



OPHELIA SPOKE AND I LISTENED

My mom rushes off the plane to meet me at school after one of her whirlwind trips and the first thing she says to me is “You have to read this book.” My mom is always trying to get me to read this or that book, listen to this song or watch this movie, and then exasperated by the look on my face she says, “I’ll never make you read another book again.” But I’m glad she did. *Ophelia Speaks* was written by seventeen-year old, Sara Shandler, who felt that girls’ voices needed to be heard. This is an amazing book, heart wrenching, shocking and honest.

The stories of my female peers will make everyone pay attention to the private horror many adolescent girls live through that you don’t necessarily notice when passing through the halls or competing for the last slice of pizza in the lunch line. I am left wondering what are the private stories of pain that boys aren’t sharing with one another, or if they are, more of us need to hear from them.

My mom explains to me after reading this book, that I could write a book review for *Focal Point*. The issue she explains is on early identification and intervention. After struggling to explain the concept to me she draws this

analogy, “You know when you get the slightest hint of a cold and I make you take Echinacea and zinc so that it doesn’t become full blown, well that’s kind of like early identification and intervention.”

My mom and I have very different philosophies about the common cold. I think it might be better to let a cold run its course and give the adolescent mind and body a much-needed rest. Yet, there are some pains that you should not leave alone or let go and hope they will go away naturally. Many of the pains that children experience won’t be outgrown. Now that I’m thinking about “identification” after reading this book I think of how we kids can identify with each other much more easily. That is the gift we provide to each other and maybe the adult world could benefit from our specialty.

I’m obviously not any kind of expert or professional but I do know that people like Sara Shandler who ask young people to tell their stories of pain and joy are doing a big deal in helping kids. The sooner kids can identify for themselves and for each other what it is that hurts them, then hopefully the sooner they will receive the help they need to live happier lives.

—Joseph Brandon Caplan

He will finish West Sylvan Middle School this spring