

Carpe Diem

Attention Getter: One second everything is going well and in the next the world is turned completely upside down. The scary thing is that it only takes a second. 800 is the fatal number. 800 deaths from people trying to beat a red light. 800 lives gone because of one's impatient decisions. I only knew one life but it was enough to change my perspective on what it means to live fully.

Necessary Information: The death of Piggy in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* impacted me more than I thought as I read the novel. It was sudden, violent, and there was no real comfort after it happened. It amazed me how Piggy's death compared to a friend of mine was taken too soon because of one man's decision.

Topic: From Joshy's death, I have learned how to grieve, how to forgive, and how to live life fully every single day.

Background Info: Dark, unruly hair, a flashy smile, and dark brown eyes. This was my first impression of Josh. Everywhere he went there was always a smile on his face and you couldn't help but smile back. I really got to know him outside of class because he was my locker partner. He was one of the strangest kids I have ever met, but that was what made him so fascinating. I don't remember how it started but one of us girls started calling him Joshy and it stuck. He didn't seem to mind, but I he always had a smile on his face whenever we did call him that.

To give you an example of what kind of kid he was, here is what his morning routine looked like: he walked into school half asleep, ran his hand through is hair and called it good, eat his lunch for breakfast because he didn't have time to make breakfast, and then proceed to drink from the liter of Mountain Dew that he kept in our locker. I learned very quickly to never touch

Joshy's Dew unless I wanted to lose a hand. The best part of the morning, however, was when he reached for his bright pink iPod from his pocket and choose a song for the day. I never knew what song he was going to choose, but I knew he would probably choose something from his favorite girl, Alicia Keys. Right before something cool was about to happen, Joshy would say, "Check it!" and then he would proceed to tell me some crazy story. Whether it was true or not, I could never tell. However, I made sure to pay attention whenever he said, "Check it!" because I knew it was going to be something amazing.

We stayed locker buddies up until our senior year. Our school was planning to move out further west and it was too far for him and his family to drive. He and his younger brother were enrolled in another school for his senior year. Our class was sad to lose him, but we knew he would do great things and impact the lives of others just as he did with us. Sadly, we didn't realize then that this would be the last time he would be with us.

It was raining the day we got the news. I was drenched when I got into class and then school dragged on the rest of the day. We were in English class when everything turned upside down. In the middle of class, my friend Jess suddenly got up and ran out of the room crying. Mrs. Smagacz, our English teacher, went after her to see what had happened. I waited patiently in my desk with the rest of my class wondering what had happened. Mrs. Smagacz came back with an ashen face saying that Joshy had been in a car accident and that it didn't look good. She had asked one of the counselors to find out what was really going on. I kept praying that this was all a big mistake. Sure, it was rainy that morning and the roads were a bit slick, and it was possible he could've gotten in a car accident, but there was no way that he could've actually died, right?

I wearily looked at my friends to see how they were faring. A couple were silently crying, two of them were pacing the room, impatient to know the news, and there were others who were just sitting in their desks waiting and praying that it was all just a big mistake. It had to be a mistake. It was just a mistake.

Mrs. Smagacz usually didn't let students eat lunch in her room unless with permission, but she didn't even bother about the food that was now in the room. She went about silently tidying up her desk and other little things as if to distract her mind. My focus was drawn back when Michelle couldn't take it anymore. She stormed out of the room to find out for herself instead of waiting.

There were a few agonizing moments which seemed to be an eternity when I heard her scream in the hallway. Deep inside, my heart lost all hope, but I tried to fight off despair until I heard it from her counselor's mouth. Michelle came back in sobbing followed by the school's counselor. When my eyes met with the counselor's, I knew. It was all true. Joshy was gone. "I am so sorry..." the counselor cleared her throat to hold back the tears, "I am sorry to say that Josh did die in the car accident. I am so so sorry."

Joshy—gone? I closed my eyes, hoping that I would wake up from this nightmare. I could see his laughing face and sparkling dark eyes. My locker buddy for three years—gone. My prayers weren't answered. He was gone. I opened my eyes to see friends sobbing and reality began to hit. Joshy was really gone.

As if in a daze, I got up went to the nearest person and clung to them. I went around the room and wrapped my arms around each of my friends. Still numb and confused, I went out in the hallway to find the rest of my class of twenty-two crying and in shock.

Always smiling. Always encouraging. Always a gentleman. Always a friend to those in need. Always trusting God—even to the very end. Joshy's locker was right next to mine for three years and he always had a way of making me smile each morning, even if it was the worst morning for me. It was either his hot pink iPod or his Heelies or his song of the day or even the five cans of AMP he had stashed in his locker—these were the things he did every morning and now these were distant memories. I didn't know how to react. Little did I know, this was the beginning of my grief.

