Walking a Mile

Growing up, one of my best friends was my older cousin Jacob. I always loved spending time with him when I was younger and we became really close when he and his family moved to Bend from Klamath Falls, making it much easier to see him. He was three years older than me and I looked up to him so much. I remember always wanting to be just like him. He was always so kind to me and included me in everything. While my other cousins saw me as the annoying little cousin, Jacob would always make sure to take the time to play video games with me or help me try to plant an apple seed in the backyard with hopes of growing an apple tree. When Jacob was just twelve years old, he made the decision to take his own life.

At the time, I was so young I couldn't quite comprehend the depth of the situation. I also couldn't understand why he would do this, but I wasn't the only one. He didn't leave a note that explained why and no one who was close to him could produce a reason for his decision. The only thing anyone could think of was that he was being bullied.

This significant change in my life made me more aware of how I treat and view others. Jacob seemed like such a happy person and I had no idea what he was actually feeling. This event brought to my attention that you truly don't know what people are going through unless you ask, and Jacob was a clear example of that. It is because of him that I will always be open to listening and having hard conversations with anyone who needs me. I never want to cause someone the type of pain Jacob was in. His death has made me kinder and more forgiving and I hope that I can create the loving environment for others like Jacob deserved.

At the beginning of all this, I learned that I am the type of person that is quick to judge others based on first impressions or things I've heard about them. Now, I strive to give everyone the benefit of the doubt and try to see the good in everyone because we never know why people do or say certain things, but it could be because they are hurting or dealing with heavy things. Through this I think I have developed the ability to give everyone a little more grace because I should never judge someone before walking a mile in their shoes.

Moving forward in my life I hope to treat everyone I meet with kindness and compassion and I hope I can apply the lessons this experience has taught me in all aspects of my life. I hope I can be kinder and more understanding to my teammates and coaches, my classmates and teachers, and anyone I may have the chance to work with in the future. Even though this experience took a toll on me, I am glad I was able to come out of it with more knowledge and awareness and I will forever be grateful for the important, yet heavy concepts I am now able to grasp and understand at a deeper level.