

2019

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Tyra P. (2019) "The Story of Friendships," *Pathways*: Vol. 2016 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.xula.edu/pathways_journal/vol2016/iss1/16

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Tyra P. Smith

The Story of Friendships

Fourth Grade

In fourth grade, I no longer was a very happy and pleasant joy to have in the classroom. In December, about three weeks after my ninth birthday and two weeks before Christmas, my dad died. He had been my best friend for nine years, so practically my whole life. I used to do everything with him. When I would sleep too wildly and mess up the fragile hairstyles my mom would complete in my hair the night before, he would re-comb my hair into three crooked ponytails and braid them unevenly to where each ponytail was half braided and half twisted. Of course the braids didn't last, so he would get frustrated and just brush my hair to the back, exposing my huge, pale forehead and add a headband. My best friend and I even woke up to the same TV show, *Spongebob Squarepants*. He knew how to whistle, but I didn't, so each time the end of the theme song came on he would fiddle with his nose as if it were a flute and whistle the tune of the sailor call. I could never get enough of seeing him perform on his minuscule, makeshift instrument. Also, his nose was big like Spongebob's, so his unusual resemblance made the theme song that much more amusing.

My dad was like no other. He was literally the joy of my life and the reason I always woke up with a smile on my face. When he died, so did my imagination, my youth, and some of my hopes and dreams. I couldn't be as artistic as I used to, because it was hard to open up my mind when all I would think about was him. It became hard for me to complete "fun" projects because my mind was so dark that I couldn't use any vivid images. My youth deteriorated because I had to grow up and understand how to cope with death at such a young age. My

dreams of attending my dance school's father-daughter dance were crushed. I wish he could have been there for many other memorable events in my life.

Sixth Grade

I was probably the most embarrassing friend for my best friend, Antanese. However, she never seemed to laugh at me like the other kids, so her genuine attitude brought us closer together. We unwillingly became friends in fifth grade homeroom. She would always talk to me, even though she could tell I didn't want to be bothered. I was starting a new school, and after losing my father, I honestly wanted to be alone. Over that summer, I was expecting Antanese and I to lose contact like I did with other elementary-school friends, but we managed to talk everyday on our house phones for about three hours. When sixth grade came, we were nervous about our new schedules and how we would have more advanced classes with more aggressive teachers and curriculums. I thought the worst situation that could happen to me would be to get Mrs. Jenkins as an English teacher, but I somehow dodged that bullet. I had more problems to face, though, and they had absolutely nothing to do with any classes, but with my awkward mishaps.

Antanese and I had to take geography with this guy who resembled Colonel Sanders. I'm talking glasses, receding hairline, white hair, pot belly, and rosy cheeks. At the end of each class, we always had to scatter, clean up, and return to our desks to sit with the "Posture of a Leader" in exactly five minutes. One day, I was the last one to get to my desk and show "Posture of a Leader," and just as soon as Mr. Thompson was about to call "time," the two front legs of my desk began to fold inward and cave in, resembling the movement a giraffe makes as it begins to sit on its legs. I remained in the Posture, but my face showed only astonishment. The other kids laughed or giggled, and so did I, only to make myself feel less embarrassed. Later on that

day, Antanese called me and we talked about everything, and I told her, “I’m just so f-.” She cut me off so fast I could barely say the word “fat.” Antanese replied, “Girl you are not fat! The desk was already messed up, but I had your back, so who cares who laughed at you?” From that day on, I knew she would become my lifelong friend.

Seventh Grade

Christopher Turner was not the cutest, or even the most popular, guy at Ivan Ludington Magnet Middle School, but he was perfect in my eyes. I actually began to notice him in the sixth grade, but I was way too shy to go and talk to him. Plus Antanese told me she thought he was ugly, so I didn’t want to do anything else to ruin my social life. However, this crush was different. I felt like I needed to talk to him, and somehow it happened. Till this day, I do not know how Christopher became my boyfriend. All I remember is us having lunch together a couple times in the cafeteria, but we never talked, and he had very bad breath. We only kissed three times, and we were dating for about three months, so that’s a kiss a month. After deciding we shouldn’t be a couple anymore, we agreed to be friends.

Our friendship was like no other because we talked to each other about everything from TV shows to school to clothes and family. I also called him when I was crying over whatever girl problem I had, such as not feeling pretty, needing advice on boys, or even experiencing the pain of cramps. He gave me typical guy responses, like, “You’re beautiful” or “some guys are just stupid” or “Eww!” or he would change the subject and make me laugh. I remember days when we literally texted each other for twelve hours straight. Our friendship lasted for about five years after dating, and now, even though we’re no longer as close, we always smile and give each other a hug when we see each other.