Grief feels a lot like fear. I don't know who said it but they were onto something. It's overwhelming and everything hurts. It drives away everything you felt like you accomplished in life. It's unexpected. Everyone knows it is bound to happen, but how it affects you and how it comes is unknown until it all comes crashing down. It is similar in the novel *Lord of the Flies*, when Piggy is killed, Ralph doesn't have time to react, he has to push through and survive. This is what I did. I push through pain. I stuff it inside until I can't take it anymore. In my mind, I have to remain strong and remaining strong means not being vulnerable, not crying, and not letting others down when they are the ones in need.

However, grief works in mysterious ways. Everyone reacts and heals differently. Just when I thought I was okay, I would sit there at a light and see someone run a red light and I'd lose it. I'd yell that the person, "You could kill someone. Don't you understand? Whatever you're doing is not that important! Stop! Just stop at the red!" Over time, I came to realize grieving wasn't a weakness, it was a healing process. The longer I held onto my anger and sadness, the more bitter and resentful I became. I didn't know that I had to let it go. I had to let my anger against the man who hit my friend go. I had to forgive.

I have no idea whether Ralph was able to forgive Jack and the other boys for what had happened on Castle Rock, but there is a part of me that hopes he did. If I thought grief was complicated, I had no idea how complex forgiveness was. I had always been taught that it was good to forgive those who had done something bad to you and when they had apologized. They had to apologize for what they had done in order to be forgiven. I did not know the man who hit Joshy, but I was bent on there being justice. I was ranting to my mom a couple of weeks after the funeral about how awful the man was for doing something like this. My mom sat there listening attentively and then said sadly, “Megs, don’t you think his guilt is punishment enough? The man did not purposefully intend to hit Josh. Granted, he ran the light but don’t you think that this is going to haunt him forever?”

To be completely honest, I didn’t even think about what **he** might have been feeling. It made me wonder how I would feel if I was in his shoes and just thinking about it made me feel sick. No one should ever go through that kind of torture. Just thinking of him made my hard heart soften to whatever turmoil he might have been going through. Little did I know, this was the first step to forgiveness. The common definition of forgive is “to stop feeling angry or resent toward another for an offense, flaw, or mistake.” Another way to describe it is “to stop requiring payment, to grant relief from payment.” Here I was demanding that this man pay for what he did to Joshy, but for how long? Until he felt the same pain? Until he was completely and absolutely sorry? How long would I hold this man in contempt for what he did? I should note that anger is a healthy feeling, but bitterness and revenge eat away at your soul. It was easier for me to forgive this poor man than it was to hold a grudge against him. Thinking back to this moment made me think of Ralph and the other boys after Piggy's death. I think the hardest thing they had to do was to forgive themselves and after what they had gone through and done. Here I was acting horribly

toward this man, when in all reality he was probably trying to find forgiveness from others as well as finding some in himself.

Like I said before, it is easier said than done. When I finally gave up my bitterness, revenge, and hatred for this man, I finally forgave him and this huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. I still grieved, but I felt as though I could move on and really start to heal. This was just one of the many instances where I have had to come to grips of what it means to truly forgive someone. There are days where I'm quick to forgive and other days where I will hold a grudge against those who do hurt me. I'm not perfect at it, but I'm learning that forgiveness does more good than harm to people, including myself. I also know that it is harder to forgive one's self than it is to forgive others; I pray that this man has been able to forgive himself and has somewhat started to heal.

Grief and forgiveness are all a part of life; this is never the easiest qualities that teach about ourselves, sometimes it is the hardest times when we truly see what we're made of. This story of mine may seem like a tragic one, but it really is one of hope and life. It is amazing to me to see what happens when I let go of anger and bitterness I start to see the positive things in life. Joshy was a positive moment in my life. He lived life to the absolute full when he was alive. He treated everyone with care, worked hard, and he spent every moment doing something that he loved. To me, he never seemed afraid of life, he just lived it. I learned from him that life is too short to worry about what others may say or think about me. Life is meant to be lived adventurously and wonderfully.

One of the last memories I have of Joshy was when he went to Burger King on the last day of junior year for lunch. He came back to school wearing one of those BK crowns with a big stupid grin on his face wearing one of the girl's sunglasses because he wanted to look "cool". I

had my camera with me that day and told him to smile. This was one of my favorite pictures as well as my classmates because it totally captures who he was. This was Joshy: living life to the fullest and doing what he loved best. Every year, I try to go to Burger King and wear a crown in honor of him and to remind myself that life is short, but it is so worth living to the fullest.

C.S. Lewis, a British author, once said, "We read to know that we are not alone." I couldn't agree more with this statement. Reading *Lord of the Flies* made me understand more about grief and the idea of moving on. What does this look like? Well, it is different in everyone's life. Grief and forgiveness are all a part of life. It is when we stop, take a moment to look around us, and see that life is an amazing thing is when we truly start living. I know that



there are more hardships and trials that will be coming, but I can't let the fear of getting hurt stop me. I know one thing is for sure and that is that I am going to live my life to the absolute fullest, love every second of it, and as Joshy would say, "Check it!" because amazing things are soon to come.