

Remembering Those Lost
By: B. N.

For my graduating class, there were many events through our four years that made us more like adults and less like the kids that we had been just a few years before. The first time I set foot in that school, my thoughts were consumed about my appearance and how nervous I was to meet the new people that had potential to be my friends, lovers, or enemies for the next four years. However, walking in the hallway for the last time, I felt like those thoughts were in the past, and I realized how my priorities had changed in such a short period of time. The assemblies in remembrance of my classmates became a constant reminder that my friends and I were not invincible.

It was our first indoor track meet of the season. I was so excited and nervous at the same time. I was almost so consumed with my race that I barely noticed some of my teammates crying. My heart sank. Some girls had heard that a group of junior girls had died on the way home from school, but many names were mentioned, and no one knew who was in the car. Our coaches warned us that no one else should be told that had not already heard the news because of the uncertainty of the situation. One of the girls mentioned was my best friend's older sister. Brennan looked me in my eyes and begged me to tell him what I knew. I couldn't even look at him because I was so scared that she was in the car, and I did not want to tell him everything was okay for him to only find out that I was lying. Heather ended up not being in the car, but two of her friends died that day. I remember almost feeling guilty because I was relieved that no one I was close with was involved in the crash, but then the reality sunk in that two families had just lost their little girls. All I remember from the funeral is Caitlyn's dad playing with her fake hair

and balling. Many students saw the girls ejected from the car, hitting the pavement as their bodies went into shock. The caskets were open as a “reminder to wear your seatbelt.” It was more of a reminder to me that life was not as fair as I thought it had been a few hours before the accident. She did not even look like the girl that I saw occasionally in the hallways. The next few months seemed like a blur.

Jason was the boy next door. My heart rushed when I realized that he was in my class my freshman year, and I blushed as he told me that I had really grown up. He was that guy that I wanted to think that I was mature and not just the little girl that lives in the house next to his. Jason died in a snowmobile accident at the age of eighteen. He was driving his usual route on a snowy night. I remember how snowy it was because my mom would not let my friends and I go to the game because there was a blizzard outside, and I was upset because we had spent all night dressing up in our black and gold. A farmer had put up a wire fence earlier in the week, and Jason could not see it through the snow. I try to think about the pain he must have gone through when he hit the fence, and only remember the good memories I have of him, but it is hard to block the image out of my mind. It is weird driving past his house and not seeing him outside in the yard riding his four-wheeler. I can't stop asking myself and God why.

Coming into high school, I thought that I was invincible, and at times, I took my life for granted. Now I realize that my friends and family could be taken away from me at any moment, and I do not hold grudges anymore because I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if the person that I got in a useless fight with was not there the next day. After these deaths, there were also two suicides in the next year. These deaths were the hardest to cope with for their friends because many people felt guilty that they did not see the

signs. At times like those, it is hard to find reasoning to make you feel better about the situation. In my history class, we started out the year with more students than we had desks. By the end of the year, we had two extra seats, Alex had died in a car accident, and Russel had committed suicide. I never talked to Russel, not that if I had that he wouldn't have wanted to take his life, but maybe no one talked to Russel. This experience showed me that some people are extremely hurt inside even at our young age.

Our class did not have a student die until our senior year, on my birthday to be exact. I was blowing out the candles on my birthday cake at our regional cross country meet. After I opened my eyes, I saw a girl on our team crying. My stomach sank. I knew by the way she was looking at all of us that something terrible had happened. She said that a senior boy had died. Many names rushed through my head. Some of the boys I had known since I was seven, how could one of them have lost their life already? Coming from a small school, our class was extremely close; almost everyone was friends. When everyone found out who it was, most of us had a mixture of reactions. I did not know Marce. I had never talked to him. How could I have never talked to him? I didn't even recognize his name. In Herscher, everyone knows everyone, you know who dates who, who got caught drinking last weekend, and definitely everyone in your class. I thought it was a mistake. The words, "He didn't go to our school," came from my trembling mouth, but I was wrong. Marce had come to our school only a few weeks earlier from a different town, and many of us didn't get the opportunity to get to know him. Although I never got a chance to be his friend, I felt like I knew him personally after hearing his family and friends speak at his memorial. By the end of the week, I felt like I did lose a friend

although we both did not even know each other because of all the stories and memories that I heard about him.

