Personal Narrative

"It's over," Paul said, tears streaming down his face.

That was the last time I saw Paul alive. It wasn't distance or disagreement that ended our friendship. It was his death—a death that came from a drug overdose.

Paul had always stood on the edge of things. In school, he was smart—really smart—and he played the drums like he was born with sticks in his hands. But he was quiet. Not just shy, but *absent*, as if his voice was somewhere he couldn't quite reach. Most people didn't know how to handle that. They either ignored him or got frustrated when he gave short, distant replies. But I understood him. Or at least I thought I did.

We became friends when I transferred schools in Year 6. I played guitar, and Paul played drums. And we both worshipped the same metal bands—Slipknot, Metallica, System of a Down. From the moment we jammed together, that was it. Every weekend, we were in my garage, making noise, sweating under the tin roof, and pretending like music could save us.

Even when we went to different high schools, we stayed close. We'd send each other riffs or memes, meet up when we could. Ours was the kind of bond I thought would outlast everything. But in 2021, things shifted.

Paul's parents divorced, and something inside him cracked. He didn't tell me much—I had to piece things together. His mum got custody, but she wasn't really there. She drank heavily, slurred her words, sometimes yelled at nothing. Paul never spoke about it directly, but the silence around him grew heavier. He started sleeping over more at my place, sometimes staying days on end. We barely talked about what was going on. I asked a few times, gently, but he always dodged it. So we'd just sit—him staring at the ceiling, me wondering what he was thinking.

Looking back, I was waiting for him to open up. But maybe he was waiting for me to *really* push through that silence. I didn't. I mistook his numbness for withdrawal, not a silent scream for help.

In November, he vanished. No replies to texts. No answers to calls. After two weeks, I went to his house. The front door was unlocked. The place reeked of weed and stale air. Paul was on the couch, smoking a joint, eyes glazed over. He looked like a stranger.

"What happened, Paul? Did you see how many times I called you?"

He looked at me, unfocused. "It's over," he muttered.

Then he reached for a bottle of pills—orange, prescription—popped two, and leaned back. I kept talking. Begging. But it was like speaking into a void. After half an hour of silence, I left. I was angry, humiliated. I thought I had done everything I could.

But I hadn't.

A month later, on Christmas Day, I called his landline. His aunt picked up. Paul had overdosed on oxycodone three nights earlier.

I'll never forget how cold the world felt after I hung up. There was no dramatic moment, no cinematic goodbye. Just a void. The kind you don't fill—just carry.

Paul was one of thousands of teenagers who died from drug overdoses that year. He wasn't reckless or bad. He was a good kid caught in a storm he didn't know how to navigate—family instability, emotional silence, and a system that doesn't know how to spot pain unless it screams. And even then, we often ignore it.

We like to talk about teen drug use like it's a choice. But no one ever asks what teens are trying to *escape from*. Drugs are rarely the problem; they're the symptom. Of broken homes, broken systems, and our inability to listen before it's too late.

I still carry guilt. I let my discomfort stop me from breaking through his silence. I let my pride override my persistence. I could've done more. I should've. And now I tell this story not because I want sympathy, but because maybe someone else out there has a friend like Paul—and still has time.

If that's you, don't wait. Don't assume silence means they're okay. Ask twice. Ask three times. Show up. Stay.

Because sometimes, "It's over" doesn't mean a breakup. It means a life teetering at the edge—and the last chance you have to pull someone back.

(Word count: 763)

The opinion piece generated in response to the prompt—"Take the role of a young person from Malaysia. Write a 700-word opinion piece about a topical issue drawing on a reflective journey in the first person"—follows the basic conventions of reflective and persuasive writing. However, while structurally sound, it lacks the rhetorical depth, emotional nuance, and narrative tension needed to make the writing truly impactful. This reflection will evaluate the AI-generated piece through the lenses of rhetorical principles (ethos, pathos, and logos) and the dramatic arc, as covered in Session 6 of the course.

The structure of the piece adheres to a traditional opinion format: it has a clear thesis, thematic body paragraphs, and a conclusive call to action. However, this structural clarity is not matched by rhetorical richness. Ethos is present in the narrator's voice as a Malaysian youth, which establishes some credibility and relevance. But this ethos lacks emotional depth or individual complexity. The narrator's authority on the topic feels constructed rather than lived, as though borrowed from a database of common opinions rather than earned through experience. This severely limits the narrative's persuasive power.

Pathos, or emotional appeal, is where the AI-generated text falls most short. For instance, the line, *"I recall a time when my family and I had to ration water during a particularly severe drought,"* is intended to establish a personal connection. However, the moment is left underdeveloped. There is no exploration of internal emotional states—fear, frustration, helplessness—or any vivid imagery to ground the reader in the moment. According to our class discussion on the power of dramatic arc, this is a missed opportunity to present a compelling inciting incident that escalates to a moment of crisis and resolution. Instead, the narrative flattens emotionally, reducing a potentially poignant personal reflection to a vague anecdote.

Even logos, the appeal to logic, lacks depth. While the essay references climate change and environmental issues such as flooding and droughts, it relies on generic statements without statistical support or credible sourcing. A more effective use of

logos would involve integrating relevant data, expert opinion, or even brief references to recent national events or government responses—elements that would bolster the argument's intellectual weight.

Furthermore, the dramatic arc, a key storytelling principle discussed in class, is only loosely adhered to. While the narrative starts with a personal memory and ends with a collective call to action, there is no true climax or turning point that marks a transformative moment for the narrator or reader. The progression from exposition to resolution feels linear and emotionally neutral, rather than dynamic or revelatory. This limits the narrative's capacity to both persuade and resonate.

That said, the AI piece does exhibit strengths. The thematic coherence is commendable—each paragraph addresses a distinct aspect of the climate issue, and transitions are generally smooth. The conclusion, while predictable, does tie back to the broader theme and issue. Structurally, the writing is competent. However, its predictability and lack of specificity result in a piece that feels formulaic rather than inspired.

In summary, the generative AI system demonstrates a baseline understanding of opinion writing and rhetorical devices but lacks the capacity to use these tools artfully or persuasively. The piece reads like a synthesis of templates, not an authentic voice navigating a personal journey. Until AI can emulate the emotional logic, sensory detail, and narrative tension that define powerful persuasive writing, it will remain limited in its ability to meet the demands of nuanced professional storytelling.