

What A Loss but What A Gain

I remember what we had for lunch that day, pizza and butter beans. I remember I had a project due on Argentina. I remember the weather; it was sunny with no clouds in the sky. I remember being in school and teachers looking at me funny.

I wondered what was going on. Something did not feel right.

I was in grade 6th grade. Mrs. Faulk was my teacher. Kelly Grace was my best friend.

After lunch Mrs. Faulk got pulled out of class in the middle of math by Mr. Baker, our principal. She comes back into the classroom. She says, "Carson will you please go with Mr. Baker to the principal's office?" She saw the distraught look on my face since I have never been to his office in my six years of school. "You are not in trouble dear," Mrs. Faulk said.

So I walked down the hall with Mr. Baker silently. We get to the office door where the office workers gaze at me with an uncomfortable look on their faces. We walk through his office door when I see my little sister, Kinsley, she was in 1st grade. I take a seat in the chair next to her.

"Carson, you are not in trouble in the least bit," says Mr. Baker, "but you and Kinsley will stay in here for the rest of the day until someone comes and gets you."

I remember thinking to myself "what has happened?", "something bad has happened", "I knew something did not feel right."

Mr. Baker leaves his office. When the door shut behind him I hugged Kinsley so big and asked if she was okay. Of course she was but she was just as confused as I was.

We sat there and colored for two hours when finally, someone was there to get us. I thought it would be my Aunt Carol since she taught at the school, but it was Mrs. Vivian, a lady from our church.

Kinsley and I get in her car and she drives us to our house. We pull up to our house where there were at least 20 cars. This just reassured me something bad had happened.

We get out of the car and I grab Kinsley's hand. Our daddy embraces us. His eyes were swollen and puffy. He is not a crier. All he could do was hug us and tell us he loved us.

We walk in the house following our daddy. Daddy tells Kinsley to go sit with Nana in the livingroom. He calls for our mama and we all walk into their bedroom leaving the people in our living room, dining room, and kitchen. Some of them were family others I had no clue who they were.

I saw my mama's face makeup running from tears shed. Eyes swollen and redness on her eyes and cheeks.

I wondered where is Lauren, my older sister, she was a college student at Troy University. I thought maybe she just had not made it home yet for everything that was going on.

I sat down on the bed. Mama sat in front of me and grabs my hands. Daddy hovered behind her. I thought to myself, "this is serious, this is bad."

"Some memories you can just never forget, said Carson Strickland, the good ones you want to hang on to forever, while the bad you would much rather let go but they cling to you."

This is the bad that you try so hard to forget. The next words that came out of my daddy's mouth the words that haunt me in my sleep. Words that will never be forgotten.

My daddy said, "Lauren is gone she is in heaven."

I could not wrap my mind around. I just felt this tightness in my chest and a pounding in my heart. I stare blankly at my parents and felt the tears building up inside of me that next exploded out of me like a volcano.

Carson is the middle child of three girls. She is the 14-year-old daughter of two parents who love her and her siblings so abundantly, so deeply.

Her older sister, Lauren Strickland, died in a car accident on October 14, 2014.

"She was 20 years old, had her whole life ahead of her, but God took her. I had a hole, but I have mended and am still mending," said Carson Strickland.

"I am stronger now, says Carson Strickland, most people cannot say they have a guarding angel who watches over them and protects them. I know Lauren talks to Jesus about me and our family."

Being with family and Lauren's best friend, Alece, helped the process. Alece gave me hope and faith when I could have none. She did that for our whole family.

"I would have never made it through the visitation and funeral without her, says Carson Strickland, "she is mine and Kinsley's older sister even if it is not by real blood."

The loss of Lauren had brought my family and me closer to God. "We have learned together about pain and it having a purpose" says, Carson Strickland, "I journal my prayers now and read my Bible."

“Through the death of my sister my family has changed tremendously, but we are all growing because God’s plan will go on,” said Carson Strickland.

“Nothing not even the loss of Lauren could stop me from loving my Carson and Kinsley,” says Tonia Strickland, the mother of the three girls, “her time here on earth was done. That was something hard to realize, but my daughter is with my sweet Jesus and I am called to carry on loving the daughters I still have here.”

“La La is in heaven with Jesus,” says Kinsley, “I am jealous because she gets to play with all the baby dolls up there and Him.”

“Over the past three years we all have mended,” said Tonia Strickland.

“On every holiday and Lauren’s birthday we visit her grave,” said Carson Strickland, “we even visit when we all miss her. Mama, Kinsley, Alece, Mama’s best friend Jean, and I all go up there to write on balloons and release them.”

“I have peace because every time I see a butterfly I see Lauren,” said Carson Strickland.

Carson Strickland: 334-344-0891

Tonia Strickland: 334-344-0893

Kinsley Strickland: Is to young to have a phone