

# All Cut Up

Teenagers are slashing themselves to cover up the pain they feel on the inside. A counsellor of **Care Community Services Society** lets us into her pain-filled world.

I'VE BEEN CUTTING MYSELF for nearly two years now. Nope, my parents do not know about it. Even if they knew, I don't think they'll care. My friends? Yeah, they know, the close ones. In fact, **whenever one of us feels down, the rest of us will show our support by cutting ourselves together.**

**My parents never told me not to hurt myself. How can they? They have been hurting me all my life.** I'm convinced they hate me. I don't know why they would want to give birth to me in the first place. They only have enough love, concern and money for my younger brother. I am redundant. Once, my mom saw a scar on my arm. Without showing any concern for me, she scolded me for being like a gangster. I ran away from home that day. That was the third time I ran away.

Who taught me how to cut myself? My friend Sharon. I really look up to her. She is so strong. She comes from a family that's worse than mine. Both her parents don't want to have anything to do with her, so she's left with an auntie who sees her as a pest. She discovered that cutting herself was a way of feeling better each time her auntie scolds her. When she first showed me her arm, I freaked out. There were

fresh wounds, and old ones too. Now I understand why she is always wearing a jacket in school. She would cut herself with a blade. She told me that when she sees her arm bleeding, the physical pain will overwhelm her so much that she will forget what a sad life she has. She also feels very proud as she knows that not everyone will have the courage to do what she is doing. And for once, she is like a hero, at least to herself.

The first time I cut myself was when my dad slapped me. He couldn't find some money in his wallet and insisted that I stole it. I was innocent! But he didn't care and didn't want to hear any explanation. He just slapped me. Later on, my mother found the money in his pocket, but instead of apologising to me, he told me, "You'd better not let me know you have been stealing! I'll disown you!" I hate him. I hate being his daughter. I want to run away!

Sharon was there for me. We met at the park near our home later and she brought a new blade for me. That was my first cut. Yes, it was painful. But I felt good. **I felt like I had gained a new strength – like I had overcome my enemy and had a scar to prove it. That was the start of many more scars that followed.** I don't know how many times I've done it. I've lost count. Each time I hate my life and want to get into a world of my own, I'll do that. I don't even need Sharon to be with me anymore.

No one ever told me I was doing something wrong. How can it be wrong when it felt right? I won't listen anyway, because they probably didn't understand what I was going through. Try growing up in a family like mine!

My turning point came 3 months ago. Sharon and I were sent to meet two counsellors from Care Community Services Society. I dreaded going, but had to. Thank goodness I had Sharon with me. We decided that we will just give "textbook answers", so the counsellors wouldn't be able to do anything to us.

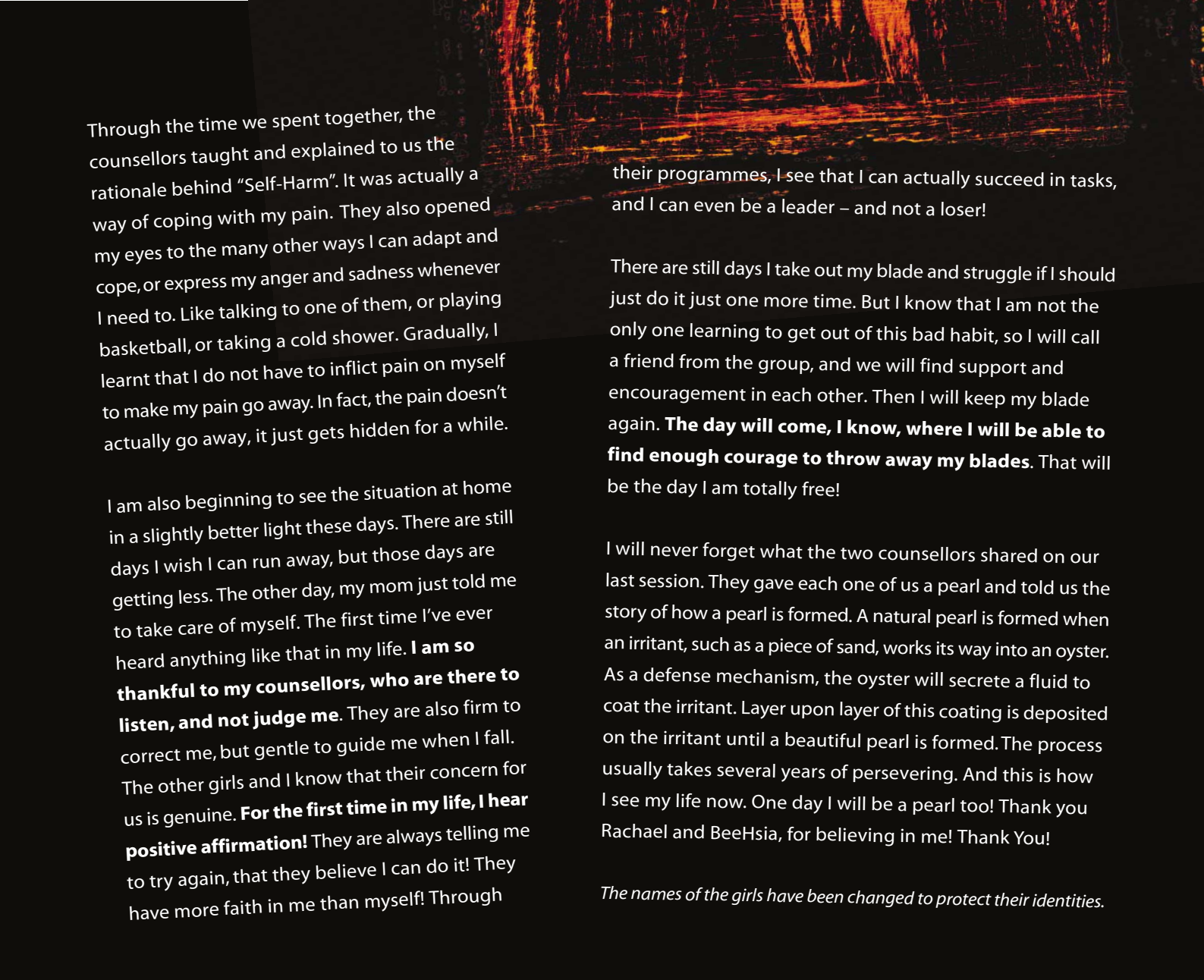
Rachael and BeeHsia – they looked younger than we imagined. And they were actually nice! They gathered a group of girls, all around our age and we sat in a circle. I noticed some scars on some of their arms, so I knew in my heart we were all there for the same reason. I was determined not to let them into my world. And so whenever it was my turn to speak, I will just shrug my shoulders and pretend I'm so not interested.

