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The Morning the Light Went Out

The biggest transition of my life started on the foggy, dreary morning of the eighteenth of November in the year 1999. I woke up to the ringing of my dorm phone at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. Most mornings I ignored the telephone. This morning I grabbed the phone expecting to hear my best friend's voice waking me up for class. This time my mom's voice echoed in my ears.

“Kevin, turn on the TV. There's trouble in Aggieland.”

“What's wrong?” I asked.

“Bonfire collapsed.”

All in one traumatic second, I dropped the phone and ran to the television and felt my heart sink to the floor as I saw the bundle of logs all over the ground. I picked up the phone and told my mom that I needed to call my friends in College Station. I grabbed my cell phone, looked for Curtis's phone number, and dialed. He answered. A feeling of relief rolled through my body when I heard his voice. I explained to him why I called and then called my other best friend, William. He answered his cell phone. While in the process of driving to the bonfire site, William yelled at people to move out of the way and dodged traffic at excessive speeds. All at the same time he talked to me on the phone. After hanging the phone up, joy and happiness flowed through my body because two of my closest friends answered their phones. They worked on schoolwork instead of on Bonfire that night. I dressed and grabbed my backpack and headed

for class. The teacher cancelled his lesson in the wake of the tragedy, but he turned the television on for us to watch the news. My best friend at Southwestern, Chris, listened to me while I told him about my actions earlier that morning. He smiled. When I went back to my dorm room, my phone rang once more.

“Kevin...they haven’t found Jaime yet,” William’s voice trembled.

“I thought she helped with Bonfire during the day?”

William answered, “Not on this day, Kevin.”

Jaime Hand, a close friend of mine throughout high school, died on that sad day. I called my boss and told him, then went home until after Thanksgiving. I asked Chris to tell my teachers what happened. Driving home a lot of memories flashed in my mind. I took the simple memories for granted, but now a smile or a warm hug from Jaime ceased to exist.

Visitation took place the next night. I saw all my friends from school and town gathered at the funeral home. A line of people stretched from the door to down the street two blocks away. A peace filled the air. Then from behind me I heard a voice: “Look at all the lives touched by an angel,” William said as he hugged me. We both kept the tears from flowing but the sadness in our eyes became evident. In that moment the preciousness of a friendship embodied my heart and soul. I expected my friends to always come back from trips, school, and vacations, but Jaime’s tragic death made me understand the value of the present. I understood the fact that the future holds a different path than my eyes envisioned. No matter what I thought the future held for me and my friends, the vision disappeared from my mind.

When I walked into the room where Jaime’s family stood, I felt the moisture of tears coming from their eyes. A family I grew up with stood there crying uncontrollably and all of my love and compassion, given in a hug, only slowed their tears for a moment. I arrived at my

house without uttering a word. Words only made matters worse. I walked in to see my parents looking at me, and I started crying because I imagined them in the same shoes as Jaime's parents. The death of my friend, Jamie, and seeing her parents cry brought me the realization of my family. I never grasped the idea of family love until I saw another family heartbroken over losing their daughter and sister. From that moment on I worked on showing my parents that I loved them. I always told them I loved them before I hung up the phone or left to go back to school.

All of the events since Jaime's death culminated with the Thanksgiving Day football game between the Texas Aggies and the Texas Longhorns. All of my family gathered around the television to watch and cheer on the Aggies. Normally, I cheered for the Longhorns just to argue and joke with my brother, but on this Thursday afternoon I yelled for the Aggies to win like a faithful Aggie fan. The Aggie players played their hearts out. On this day, the Texas A&M football team showed determination to win no matter what. They came back in the fourth quarter to shock a Longhorn football team who thought they already won the game. The spirit of Aggieland and the spirit of those twelve students who died on November 18th embraced all of Texas at that game. I felt the spirit of Aggieland from the television and saw rivals show their true colors as they comforted each other after the game. The game became the most meaningful game in A&M history. Not only because they won, but because they won for those twelve lives that they lost.

Throughout that one week of my life I realized the most important aspects of life. I experienced the sadness of losing a close friend and the feelings that followed that event. I understood that the blueprint of my life revolved around more things than happiness. Every life possessed grief and suffering, but coping with the grief and suffering shows the true character of

a person. I think the most important part of the whole week revolved around the football game. It symbolized the reality of life: the speed with which life can change and the spirit with which we all need to live our lives. I now understood that in my life I will come upon many peaks and valleys, but as long as friends and family solidify my life, a light will always shine, even in the lowest places.