

Hope can Never be Completely Gone

No matter if you knew them before, if you live close to someone for long enough, you'll eventually get to know them. I live on a cul-de-sac, and know all my neighbours better than most. My mom goes out to dinner with some of them, and we go swimming in my neighbour's pool. There were two others couples with young kids on our court. The Johnsons, with two boys, the elder of which I used to be close with (we would always play Spider Man) and the Stewarts with a boy and a girl, a few years younger than me.

The girl, Mackenzie, was adorable. She was always happy and always wanted to play with me but I'll admit that sometimes, I just wanted her to go away. She was two years younger than me, and I cared more for my non-existent coolness than for a really good friend. To be fair, I think I was in about grade 7, not that that's any excuse. I'm actually disgusted by that part of who I used to be. Besides, it's not like I could get any worse; I was already the nerd that nobody liked, except for her and a couple of actually nice people at my school. And while it's not like we never talked, we still hung out every once and a while sometimes more. Besides, we had plenty of time. I mean, it's not like she was about to die.

Enter Murphy's Law. Everything that can go wrong will go wrong. For a while there, Mackie was feeling kind of sick, so they took her to the hospital. They did some tests and all was well then, to ruin it all, the results had to come back. She had leukemia, but it was a really rare form that only adults got. Yeah; might want to rewrite that description. If a perfectly healthy, grade 5 girl got it, obviously it wasn't that hard to develop. It's not like it was hopeless though, there were still treatments and so, a few weeks later, they started chemo.

It was a really hard time. She had a little brother, and he was understandingly starting to be ignored. He was only in grade 4, and it certainly didn't help that his French teacher was evil. I had been in French immersion for eight years, so I started helping him out after school. That may have been the only bright spot in the whole thing. Not his evil French teacher, but everybody helping out. We mowed their lawns, made them food and shoveled their driveway. We looked after their dog, Darcy, and drove Jaime to hockey. It was really beautiful and inspiring to see. I didn't know half these people, but we were all working together to help this family. We all cared.

But the cherry on top had to have been Mackie since she went into remission and came home. She went swimming in the neighbour's pool, and went to camp with her family and all was well. But all good things... After a few months, the cancer came back. The doctors had no idea what to do with her.

That's not to say they didn't try. They tried everything they could think of and nothing worked. Until eventually it did. Mackie was getting steadily better. Everything was right with the world again. Until one day, she didn't.

One week after her 12th birthday, Mackenzie Masson passed away of leukemia. She left behind a mother, a father, and countless others. I was kind of in shock for the first little while. It didn't seem real, you know? And then every once in a while, it would just hit you, and you'd realize she was gone all over again. It hurt so much, but everyone showed up to her funeral. Teachers, friends, family, even a girl who used to bully her, because everyone had realized, or already knew, how amazing she really was.

She didn't only leave behind sadness though. She also left behind hope: Mackenzie's Hope. Through Muskoka Woods, a foundation was formed to send siblings of cancer patients to camp. Mackie loved her brother, and didn't like seeing him pushed aside for her. She wanted to make sure he was happy. And what happened to Jaime doesn't just happen in their family. The other child is pushed aside, and Mackie wanted to change that.

At the one year anniversary of her death, a fundraiser gala was held to raise money for Mackenzie's Hope. Last year, it managed to send 30 kids to camp. Our entire neighbourhood turned out for the gala, and a few people even bought entire tables. Everyone from Ken Shaw to the cast of Murdoch mysteries was there, auctioning off set tours. All of the kids who went to camp were there, and one of my neighbours bought a table for them, so that they could go.

Mackie's death was a tragedy. There's no denying that, but there was also a silver lining, no matter how faint. Even if I was friends with some of my neighbours before, now we all know what it means just to be a good neighbour. It means, helping out with the leaves, taking over a plate of cookies, or even just acknowledging each other when you take out the garbage. It's realizing that we're all in this together, as cliché as that is, and that no man should be left behind. And even if we lost hope after her passing, we got it back by realizing that we all had each other's back. The lesson Mackie left behind is a simple one, full of hope: if we can work together, and be nice to one another, anything can be at least made better, if not completely fixed.