Stronger Together

By Gabriella Panas

Growing up is like waking up early on a Saturday morning with no caffeine in your stomach. No one wants to do it.

I am ten, though right now I feel like a two-year-old mumbling when I speak. As I grow older, it feels like I am just getting younger. I am tall, but in a crowd, I'm a ghost. Why is it that when I want to talk, I can't? I bury my true self from everyone because I'm not sure people would really like the real me. As the world turns, I feel as if I have glue on my feet. I stand still and watch people move, but I am stuck.

I seem to be getting older physically, but not mentally, as I watch other people's friends laughing while not having any friends of my own. People think you are strong and wise when you are quiet, but I beg to differ. With no friends, it's hard to care about yourself. I tell myself, 'Just keep walking in the corners at school. If you are invisible, no one will bother you.' That's my motto.

It was like this all year. Hiding, getting good grades, but not caring, that is until one humid spring day. It started as a normal day, hiding in the corner of my school, always making sure no one was looking. But then I saw someone doing the same. Her hazel eyes and freckled face shimmered in the shadows. She had long, lush brown hair like mine and a baggy sweatshirt that had a sunset on it. I wanted to hop over and help her, but how could I help her if I couldn't help myself?

I walked by quickly hoping she didn't notice.

Then I heard a chill laid-back voice call, "Hi I'm Olive."

I looked back hoping she didn't see me, but she did. Should I run or hide? What would I say? I knew I had to make a decision. I opened my mouth, but the words were stuck in my throat. My brain was as jumbled as a huge bowl of cornflakes, soggy from sitting out all morning. I knew I had to say something, "Hi, my name is Molly."

"Nice to meet you, Molly. Do you know where room twenty-seven is?" Olive asked.

"Yes, that's my homeroom. It's down the hall to the left," I whispered, but after it came out of my mouth, I regretted it."

"Cool, see you in class," Olive said, confused. This was the only time I talked all school year, and I sounded like a huge nerd. 'Walk away, and don't ever talk again,' I told myself, though a little part of me wanted her to be my friend. She looked lonely too.

"Do you want to walk there together?" I said, but immediately whispered, "You probably don't want to do that."

"You know you're crazy if you think I don't," said Olive.

I just stared at her. She talked to me. I wasn't a ghost in a crowd. Now thinking about it, I did go up to the new kid, but I thought the shock was going to kill me. It would be all over the newspaper, 'Thirteen-year-old Molly Foster died from the shock of a compliment.'

"Oh, sorry. I talk a lot." Olive whispered, embarrassed.

"Talking is not a bad thing," I said.

The whole way to class we talked about the weirdest things, and it was like this for the rest of the year. She was either at my house or I was at her house. Life was better with Olive. The school year flew by after that. I felt more alive than I ever have. It was like Olive pushed me and I was no longer stuck in one place. Olive and I would be friends forever, and we grew stronger when tragedy struck one rainy, summer day.

We were skipping rocks and jumping over puddles. Olive tried to jump over a huge puddle. As she jumped over the puddle the wind whipped at my face. The wind was so strong. When Olive jumped, she landed in the puddle and fell face-first into the pavement. My life flashed before my eyes even though I wasn't the one falling. All I heard was the crack of her arm as she screamed in pain. I went to a lifeguard camp last summer, so I knew what to do. I looked down at her hand. She was sobbing. Tears streamed down her face. Her arm was terrible, and her face was covered with blood. She would need to be taken to the hospital. The wind was so bad that we couldn't get up. We were stuck. Branches fell from trees. Crash! Crack! BOOM! A tree branch fell on my leg, and I couldn't move.

Lightning slashed the ground. I screamed, but my voice wasn't as loud as the storm. I was like a two-year-old crying with a muffled voice. I felt as little as a red ant standing next to a huge white house. I knew we had to get inside. I grabbed Olive and squeezed the hand that wasn't broken. The wind was awful, and I couldn't see a thing. Olive screamed in pain as I worked to get the branch off me.

"Help us!" I shouted as loud as I could. Nobody answered. People were probably in their houses, warm and cozy. I fought through the wind. "HELP, US!" My voice faded out and in.

A light went on. My mother and father were looking out the window. I screamed as loud as I could as rain pelted at my leg. The wind blew and whipped me in the face. My parents rushed to the door with towels and tears came running down their faces. They ran to us and pulled the branch off.

"We were about to call the police." My parents shouted. They sounded like they were angry.

"My leg and Olive's arm are hurt, I think," I whispered, dragging Olive in front of my parents.

"We'll call Olive's parents and call an ambulance," my mom whispered, wiping her tears.

A day later, I was at my best friend's side as she sat on the bed next to me in the hospital. Her arm had two broken bones, and my leg had two broken bones, too. Our parents were in the room holding our hands. Olive and I got the same sky-blue-colored cast. I groaned as she turned on Wheel of Fortune for the seventh time that day. "You know even when we are hurt, we are stronger together," Olive whispered.

"We are stronger together. No matter what happens," I agreed, squeezing her good hand. Without each other, Olive and I felt alone. But together, we were unstoppable.

About the Author:

10-year-old, Gabriella Panas is in fifth grade at Helen Morgan School in Sparta, New Jersey. Gabriella likes to play basketball and lacrosse, and loves to bake, write, and read. She has two brothers, and two loving parents. Gabriella is very happy, cheerful, and creative. She is excited to share her short story with you!