John. It is hard to put into words how much I love him, how I love their whole family. Jill and I became friends in the 3rd grade, and since then I have practically lived at their house. They are the type of family that I am totally comfortable with. I talk to Cindy about boys more than I do my own mom. I would stay at their house if I needed somewhere to stay, and I have no problem eating their food without asking. They are probably the people I would call if I needed someone to bail me out of jail. Although I love my family more than anyone, I think of them as extended family, and I am closer to them in different ways. I am an only child, so it was nice spending time with John and Jake. John would always tag along with Jill and me because he was a few years younger. He always had a smile on his face, and I could never remember ever being annoyed with him because he was just a lovable kid. Of course, we took advantage of his wanting to hang out with us, and we always made him make us lunch or let us pick the movies we were going to watch or the games we were going to play. We even woke him up in the middle of night so we could sing the new Spice Girls song to him. He never complained, and although Jill never admitted it, he knew that we liked him hanging out with us. I feel like I had a brother/sister relationship with him, but I never got annoyed with him and we always got along. I remember the first day of high school, watching him awkwardly walk down the hallway with his big binder about to drop all of his books. It was the strangest feeling; I just wanted to run up to him and give him a hug, but that would not have been "cool." He gave me the what` up nod, and he even resisted to ask me where his class was even though he was obviously lost. It freaked me out. Soon he would be going to dances,

kissing girls, driving a car; it was way too weird. Later on in the day, I went up to him and jokingly said, "Hey stud, I'll be over later, see you then." His face got bright red as his friends asked how he knew a "senior girl." He joked around and said "that's just BriAnne, we go way back." He was a genuine kid that no one ever had a problem with because he was nice to every person he met. The last time I saw John was when I went home for Thanksgiving break. He was working that night, and Jill and I were waiting for some guy friends of us to call us to go out. They decided to have a guys night instead, so we resorted to playing Monopoly in their basement. John got home from work, and he came down, and he had that smirk on his face and joked around about us playing Monopoly on a Friday night. However, he was soon playing with us instead of going out with his friends. I wish I could go back to that night and live it over because I took it for granted. The night that I thought was just another game night at the Funks ended up to be my last memory with him.

Jill and I were at Mcalisters, which is our favorite restaurant on campus. We were there without a care in the world, laughing and eating, while the town that we grew up in was in agony as they found out the news. We were the last ones to know. When we were leaving, I saw that I had missed calls from people I rarely talk to. I guess from being graduated for so long, death did not even cross my mind. I called my friend, and she told me to sit down. Jill was begging me to tell her what was going on because she could tell by my face that something was wrong. The only thing that my friend said was "Johnathon Funk has just got into a car accident." I had to have her repeat the name. I never called him Johnathon; it might not be him. In those next few seconds, I just froze, but then I looked up and saw Jill. I couldn't think of the right words. I just sat there in awe, and

finally I told her to call her house. She knew something was wrong, and she begged me to just tell her what I knew. I just told her that I thought her brother got in a car accident, but I couldn't bear to tell her that he might not have made it. I thought that maybe if I didn't say it, then maybe it wouldn't be finalized. A few moments later, her world came crashing down. The next hour was a blur; a friend and I somehow got her back to the dorm rooms. I rode back to her house that night with her family. I have never been at that loss of words. Seeing him for the first time in the casket, I realized just how fragile and unfair life is. The guy lying there looked nothing like the John that I knew. Watching his mom and brother break down hysterically made me realize that although parts of life are great, there are other parts that just aren't explainable. There are no words that can be said to explain the pain that you can still see in John's parents' eyes. Dennis, who has never seemed to take life too seriously, still looks sad even when he is laughing. Cindy will not allow herself to have any fun, and she constantly reminds herself of everything that she thinks she has done wrong. He was the nicest person that I have ever met, and it made me question a lot of things about life. I know that everyone has to die, and I know that none of us know when our time is going to be, but this made it more of a reality.

Although many people would not recommend their students go to Herscher, I could have not imagined going anywhere else. I am still best friends with the same people that I was freshman year, and I plan to continue to be friends for the rest of our lives. Part of this bond was made by the trials and tribulations that we dealt with in living in a small town where accidents just seemed to keep happening. Like any tragedy that you see on the news, you feel sympathy for the victims and the families, but it is hard to feel the pain and agony of a situation unless you see the family mourn and remember the person that

was alive the day before. I remember the day that the twin towers fell, watched them in amazement and disbelief on the television in the cafeteria. I remember the knot in my stomach, and I saw the questioning looks on everyone's faces. No one had any answers, and there was a sense of fear and anxiety in the classrooms. Even though I did not know anyone who died personally, I was hurt knowing that so many families were hurting and so many good people died that day. I never thought that anything like that would happen in my lifetime, but as the years go by, I realize that tragedies can happen at any time to anyone.

The most important lesson that I have learned in life so far is that I should show the love that I have for my friends and family in every way that I can. Every decision I make in life could be my last, and little problems that may seem like a big deal now are not as important as enjoying life as much as I can in the time I have been given. Life has mysteries in it which sometimes there are no answers. When we graduated, our class was so much closer than how we started four years earlier. This might have been because of all the memories shared in the four years, but not many people can understand how your attitude changes when you just get done coping with a loss of a classmate to turn around in a month to go through the whole process again. Why do good people suffer? This question might never be answered for me, but I can deal with this knowing that there are also a lot of aspects of life that do make sense. Life can be a beautiful thing, and each one of us gets the opportunity to somehow influence others with our life.