Leap of Faith

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Leap Of Faith
By: Kevin Dicciani

Author’s Note: The assignment was to write a newspaper-type article in 750 words or less.
I was only nine years old when Johnny Tremaine jumped off the Green Lane Bridge. How such a young kid, only ten, could commit to eternity like that bewilders me. One night after supper, he went upstairs and filled his backpack with his most cherished belongings and then hopped on his bike. He rode to the Green Lane Bridge...then leapt. Where he leapt to, I don't know, but his death caused more than a quiet ripple throughout my existence. What caused this seemingly normal, innocent kid to end his life out of the blue? “I’m not quite sure. I might know why.”

Even though Johnny Tremaine was only ten years old, he had a certain aura surrounding him. He laughed a lot, did his homework, participated in class, and he was an altar boy. And his inferno-red hair; boy, you could see Johnny from a mile away. Like every other fourth grader, he seemed happy. But sometimes the ship sinks for reasons other than the waves at the surface—sometimes it’s because of the silent undertow. The pressure from whatever transgressions in his life eventually turned him into ink in the obituaries. For some odd reason, though, I haven’t been able to get Johnny out of my head for nearly thirteen years.

I can remember the day the other kids found out about his suicide. They seemed...thoughtless. They failed to sense that a life, a breath, disappeared from the world. They went on to make childish jokes about Johnny and how “the flamer cooled off for good.” I remember possessing feelings of animosity towards them, but on the opposite end of the spectrum, I couldn’t help but cry. Even though Johnny might not have been my best friend, he was still a kid.

He was still a kid I played tag with, joked with, learned with, and admired. While the rest of us were wreaking havoc in the halls and schoolyards, Johnny was reading and studying, hoping one day to get into Princeton and change the world. Some of the kids took Johnny’s serene and intelligent demeanor as a weakness, which soon opened up doors for humiliation and taunting. They called him ‘gay,’ ‘worthless,’ and on the day of his death, somebody told him to ‘kill himself.’ Well, Johnny did just that. He sat back and watched the consequences unfold in front of his very own eyes. If you don’t like me, try forgetting me.

Weeks went by in school and nobody seemed to notice the empty desk in the back of the room. Nobody noticed except me. It was hard for me to look over at the desk during class and forget who sat there. At the end of each class, I expected to hear Johnny debating with the teacher about something completely unbeknownst to me. I thought I would see him shuffling yards in front of me in the hall with his wildfire hair or getting in the car with his mom. I never heard Johnny, though, and I never saw him. His mom’s beige mini-van never showed up at 2:30 again.

For thirteen years I’ve wondered where Johnny Tremaine leapt to. I wondered what internal demons swam inside of his conscience before tearing him apart. I wondered if it was my classmates, his family, or his own understanding of the world that caused him to rupture. Without a doubt Johnny’s intellect was well above average, but was it his internal reality that caused his suicide? Did he understand what we didn’t? Did he understand that we were wasting away in the cacophony of the halls and schoolyards and talent shows and Christmas plays and little league baseball games? Did he think that meant something? In the hours he spent alone, did he wish he was like the rest of us? Did we make him think he couldn’t exist within himself and the world? Did he really feel like he didn’t matter at all and that he was “too” messed up? If anything disproves that, it’s that his parents have to wake up every single day without their son. The son they never got to see walk across a stage with a Princeton diploma in his hand and a smile on his face. The son they never got to see grow up and become a happy successful man with a family of his own. The son who surrendered eternally.

I wish I could’ve played some part in changing the outcome of all this. It was a lifetime’s solution to a moment’s problem—then again—no one really knows what’s exactly going through another person’s head. All I know is that it was a tragic end to a life not yet lived. I still wonder whether I could’ve stopped him from jumping, either through my words or my actions. Most of the time though, I just wonder why it had to be Johnny who died.