

The loss of a childhood friend

by KEITH SCHELL

When a child loses a friend, it leaves a quiet hurt that never fully goes away. Nothing ever really takes the place of that first true friend you ever had.

As a child, you look only to the future, anxious to grow up and never imagining that anything bad could ever happen to you. You think you and everyone around you will live forever. But the sudden passing of a true childhood friend leaves a painful hole in a young heart ? a wound that takes forever to heal.

My friend and I were always together in the early years of public school, spending all our time at recess playing playground sports, usually as teammates on the same sandlot teams. We journeyed through daily school life together, shoulder-to-shoulder, like two of the Three Musketeers, marching through the early years of public school with the brotherly camaraderie of youth and an unconditional loyalty to each other.

How many times would I be in the school hallway after recess, just before class was rung in, when my friend would walk past me and gesture for me to follow him, saying, "Come on, Keith, let's go down to the wart room," his childish little nickname for the boys' washroom. And, of course, loyal to each other like Porthos and D'Artagnan, I would have followed my good friend anyplace, walking shoulder-to-shoulder together to the ends of the earth if I had to. But in this case, simply going down the hall to the boys' washroom to hang out for a little bit before class began was good enough for us. We would use the facilities if we had to, and then, with the innocence of children, spend the rest of our time in the washroom laughing and telling each other all the childish and immature little potty jokes and stories that were fashionable and current to the school playground of the time.

I still remember the day I heard about the loss. Roughly a month into the summer vacation, our phone rang. When Mom and Dad received the news, they hung up the phone, took me aside, and with a profound sadness on their faces, quietly and gently told me of my dear friend's passing.

In a typical kid moment ? so the story goes ? he was playing baseball with a bunch of other boys in town and, when the ball was hit past him in the outfield, ran after it with the reckless abandon and passion of a kid who loved to play sports. The ball bounced to the end of the field and rolled out onto the road. Focused entirely on retrieving the baseball to prevent the run from scoring, he ran out onto the road to get the ball without looking both ways and, tragically, was struck by an oncoming car and died on the way to the hospital.

I was absolutely devastated by the news. I cried for what seemed like forever. How could something like this happen to an innocent kid? No child deserves to have their life taken away from them before they have had a chance to live it.

They say that time heals all wounds, and while you don't believe it at the time, it is very true. It took most of the summer, but I eventually got over the loss of my childhood friend before I went back to school in the fall. And while a loss like this will always stay with you, after the sadness passes, the memories and loyalties of that cherished childhood friendship will stay with you forever.

Eventually, you find new friends as you make your journey through life, but the very first true friend you ever had as a kid is a very special thing. There is never anything quite like it.

He was such a good guy and such a good friend. In quiet moments of reflection over the years, I sometimes wondered what kind of man he might have grown up to be had he not been robbed of the chance.

He is in the arms of God now, a child forever, but perhaps we will meet again in the hereafter to renew our treasured friendship. Porthos and D'Artagnan, reunited again, we will walk shoulder-to-shoulder again down the path of the great beyond and once again

revel in the cherished childhood friendship we once had.