

Tomorrow is my first day of school. My body is making it pretty obvious I don't want to go. I'm sweating like crazy and my stomach feels like I have a bird trapped inside.

This year I'm at a new school on the other side of the country even though it feels like a world away from where I used to live.

I miss my old house desperately, the big blue ocean right outside our small yellow home. But above all that, I'm a completely different person than I was last year.

Mom drives me to school that next day. She's all dressed up like it's her first day of school. She hasn't found a job here yet. In Maine she worked at a cute little book shop. She loved that job. When we moved away she said it was fine and she'd find an even better job. Turns out there aren't a lot of cute Maine book shops in California (what a surprise).

"Now honey" I snap back into reality "I'll be just a block away so if you need me just call, ok." I agree even though I know I won't call.

I walk into the big brick school I will be spending the next two years in. There are hundreds of kids chatting and slowly walking to class with their friends.

The bell rings and it's way too loud to be a junior high bell. It sounds like an aggressive fire alarm. "God." I whisper to myself. The bell screams signaling the start of the home room.

Once I finally find my Homeroom, I quickly slip in through the door. The teacher notices me and smiles.

"Hello." He says kindly. He's short for a grown man with dark brown hair, and a blue button down with corduroys. This makes me feel underdressed. I look down at my light pink hoodie and Jean shorts with my long hair tied up in a messy ponytail. Whoops.

I quickly walk to the only open desk. "Hello, I'm Mr. Green. What's your name" he looks down at his attendance sheet. "Maddie," I mutter. I immediately become self-conscious. It took me months to find the perfect name for me. I loved it. "Maddie." My grandpa had said "it's a beautiful name."

In Maine my own dad didn't support me and I acted like I didn't care and went on with life as Maddie, but now I care about what a bunch of random teenagers think of me. "I mean, Ben." I say sadly. For some reason my dead name just slipped out of me like I'm ashamed of the new me.

After a long homeroom of playing ice breaker games, Mr. Green, my homeroom teacher called me up to his desk. "Hello Ben, welcome to Baker. I see your name listed as Maddie and I just wanted to check what you'd prefer to go by Maddie or Ben." I paused. Those words sounded so sincere, not judgmental.

I wonder whether I should tell Mr. Green the truth, that I had said my old name because I was afraid that people would judge me and I'll regret being the real me. He said one small sentence that normally I wouldn't find so touching: "don't be afraid to be yourself, Ben," he said, looking me straight in the eye. "My name is Maddie." I say confidently, He nods, smiling.

The rest of those years at Baker junior high I went by my true name, and school wasn't as bad as I thought in California. My mom got the perfect job at the public library. I started at an awesome new theater company and made a lot of new friends. We both found our place in our new lives.

