

Carefully I slid the sharp blade over my skin. I had just used a new one, it was razor sharp.

For a moment I went a little deeper into my skin, but not too deep. Otherwise, too much blood would be involved and that could cause problems. When I was done, I put the blade back in my box.

Then I went to the bathroom and dabbed with a cotton ball and rubbing alcohol on the cuts I made.

It stung violently when I pressed the cotton ball a little longer on the wound. I shivered for a moment.

The reason why I did it. Well, there were so many, but certainly not the ones people thought.

“She does it for attention,” was one of the stingy comments I often got when I took off my clothes during gymnastics and heard my classmates whispering to each other. If I did it for attention I wouldn't hide it under sweaters, long pants or long sweaters when it was 25 degrees outside. I had already had to talk to student guidance a few times to explain why I committed self-mutilation. I could barely answer this. My parents had already had a conversation and they didn't understand it either, while they were a predisposition why I did it.

Let me summarize briefly: I am Ella, just turned fourteen. I have a brother who is two years older and who constantly puts the blood under my nails and my parents who never ask my opinion and decide everything for me. The answer isn't hard to find then, is it? The cutting gives me, alone in my life, the feeling that I am in control of something. It's something I decide for myself. Something that I can control myself. It's something I have control over. But it's also something that gives me a kind of relief.

After an argument with my brother or parents, I am left with pent up frustration, because attacking or telling my side of the story is not tolerated in our family. The only ones allowed to express their opinion are my mother, father and brother. Me, I don't count. I live there, but belonging is something else. As my mother often says, “You were an accident. Your arrival was not foreseen at all. Dad and I wanted to stick to one child. Suddenly you came and we all had to get used to it at first, but eventually we started to love you.' I never noticed much of that love. I have a roof over my head, my basic needs are given to me and if I need something I get it. But as for the rest, love, attention, deep conversations... no idea when they ever gave me that. Like I said; I live there, but belonging is something else.

I've been doing it since I was eleven. When I was in sixth grade, there was a girl in my class who was two years older than my classmates and myself. She had a severely neglected life and had been living with various foster homes since she was six. She was the toughest in our class. Everyone thought she was cool, but that was about it. I liked her and was also the only one who really hung out with her. She told me that when she was feeling unhappy, she would sometimes take a razor blade and cut her legs with it. I thought she was crazy then, very crazy. "It makes me feel alive," she explained. "I'm alive, but I often don't know it. I am lived by others, but not by myself. The cutting does make me feel like I'm living for myself." I listened to her intense story, and while mine was nothing compared to hers, there were some similarities. Everything was decided in her place, for her own good, but her opinion was never asked. That was like me. During dinner, family outings, family parties... my opinion was never asked for anything. And if I ever dared to say something that I thought about something, it was said. "Your opinion was not asked Ella. Keep playing with your dolls."

I remember, after I heard her story. A few days later my parents had a violent argument with each other, this happened so much, but it was always difficult for me to place it. The shouting, the chairs being moved, the doors being slammed... That's why I decided to give it a try. I angrily went into the bathroom and took my father's razor. In my bedroom I sat down on my bed in tailors, there I slid deep into my skin with the knife. Ouch, that hurt. I did it again, then twice in quick succession. It all hurt and it stung when I ran my finger over it to wipe away the blood. But inside I felt a relief. The anger and frustration was much less. I cried and laughed at the same time, because I had found a way to release my pent up frustration.

I've been doing it for several years, very occasionally. Sometimes it happens three times in a week. It depends on how the home situation is or how I deal with my feelings. I also do it in places where no one can see it. Usually in my thighs, arms, stomach... I only do the wrists when I'm very angry. Sometimes when I'm very angry and go over it with the knife I'm afraid I'm going too deep and I'm going to cut my wrists and bleed to death. Because I don't want to die at all. I don't want to commit suicide or anything. I think life sucks sometimes, but I find life way too interesting to end it. Besides, if I did that, then I would lose control over myself, because then it would be your body that takes control.

Nor is it an addiction, as some suggest. Although sometimes it feels like an urge. Yet it doesn't feel that way. If it were an addiction, I would do it every day. Just like people who drink, gamble or do drugs. But they also do it because they feel bad, so maybe it's an addiction after all. Well not for me, because I have it under control. The lady from the student guidance said I had to find another way to vent my frustration. Like: boxing, running, walking... I tried boxing on my brother, but my parents

didn't like it. Walking there gives me stitches in my side and walking makes me restless. So no, these were not options to do. What does help, besides cutting, is writing it down in my diary. I usually do it after I cut myself, then I feel calm and can better describe my feelings. If I do it for it, then it's chaos in my head.

I admit that the scars on my body are not a pretty sight. It's even very ugly. I have a mutilated body. That's why I don't wear clothes with short sleeves or legs. Loving myself, well what is that actually. I don't know what love means. That's why I've never fallen in love with anyone. Simply because I don't know what it is. When I see myself naked in the mirror, I despise this body. It is slim and long. Barely breasts. And then the scars. Yuck! You would walk away for less.

But so all the reasons that people think why I self-mutilate are not correct. The only one who knows the setup of this, is myself. I know why I do it and I know how it makes me feel. I'm also the only one who can put an end to this. Not my parents, brother, friends, school... Me, just me! Why because I'm the only one in control of it.

I was advised to see a therapist. This gave my brother even more of a push to call me a freak or an alien. My parents agreed. They had no other option, because it was recommended by both the student guidance and the school. As always, I had nothing to say. I just had to nod and follow along. Though I gave it a chance. In my head I gave the therapist three chances, after the third I would give up.

I am currently on my fifth session. Yes, you hear it on the fifth. It really does me good to have a conversation with her every week. She works in stages. The then and now phase. We talk about my childhood, my future and the now. She focuses not only on the problem, but on other things. Like a solution, a reason, new steps... I'm not going to say the cutting is done. I still do it, but it's already greatly reduced. When my brother is being a jerk or my parents are fighting I try to cover myself up in another world. A world that only focuses on myself. I completely shut myself off from the world and crawl into a bubble that doesn't exist. I then focus on my breathing, only my breathing. When I'm completely gone, I don't hear the slamming doors anymore, the shouting or the whining.

I also feel completely relaxed and calm afterwards. And no, I have not become a woolly hippie-like person. Peace and love is not for me, especially the pass-through pipe. It's getting better, but we're not there yet. Maybe the cutting will never go away. At the moment I don't feel or want to completely banish it from my life. For me it's still a way to feel in control. But who knows, maybe I'll find something that can give me control and it will disappear. Only I have this under control. Me, and only myself.