be done to stop the cycle of physical and verbal violence. That is why I am writing you this letter.

I recently joined forces with an anti-bullying and suicide prevention organization, based in Mount Washington, Kentucky, called [Make a Difference for Kids, Inc.](#) Make a Difference for Kids was founded in April 2007, following the suicides of 17 year old [Rachael Neblett](#) and her best friend, 16 year old [Kristin Settles](#). Rachael's suicide was linked to bullying -- [cyberbullying](#) in particular. Right now, Make a Difference for Kids consists of four people: Rachael's father and aunt, Mark Neblett and Sheila Stanton; Kristen's grandfather, Dave Peak; and Jonathan Rideout, who is a funeral director in Mount Washington. They were instrumental in getting [Kentucky House Bill 91](#), often referred to as the "Golden Rule Act," signed into law last month. It requires bullying policies in all of Kentucky's public schools.

I have committed to executive producing a fundraising gala to benefit Make a Difference for Kids, Inc. In a perfect world, the event will take place in January 2009, and it will include a cocktail hour, a silent auction, dinner, and professional entertainment. I am in the process of trying to book members of the cast of the Broadway musical [Wicked](#) to perform a cabaret act for us on one of their off-nights while they are in Louisville. Furthermore, a number of celebrities already have pledged their support.

I want to have a large collection of auction items for this event. I'd like to make available some expensive items, such as travel packages, as well as some inexpensive items for those attendees who don't have as much money to spend.

I really need you to help me make this happen. Over the next many months, whenever you eat at a nicer restaurant, go to the movies, get your hair done, get a manicure, have your car repaired, shop at a department store, etc., take a few minutes to speak with the manager about this cause and this event, and ask if they can make gift cards, merchandise, or any other freebies available to us to auction off. If you or someone you know is in the business of providing a particular service to people, such as massage therapy, or has a hobby, such as producing works of art, see if they would be willing to offer something for our auction. Think outside the box. I once was associated with an event that auctioned off a party, complete with a personal chef, for several people in a penthouse apartment in St. Louis. Please keep in mind, these items will be auctioned off in Louisville, so if you live outside the Louisville area, make sure the items are not location-specific.

I also will be seeking corporate sponsorships to cover much of the cost of producing this event, so if you think your employer might be interested in sponsoring us, please let me know as soon as possible. Make a Difference for Kids, Inc. is in the process of obtaining 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, so it will be a little while before I can start soliciting sponsorships in earnest.

The money raised at this benefit will help Make a Difference for Kids, Inc. get educators and others who work with youth properly trained in suicide prevention. The training is very expensive. It will also fund other efforts to stop bullying and teen suicide such as (potentially) public service announcements.

If you are willing and able to help with this cause in any way, please let me know as soon as possible. I will be assembling committees, such as an auction committee, very soon. Also, if you know of someone else who might be willing to help, or who could benefit from Make a Difference for Kids' message, please don't hesitate to forward this e-mail to them.

Please know that I value your friendships and support very much. I look forward to hearing from you with thoughts and ideas about this venture.

Sincerely,  
Joey Brown