

I first met Jenna when I was fifteen, at my second high school, still in my freshmen year. Jenna Wenzel was a year older than me, almost a foot shorter, with square-rimmed glasses and the biggest smile. She'd go on to graduate at 16, receive a perfect score on the ACT and even finish her first year of college, before she was 18. Needless to say, this girl had it figured out. We clicked right away, I spent our first conversation pouring my soul out to her, laying in the Colorado sun, laughing for hours. Then, through a series of questionable decisions and lots of late nights over the course of our friendship, we became inseparable. Little did I know that this short blonde girl with a bubbly personality would become one of the most important people in my life, how she would shape my view of life the way she did. I can still hear her voice, telling me she knew I'd do great things with my life, or that I'd be the next Mother Teresa, that I would be a part of the good. She spoke highly of me, told me how much she loved me sincerely and often, and no matter how life shook us, we remained strong, together.

Jenna's life was not an easy one, and being the restless soul that she was, she was constantly seeking a feeling of validation and peace. For all the time that I had known her, she had looked for this peace at the bottom of a bottle, in the prescription drugs she took, and in the cigarettes she smoked. From the inside, I hardly noticed it as destructive, I hardly thought of it as an addiction. Mostly everyone I knew was doing the same, and the idea that we could lose one of our own didn't seem real- until July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015. On that day, another one of our closest friends, Jessica, passed away. She'd lost her life to heroin at the age of 17. This broke me to my core; it broke all of us. Jenna and I both watched as everyone who had ever known Jessica, broke too. We sat at her house, the day Jessica died and heard her sister screaming for God, listened to her dad telling us, "Just learn from this." When I got back to Jenna's, I sat down on her concrete porch with her, and I can remember every detail of our conversation like it just happened. I told her to slow down. I told her that I didn't know what I would do with myself, if I lost her too. I told her, "You have too much to live for." Death has a way of shaking you awake, of changing the way you see the things you do everyday, it's that movie-like moment of clarity. A realization that we were not invincible.

On June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016, less than a year after Jessica's passing, I received a phone call. I immediately hung up after hearing, and dialed Jenna's mom's number with shaky hands and a quivering lip. My mind couldn't focus; I listened to the ringing on the phone, praying Jenna would be the one picking up the line, praying that this was all a mistake. But by the way her mom picked up the phone, how she didn't even say "Hello?" I knew. She spoke with a tired voice "Desi..." "I heard something about Jenna," I could hardly spit the words out of my mouth. "Oh honey... it's true. It's true." I broke. This sort of breaking wasn't like what I'd been through before, this break was more of a shattering.

Lately, I have begun to pick up the pieces. Nowadays, I live my life so differently. I leave nothing unsaid, I say how I feel and I always mean what I say, because I realize that life is, in fact, as fragile as they say. I try to live my life the way that she saw me, with kindness, with strength and a belief in the good things coming. Life gave me a hand of tragedy-ridden cards, but who does tragedy spare? I had to learn to grow from that pain, and make use of it. I write about her, make songs about her, I think about her everyday, and I tell everyone who is close to me of this five foot girl with kaleidoscope blue eyes and the way she changed me, in life and death.