

**A note from L. J. Smith:** If you have an article, story, or fanfic (G-rated, please) you'd like to see up on this website, please send them to [info@ljanessmith.net](mailto:info@ljanessmith.net), with a subject that lets me know it is a submission for the site (e.g. ARTICLE SUBMISSION). I look forward to some of you aspiring writers out there having their say. The only rule is that it must have something to do with the site or my books. Here is the first article, an incredibly touching story that brought me to tears.

## How L.J. Smith's Books Saved My Life

By Jessica Sherman

*L. J. Smith's books saved my life.* That's a pretty strong claim. But it's the truth, and I don't think that I'm the only one out there who could say it. I'm not just talking about saving my adolescent sanity. I'm talking about books that actually changed my way of thinking so that I could see the world through different eyes.

Do you remember the stories your grandparents used to tell about how awful things were when they were young? They love to tell you how great you have it because they walked 5 miles to school, uphill both ways in the snow all year round with no shoes.

I wish I could say something like that to teens today but I can't. From kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade I was picked on, bullied and tortured at school every single day. Tacks in my chair, getting jumped, name calling, prank calls and random cruelty were just a part of my life. I got used to it and I survived. Barely.

The problem is a lot of kids and teens today aren't surviving it. As bad as I had it in school it's sad that I can't say "I had it worse." Today's technology allows kids and teens to torment each other on websites, cell phones, and social networks on top of the run-of-the-mill in-school bullying. These teens are committing suicide in record numbers because they can't take the pain that bullying causes day in and day out.

I know exactly how they feel and yet, I don't. When I was their age, I often thought of suicide as an option, I tried it more than once and I'm lucky that I failed. A lot of tormented people may read this and to them I want to say "read a book first—not any book, but one by L. J. Smith." Then read another and another and another until you realize that the real world does not revolve around school and what bullies and popular kids think.

And this is how L.J. Smith's books saved my life. They opened a door to a world of books that offer not just the perfect escape from anything and everything, but a new way to look at bullies and the way they made me feel. I realized that no one had the right to make me feel badly. My feelings belonged to me and I really didn't have to care what a bunch of other kids thought of me. This will work for everyone because there is a book out there for every personality. Smith's characters are famous for being strong-willed and often strong-bodied. You probably can't imagine Jez, Rashel, or Keller being picked on. But not all Smith characters are strong and powerful from the beginning. Some are weak, meek and even bullied.

Illiana of *Witchlight* started out as a popular bit of fluff with seemingly nothing between her ears but air. Cassie of *The Secret Circle* and Gillian of *Dark Angel* both start as quiet girls that get picked on by others. Kaitlyn of *Dark Visions* is considered an outcast at her school before transferring to a school for psychics. As their stories unfold they each become their own person. And the people they become are far from weak.

Perhaps the most famous story of a timid character who gradually learns to find her courage is Bonnie of *The Vampire Diaries*. She begins as an airhead whose hobbies include reading palms and falling in and out of love. But all that changes slowly, in book after book, she finds her courage and overcomes her greatest fears. Her strength and bravery earn Damon Salvatore's respect and affection. Who knows how things would have turned out between Damon and Bonnie had L. J. Smith been allowed to complete the series. Now we'll never know.

If you are a strong willed individual like Elena, Diana or Hannah count yourself lucky and try reaching out a hand to those that need a little help finding their own strength. You can make a positive impact on a classmate that will last them a lifetime. As bad as things have gotten for many bullied teens today, standing up for someone who's being tormented may very well save their lives. And if the hand you hold out has an L.J. Smith book in it, you're handing them the keys to another world. It's a place where popular, beautiful, strong and powerful characters *always* have your back. Smith's books wash away the pain and leave you with a different view of your own world.

Whether you're a bully like Blaise or Faye or Maya or an outcast like Kaitlyn there's a character in these books that you can (perhaps reluctantly) identify with. The result of every book is personal growth for the characters and for you. Books give you an escape when you pick them up and newfound strength to take with you when you put them down. For my money, that's the cheapest therapy around.