



A Lesson Learned the Hard Way

By Samantha Pendleton

DEATH CAN eternally change how we view our life; particularly its cause. It can also teach us lessons about our own life, or how to treat our life. It definitely did for me. This past summer a student at my high school passed away from alcohol poisoning. Fletcher Armstrong's death affected my small-town community, my school, and it ultimately affected me. It was a tragic event that rocked the little world I lived in.

Small towns are notorious for being tight-knit. This was especially true for my small town of Eagle River, Alaska. Fletcher's parents were popular as they were well known for being heavily involved in the community. Fletcher was too, not only by relation, but by his own unique charm. He got along with seniors, kids, everyone. He was that kid that floated between 'cliques' at school. Fletcher had this charisma that was not hard to get along with. When he died, his parents weren't the only ones in tears but everyone who knew him too. We cried for his passing, but also for the tragic way he passed. Although the way he passed was terrible and irresponsible, it was

overlooked; though not by his parents. I cannot speak for his parents, but I'm sure that finding out that their own son participated in that kind of action was bad enough with his death on top. Even though Fletcher was a participant in parties, alcohol and drugs, it did not make him a bad person—just a teenager making bad choices. There are two sides to everyone. He was an irreplaceable community member and my fellow student.

My senior class consists of two hundred and sixty three students. Since Fletcher was so friendly and most of us grew up with him, there weren't many who hadn't met him. And meeting Fletcher was always an event in itself. He always made it memorable. When he passed, it brought the school together as a unit. The different 'cliques' worked together to help out and support the family; students who would have never even met, came together under Fletcher. The biggest thing they did was fundraise for Fletcher memorabilia. These consisted of car/window stickers, bracelets, and t-shirts. The student government even funded a year book page dedicated entirely

to Fletcher. All funded and supported by his fellow students and friends. It also converted a lot of our heavy party going Seniors to non-everything. No drugs, no alcohol, and almost no parties. Fletcher's unfortunate passing left an everlasting impact on our school.

Fletcher was my friend but we were never very close. I was never one of the people he went out partying with. I knew he drank but I never knew how seriously until I learned how he had passed. I had always thought alcohol was supposed to make you look cool and help you have a fun time. I've quickly learned that this is not the case. Fletcher's passing showed me how quickly our lives can end, and it has also taught me that alcohol is not something to mess with, but a dangerous element to be careful of. This lesson was also taught in my IMPACT class. This class was about making an impact on people and our environment. It was very hard to talk about alcohol in our class without the presence of Fletcher felt. Fletcher has become a symbol for our school. He is even mentioned in some of our school-wide alcohol prevention campaigns. He is our constant reminder to cherish what we have, while we still can.

Alcohol and drugs are not things to joke about; they are a serious danger to be aware of. Things can go really wrong if we are not careful, i.e. a friend passing away from alcohol poisoning. Fletcher's passing has taught me this. It took an unfortunate event for it to be made clear, but it has been learned and ingrained, and I will never forget it. Fletcher will always hold a place in my heart and many others. Thank you Fletcher, for showing me to cherish life. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Samantha Pendleton is a high school senior from Alaska. Alert Magazine congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.