

## MEMORIES

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She may not have been the most beautiful girl in the world, but then again, who is? She was though my cousin and to me, she was beautiful. And watching her grow up was fascinating to me. From a child to adult, it felt almost overnight. Makeup wasn't her friend because it wasn't needed. I'm not a fan of the words "natural beauty" because I feel everyone is beautiful in their own rights, but she was a cute kid and turned into a beautiful young adult. Her eyes were so dark and enchanting they could make anyone's heart skip a beat.

Just try to picture though as her thick, black curly hair touched her shoulders. The curls bounced like pogo-sticks as she walked by. Her smile always graced the room she was in; the only times I could remember her not smiling was when we were kids and would fight over a Popsicle or toy. Sadly, the fight over Popsicles had become a long noted battle until we were old enough to move on to more important things. It's not that we were bratty kids; it's just that her favorite color was Orange, and my favorite flavor of Popsicle was, well, the Orange one. Granted, I enjoyed the Red, Purple, and Green ones; but just staring at the Orange one made my tiny mouth water and nothing would ever taste good enough.

That epic ended with two trips to the hospital by me pushing her and my other cousin down the stairs. Surely these weren't my proudest moments in life, but I loved Orange Popsicles.

Her eyes were also deep. If you took the time to look at her, you could almost see inside her. You could see her love flowing, her hopeful thoughts, and her good nature to just enjoy life. And that was probably the best part about my cousin; she made everything better. If I fell and needed someone, she picked me up. And she also kept to a great code of not telling the guys a girl

helped me. That could have and would have been hell.

I can't remember the first time I met my first born cousin mostly because she was a month old when I was born and who could remember back that far? Thankfully, there are pictures to prove we were once that young and we did know each other. I also don't remember meeting my second born cousin the first time either because she was born a day after my first cousin. Two babies in two days may seem normal, but when they are cousins, it becomes fun. Then a month later, when I was born, it just becomes crazy. My poor grandmother went from watching three of her daughters being pregnant to having three grandkids in what probably felt like overnight.

Two girls and a boy.

Not my favorite combination considering there wasn't a boy born for another three years or so. AND, there was another girl born in between this time.

Kids and grandkids are miracles in their own light, but there is nothing quite as special as that "first" one. Now I'm not implying that my grandmother loved her second through sixth child any less than the first or that she loved my other cousins and I less than first, but there really is something powerful about that "first" one. And everyone was okay with it. Granted she may have been a day older than my other cousin, but we always fell back on her being the "older one". If we turned up the stereo on my grandmother's car before she turned it on, the "older one" should have taught the "younger ones" better. And even as my grandmother tried to scold her for not teaching us "young" kids, she would just smile and the world would turn right again. There really wasn't anything her smile couldn't cure.

School was easy for her. Her mind was amazing; she thought like an adult but acted like a kid. She had exceptional grades throughout school – all the way from pre-school to senior year. And I swear I never saw her study once. Ever. Somehow, everything just came to her.

The school actually approached my Aunt about having her skip a grade, but my cousin didn't want to leave her friends. And while most parents would have probably jumped at it, my Aunt let my cousin make the decision. That's how much everyone trusted her and how much everyone admired her. Everyone wanted to see the decision she would make, and why.

My favorite pictures were always us playing. It was the three cousins – all the time. My all time favorite was a picture of me hugging her. She may have been a month older, but I was taller. My tiny arms, coated in a flannel shirt, were wrapped tight around her. Her tiny eyes stuck could be seen above my arms as I smiled. If you looked close enough, you could see her smiling.

Our first Halloween was funny. I was Superman. Thinking back, it would have been much cooler to be Batman. And my two older cousins were dressed as clowns. The exact same costumes. I remember seeing a picture of the three of us sitting on a counter somewhere. All three of us were tired, but only two of us were crying. My oldest cousin had her gentle arm somehow wrapped my other cousin and I. She was smiling. I still don't understand how, but she was smiling. Always smiling.

I remember as time moved on and we got older. As expected, we drifted somewhat as we soon had our own set of friends outside of "the cousins". We had holidays, vacations, and those great random visits that were sometimes too infrequent. I use to hate vacations as a kid. We all grew up in what was considered "middle class", but in reality, "middle class" had its own poor and rich. We weren't poor, but we weren't rich. None of us, meaning our parents, could afford a luxurious vacation. No parties with Mickey, no islands, no foreign languages. But, the vacations were always spent as a family – all of us would cram into my aunt's house for a weekend. Sounds lame, but we did this four or five times a year. I used to joke to everyone saying that the kids were locked in the basement while the adults had fun. This was true – but we had a blast in that basement. Sneaking food, playing hide and seek, and just being cousins. We laughed, we fought,

we cried, and we slept.

My oldest cousin led the scene. She was our negotiator if we needed one. If lights were turned out at midnight, she always would find a way to get the adults to give us that extra hour. And bear in mind that I was only a month younger, and my second oldest cousin was only a day younger! Her words were soft, sweet, and persuasive.

And I always made sure I slept next to my oldest cousin. No matter how early I got up, she would get up with me and we would always start the day together. Even at night, if everyone was asleep, we would sit up and talk. Some talks were deep and personal and will remain locked in my heart forever.

She wasn't very tall and thankfully, I stood over her. I say thankfully because I remember one Christmas when my younger cousin was a foot shorter than me and the next year he was a foot taller than me, had a full beard going, and somehow turned into a man without anyone telling me. She stood at my shoulder and most of our pictures when we were older she would always have her head on my shoulder. Sometimes it felt like I had a sister; she was one of the only people that I would have protected with my life if it came to it.

Sometimes life requires us to slow down and think. Time isn't tangible, but it can be lost. I was reminded this from the little angel at the top left corner of the little gravestone that lay in front of me. I was bent down shielding myself from the winter wind as it ripped through the cemetery. I often would stop there to pay a visit to my grandmother who was laid next to her first granddaughter.

I thought about all the memories that could have been with my first cousin. I thought about how different things could have been for her, for me, and for everyone else who would have been graced by her presence. On the little stone, there was only one date and one name. And while I never met my first born cousin, I think about her everyday. Every holiday, every

birthday, every vacation, I can't help but wonder what it would be like if Lindsay were here.