Tenth Grade

Tenth grade at Renaissance High School was one of my most horrible years. I was still going through depression from my father's death, and I was adding pressure by worrying about my friends. After my father's death, I never had the proper counseling until I met a lady by the name of Dr. Boards, who completely changed my life. I began seeing her once a week starting in November of 2012 because, according to her, I needed that much attention. I was constantly thinking about suicide, and I used to get easily frustrated with school and trying to fit in. My friends were known as the "You Can't Sit With Us Crew." YCSWUC was the abbreviation we named our iMessage chat group. There were only four of us, and we always walked into the lunchroom together, so we resembled the self-centered and judgmental group with very stern faces from the movie *Mean Girls*.

This group included Najiaah, Autumn, Kaila, and me, and we talked in the chat group all day, everyday. I found myself trying to be like them. They always had boys approach them, compliment them, and they were really pretty. I never envied them because being jealous of other people is downright crazy, but I did have hopes. I had hopes that one day, I could have a boyfriend just like they did. I more so hoped that I could just have male attention, because I didn't feel right being in a relationship. As I went through depression and other problems, my friends were there to uplift my spirits, but the conversations unfortunately often turned into "No she didn't..." followed by a screenshot off Instagram or Twitter. There was never a day when Autumn and Najiaah did not talk about somebody.

They would either comment on what a girl wore, what boy was talking to what girl, or talk down on other people's lifestyles. Kaila and I were generally more laid back so we didn't

always entertain the foolishness taking place. I was closer to Kaila and considered her to be my best friend. During counseling, I explained to Dr. Boards how those girls were my best friends and briefly described to her the conversations we had. Dr. Boards brought to my attention during one of the sessions that maybe “these girls” weren’t really the type of people I should hang around. Her comment went in one ear and out the other. Unfortunately, in eleventh grade Autumn and Najiaah ended our friendship, and I began my senior year in high school with a new clique.

Twelfth Grade

By the beginning of twelfth grade year, I had lost five best friends, including my dad. I had gained a couple friends in eleventh grade, Daijah and Imani, but our friendship shortly ended before homecoming of senior year. Daijah was someone whom I could've gotten along with, but her actions were very different from mine. She had to bring others down, to make herself feel good, or make her wrongdoings seem not as bad. Daijah had a boyfriend in the beginning of her tenth grade year, but she cheated on him numerous times. So when the topic of another girl being unfaithful to her boyfriend came up, Daijah would be the first person to bring it to our attention and call the girl names. What a hypocrite, was all I could think when she did that. The two girls Najiaah and Imani took right after her actions. At that point in my life, I was tired of seeing people following others and not being themselves. During eleventh grade, when I first met Daijah, she was a bully with a very proper voice. I started to feel differently about her when she used to say I was stupid and dingy, but if you looked at our grade-point averages, you could see who was really the dummy. She always ran to Najiaah for everything, even if that meant cutting

off the conversation I was in with Najiaah. She used to try so hard to make herself Najiaah's only friend, and, well, she succeeded.

By December of senior year, I had lost Kaila, Autumn, and Najiaah as friends. Kaila and I got into an argument that wasn't even started by either of us. Autumn felt like I was replacing her with two new friends I had made, which was not true, and thought she was losing me. Najiaah remained best friends with Daijah and was using Autumn to just have her there. Autumn was the one hanging onto Najiaah because after losing me as a friend, she really didn't have anybody. I learned during that year that friends will come and go. Letting go of certain friends was a challenge, but I couldn't allow them to talk to me the way they did. I also realized that friendships are all about respect and loyalty. I was no longer such a gullible creature. I refused to lower my standards or shed a tear for a group of plastic, heartless, and hypocritical girls. All they ever did was shop, get Starbucks, eat Mrs. Fields cookies, go to Chipotle, eat at Original Pancake House, and talk about people and each other. That was not me, but it took me four years to find out.

At the end of senior year, my high school friends totaled five. I was blessed that, with the new group of friends, I could always count on them, knowing they would make me smile. They didn't bring negative energy to my life, and they respect what I brought to the table. We didn't follow each other's footsteps or talk down on anybody. Even though people tried to bring me down, I came out on top, feeling more loved than ever before.

Postscript

Now that I am in New Orleans at Xavier on a chemistry/pre professional track, working to become an anesthesiologist, I am miles away from my friends and support system. One of my

friends is at Xavier with me, so that's a plus, but when we are all together, we are unbreakable. I always used to wish for a boyfriend, and I felt down when boys didn't talk to me or give me attention, but now I have a boyfriend who treats me like I am a queen. He supports my decisions, respects my space, motivates me when life brings me down, and goes out of his way to make me smile. I've come to the realization that life happens for a reason and you have to lose certain people in order to better your situation. I went from being someone who wanted to be popular and to be friends with everybody, to someone who just wants to enjoy and live life to the fullest. I can now be "popular" in my own eyes, because I feel like I deserve to reap every blessing life hands me. After so many years of depression, I can finally breathe some fresh air and smile every day. I know that I will never fully come to terms with the death of my dad, but I'm finding healthier ways to cope with his loss. My dad is still my best friend, and he is on my mind every single day. Friends come and go, but life goes on. I've learned to take life a day at a time, and to encourage myself when others don't. As long as I remain strong, I will be able to face any obstacles I come across, knowing my guardian angel is watching me.