

# Me and My Habits

by ReadWorks



The first thing I do every morning, before I stretch or get out of bed, is rub my eyes three times with closed fists. Then I get out of bed and tap my right big toe on the floor three times before walking to the bathroom to brush my teeth.

It's not that I enjoy the odd habits or anything. I'm just used to them, and they're kind of a part of me. As I brush my teeth, I look at myself in the mirror. I like to inventory things about me that relate to my family. I have light green eyes and thick eyebrows like my dad's, a short nose like my mom's, and a ton of freckles, like my older brother Joey. If you look at my face closely, you will see that I am really not my own person. I'm just someone made up of the different parts of everyone else in my family.

My friend Susanna says that's kind of a morbid way of thinking about my life, but I don't think

she knows the correct way to use the word "morbid."

After I'm done brushing my teeth, I walk back to my bedroom, toe-to-heel, very slowly. Then I get dressed for school. We have to wear a uniform, so I wear the same thing every day: a blue and green plaid skirt with a navy blue polo shirt and black loafers. Susanna finds the uniform boring (she says it infringes on her self-identity), but I don't mind it so much. It's just one less thing I have to worry about in the morning.

I eat the same thing for breakfast every day: oatmeal with bananas and a few spoonfuls of brown sugar. My mom prepares breakfast for Joey and me because our dad has usually already left for work by the time we're ready for breakfast.

Joey sits at the head of the table, and I sit at the foot of the table. He always reads the sports section of the newspaper, and I always get the front page.

On the way to school, I buckle and unbuckle the seat belt two times. My mom doesn't ever say anything, but my habit seems to really annoy Joey.

"Rose, *stop it!*" he says, turning around to glare at me from the front seat.

"Just ignore it!" I respond, and click once more.

"Settle down, settle down," Mom says.

We are all quiet on the rest of the way to school. My mom says it takes her a while to wake up in the morning; otherwise she'd be chattier. I don't mind though. It's sometimes nice just to watch the streets go by out the car window, with the people walking along the sidewalks. We always listen to the same radio show, "The Darnell Owens Show," whose emcees talk about movies. They especially love film noir.

When we get to school, Joey slams the door behind him, and I reach between the front seats to give my mom a kiss good-bye.

In school, I meet Susanna by our lockers. They're right next to each other in a prime spot by our classroom, because Susanna complained to the principal that she didn't feel comfortable "expressing herself" on the inside of her locker next to any other person in our grade. (Susanna's dad is a lawyer, and her mom is an artist.)

I open and close the locker three times before I reach inside to grab my books for social studies and math.

Susanna is chattering on about this new painting she and her mom did in her mom's studio

when the long shadow of William Jones crosses over us.

"Hey, freaks," he says.

Susanna and I glance at each other.

"What do you want, William?" Susanna says defiantly.

I'm always in such awe of her bravery. William started making fun of us when we were in first grade. That's when my habit really picked up, and he noticed that I was tapping the doorway three times every time we left the classroom or sneezing three times, even when I didn't have to. Well, Susanna started sticking up for me, which is how we became such great friends, but it only made things worse with William. Soon William started mimicking Susanna when she raised her hand to answer a question (which she did often), and mocking the way she walked, always with one hand on her hip.

"Just wanted to say good morning. Just wanted to say good morning. Just wanted to say good morning," he says, smiling and curling his lip. "Three times... Right, loser?"

I shake my head and turn back to my locker, like what he says doesn't hurt my feelings. I can't help my habit-it just pops up when I least expect it. My mom says the people who make fun of me are ignorant, but she still takes me to see Dr. P. every week to try to help me get over my habit.

"Doesn't it get old?" Susanna asks.

"Nope!" William bares his teeth at us and then walks into the classroom.

"Just forget him," Susanna says, patting me on the back. I'm glad Susanna is on my side.

Joey and I take the bus home together after school. At the bus stop, Joey always gets off first. He's supposed to wait for me to get off the bus before starting to walk home, but he rarely does. I end up walking a few yards behind him, watching his dirty backpack move up and down as he moves.

Mom has a snack waiting for us when we get home-carrots and ranch dressing-and every day we have to eat it and then do our homework right away. Joey says he does his homework in his room, but he's just playing video games. Mom lets him get away with it.

I sit down at the kitchen table and pull my worksheets out of my backpack to start in on my math homework. Mom sits next to me, takes a carrot out of the plastic dish, and dips it in ranch.

"How was school?"

"It was okay. William was teasing me again." Mom looks sad when I say this.

"I'm sorry, sweetie. Things will get better," she says.

"I know," I say. I do my homework and then go read in my room until it's time for dinner.

I wonder if I will ever "kick my habit," as Dr. P. likes to say. Dr. P. thinks that my habit is something I can train myself to give up. She thinks that with a little bit of effort on my part and with lots of help from her, I can learn not to need my habit to feel comfortable. Most of the time, I believe her and even want to kick my habit. Maybe then, Joey wouldn't be embarrassed of me, and William wouldn't tease me. But without my habit, I don't think that Susanna and I would have become friends. I also don't think that I'd feel the same sense of happiness I feel when I touch things or do things three times. There's something very back and forth about my relationship to my habit-I'm not sure I'm ready to give it up. Maybe someday in the future.

"Rose, dinner!" Mom calls.

I go to the bathroom, look at my face in the mirror, and wash my hands three times before going downstairs to eat.