

Monday, October 25, 2004: Jesse Baier '05, Student Council President.

Good morning. Since I have this opportunity to talk to all of you about things other than homecoming and green sheet announcements, I'd like to take the time to tell you about my heroes. Many people idolize celebrities, historical figures, and athletes throughout their lives, and I can admit to admiring Princess Diana and the Spice Girls. However, I am lucky enough to have two heroes much closer to my heart - my cousins Brian and Craig.

I have been gifted with an amazing family. Everyone talks on the phone all of the time, my aunts love family gossip, and most of us are abnormally tall with blue eyes. I have a ton of cousins that range from one month to forty-five years old, and I am by far one of the youngest. Before all of the little ones were born, it was just me and the big kids. I always wanted to hang out with Brian and Craig, because they were the epitome of cool and always let me play football on the beach with them. Brian and Craig were my heroes - the kind of guys that no matter what they did wrong, it could never be that bad. I'm sure the two of them would have always remained perfect to me; unfortunately, two separate yet strangely connected events happened that made me realize no one is perfect.

After Brian graduated from the University of Rochester, he decided to move to Los Angeles to pursue a career in music. He was a very talented drummer, and he immediately joined a band in LA. In order to make some money for living expenses, he got a job as a bartender. He was so charismatic and personable that he quickly made all sorts of friends. As tradition in my family goes, he always called home and told us how great he was doing. He sent me a package once with big black and white head shots of his band - as hard as it is to make it in show business, they were really starting to take off.

What he didn't tell the family, however, is that with the crazy new lifestyle and friends, he had become involved with drugs. At first it was just social, but then it turned to much more. He was addicted to heroin, and no one was around to stop him. His friends were doing it and my family didn't know about it, so there was no way we could possibly help. On his birthday, he called my uncle to talk. They had a short conversation, and then Brian talked to my aunt. They thought he was in Los Angeles, because that was where he had been living, but he had secretly flown to Buffalo during the night and checked into the ECOMC detox center. His roommate Tim had flown back with him, and the two were staying with Tim's mother near the hospital. The doctors gave my cousin a certain prescription medicine to get him off of heroin, and he was then to go through rehab.

Unfortunately, Brian had a reaction to the medicine, which stopped his heart and he died in the middle of the night. He was only 26 years old. It wasn't easy for a little girl to have to go to a funeral for one of her heroes. At the time I didn't understand what happened, but when I found out two weeks later that Tim, Brian's best friend, had died of a heroin overdose, I finally realized how awful drugs can be.

With every passing year after Brian's death, my cousin Craig and I became closer and closer. He and his friends always came over to my house and swam in the pool or watched football on TV, and he was so awesome to have around. When I was in eighth grade, he was 21. On Saint Patrick's Day of that year, I was at home watching a movie in my living room when the phone rang, and I'll always regret picking it up. "Jesse it's Ricky get your dad quick! Something really bad happened!" What happened next is a blur, but I know my dad flew out of the house and drove downtown to the hospital. I later found out that Craig and a group of his friends were all taking a walk down Chippewa, just hanging out. They were just taking a break from college life and walking around in a big group. When one of the friends heard a bunch of people shouting and yelling, he turned around and realized that Craig was no longer with the group. A gut feeling told the friend to run over to the mob and see what was going on. An underage guy, who was clearly drunk, was kicking at a crumpled up person on the pavement. It was Craig. The guy was kicking him in the head, punching him, stepping on him, and basically killing him. By the time the

ambulances and police got to Craig, his brain had been severely damaged, his entire jaw, and almost all of his ribs and fingers had been broken. He spent a week in the hospital, and could barely move or speak for a long time. He went through about a year of rehabilitation and couldn't return to college for two. His life as he knew it stopped, almost ended by a drunken underage boy trying to impress his friends.

After the accident, my cousin's lawyers sued and won \$16 million. The boy went to jail, however his family does not have any money to give to my cousin, so Craig will never see a penny. Without insurance he would never be able to afford all the different kinds of medicine he has to take to get through everyday. Thankfully, he was able to return to college and just graduated this past June. It took eight years, and he never gave up. I don't think my family has ever been so proud. Even with everything that has happened, Craig has never stopped being one of my best friends or my hero. He is always there for me; to take me out to dinner or calm me down when I'm crying about college. He's been through so much, yet still puts up with me when I feel I have a right to complain - I have no idea what I would do if he didn't make it that night.

Although Brian is not around anymore to do all of the things that Craig is once again able to, I will always consider Brian to be one of my heroes. Yes, he made a wrong decision, but who doesn't. All I know is that he finally realized he needed help. He tried to make things right, and in my eyes, that is what a hero does.

I don't mean to depress you with those stories about my cousins. I felt that this was the best way I could tell you about things that have really affected my life. I am very thankful to Mr. Fayroian for letting me talk today, and if I can leave you with anything it's this: Please look out for yourself and for the people around you. Take care of your friends and be responsible - it's not always about looking cool, it's about doing the right thing and taking care of what matters most to you.

Thank you.