As we continued to meet, I got to know the counsellors and the other girls better. They started sharing about their families. Some were like mine, some were worse. Gradually, I began to look forward to our group sessions because they were beginning to feel like a family to me. All of us have our own story to tell. What we have in common are the labels our family members and some teachers have been giving us – that we are hopeless, we have behavioral problems, we lack motivation, we are often emotional and have difficulty controlling our anger. **This is where I belong! I feel like I'm finally in a place where I'm understood and not judged for just being me!**

I still remember our 4th session. One of the girls, Bessie, lifted up her sleeve and told the group that she'd been cutting herself. One by one, we also started to show our scars and share why we had been cutting ourselves. I realised then that there were girls who would cut themselves because they think it's cool – they were following a trend and wanted to remain in the "in" group.

We learnt from Rachael and BeeHsia that what we've been doing is called "Self-Harm". And it dawned unto me that it really is a miracle that I haven't died of any infection from using and reusing blades to cut myself – without sterilisation or proper aftercare. But how can I stop? It's already a part of my life and I don't know how to stop!





Through the time we spent together, the counsellors taught and explained to us the rationale behind “Self-Harm”. It was actually a way of coping with my pain. They also opened my eyes to the many other ways I can adapt and cope, or express my anger and sadness whenever I need to. Like talking to one of them, or playing basketball, or taking a cold shower. Gradually, I learnt that I do not have to inflict pain on myself to make my pain go away. In fact, the pain doesn’t actually go away, it just gets hidden for a while.

I am also beginning to see the situation at home in a slightly better light these days. There are still days I wish I can run away, but those days are getting less. The other day, my mom just told me to take care of myself. The first time I’ve ever heard anything like that in my life. **I am so thankful to my counsellors, who are there to listen, and not judge me.** They are also firm to correct me, but gentle to guide me when I fall. The other girls and I know that their concern for us is genuine. **For the first time in my life, I hear positive affirmation!** They are always telling me to try again, that they believe I can do it! They have more faith in me than myself! Through

their programmes, I see that I can actually succeed in tasks, and I can even be a leader – and not a loser!

There are still days I take out my blade and struggle if I should just do it just one more time. But I know that I am not the only one learning to get out of this bad habit, so I will call a friend from the group, and we will find support and encouragement in each other. Then I will keep my blade again. **The day will come, I know, where I will be able to find enough courage to throw away my blades.** That will be the day I am totally free!

I will never forget what the two counsellors shared on our last session. They gave each one of us a pearl and told us the story of how a pearl is formed. A natural pearl is formed when an irritant, such as a piece of sand, works its way into an oyster. As a defense mechanism, the oyster will secrete a fluid to coat the irritant. Layer upon layer of this coating is deposited on the irritant until a beautiful pearl is formed. The process usually takes several years of persevering. And this is how I see my life now. One day I will be a pearl too! Thank you Rachael and BeeHsia, for believing in me! Thank You!

*The names of the girls have been changed to protect their identities.*

Care Community Services Society (CCSS) was founded by Trinity Christian Centre in 1996. CCSS is the social arm of Trinity Christian Centre and an expression of its local missions. Through CCSS, Trinity restores hope and purpose to people of all races and religions. Over the past 10 years, more than 30,000 people have benefited from its programmes.

To find out how you can contribute to or volunteer with Care Community Services Society, call John Chua at **6304 7604** or email **johnchua@carecom.org.sg**

For more information, visit **www.carecom.org.sg**

Care Community Services Society (CCSS) provides a wide range of counselling services are **Centre counselling, School-based counselling and Workplace counselling.**

For counselling requests, please call CCSS at **6304 7604** to make an appointment.

In addition to counselling services, CCSS offers an exhaustive **Family Life Education** programme comprising workshops, talks/seminars and courses on marriage, family life and parenting. These include Marriage Preparation Course (“Getting Ready”) and Marriage Enrichment programme (“I Still Do”). To find out how your organisation can sign up for the Family Life Programme, or to find out more about the talks and seminars available, please email **joshuatan@carecom.org.sg**