

# Chapter 1

## **Introduction**

My son Kevin was like most teenagers. He never believed that anything could happen to him. He thought he was ten foot tall and bulletproof.

I often gave him a speech about safety, being careful, and of course, clean underwear. His standard answer was, “Yeah, yeah, Dad, I know; you don’t have to tell me again. I know what I am doing.”

But Kevin was wrong, so horribly wrong; he didn’t know what he was doing. It would cost him his life and alter my perfect little life in a way I never would have imagined.

This is our story.

KEVIN'S LAST WALK

## Chapter 2

### A Letter to Kevin

Dear Kevin,

Well son, it was one incredible journey. I kept you close to me all the way. Your ashes were there in my backpack to give me strength and courage every time I spoke. We walked together through barren deserts, withering wind, snow and rain storms, up over high mountain passes, and down through beautiful sun-drenched mountain valleys for the final time.

I played back so many fond memories of you as I walked. Memories of the day you were born, your many baseball and soccer games, trips to the county fair with your pigs, sitting at our dinner table talking about life, our many hunting trips together, hugging you so tight after you graduated from high school, and yes, the last time I saw you alive. I hugged you and told you I loved you and to be careful. I then stood on our front porch and watched as you drove away for the final time.

At the viewing before the memorial I was there, but I didn't go in. I stood outside with friends and family—hugging, laughing, and crying. I chose to not see you lying in a casket, but to remember you as you lived: your love for a good laugh, a good friend, and for life.

You taught me many things in life about being a father and what it means to love a child. Your death has taught me how deep that love goes and that life holds no guarantees. You taught me that God has a plan for each of us and sometimes someone must die so that others might live. You are no longer with us physically, but you will always be in our hearts.

Love,  
The Dad

KEVIN'S LAST WALK

## Chapter 3

### **That Fateful Night**

Kevin started the process of moving out on his own on a July day when the sun seemed to cover half the sky. He spent most of the day like many teenagers in the Phoenix area: at the Salt River with friends.

The Salt River flows through central Arizona and the Phoenix area. The river is dammed in several places, so the water flow is, well, perfect for a lazy summer afternoon in some inner tubes.

A month earlier, Kevin had met my financial requirements, so I agreed to cosign a loan on a new truck. When he found his truck at a local dealership, he called to tell me all about it. “Dad, you have to come see it; it's a red Ford Ranger and it's awesome!”

Buying from a dealership meant that I would have to go down and help him negotiate the final price and sign the papers—not exactly one of my favorite things to do. Once we agreed on the price, we sat down in a cramped office with the finance guy to sign the papers. The finance guy looked at me and asked if I needed any life insurance. I was rather annoyed with his question and told him that I didn't need any life insurance. My wife will do just fine if something happens to me. He looked at me and said, “I'm not talking about you; I'm talking about your son.” I rather indignantly told him we didn't need life insurance on Kevin; 18-year-old boys don't die.

I was so very wrong. They do die. Kevin would not live long enough to make a single payment on his new truck.

When Kevin got home from the river, he took a

shower and started packing a few belongings in his new truck. Those belongings included his bed, TV, and a piece of junk dresser he'd just bought at a thrift store.

For some reason, he thought that he needed to leave his dresser with us. His dresser definitely looked like it belonged to a guy. When we got it, Kevin didn't like it very much. He said it "looked like a girl's dresser" because it was white. He wanted to make it look more like a guy's dresser, so he and I decided to make it look rustic. To do this, we took it out to the garage and proceeded to take a hammer, a grinder, and whatever else we could find to this dresser. We gave it a rustic look all right. Kevin took great pleasure in this exercise.

Kevin's friend, Craig, and I finished helping him pack the first load. When Kevin was done, he came back inside, went into his room and picked up a clean pair of jeans off of the floor and threw them in the dryer to de-wrinkle. I realize that most teenagers always pick their dirty clothes up and put them in the hamper, but not Kevin. Kevin had to walk by the hamper to leave his room, but the dirty clothes still didn't make it in the hamper. I also realize that most teenagers always fold their clothes and put them away as soon as they come out of the dryer, but Kevin was different. Kevin had two piles of clothes on the floor in his room: one pile was his dirty clothes and the other was the aforementioned "clean, wrinkled clothes."

While his jeans were de-wrinkling, he came in and told me he was going to brush his teeth now because he didn't want to take his toothbrush with him. He said, "I'll be back tomorrow and get it." I have never forgotten those words and I think about them often. Why didn't he want to take his toothbrush with him? I have often wondered about this. Maybe it was his way of putting my mind at

ease as my youngest child (okay, my baby) moved out. He put on his jeans, gave me a hug, and said, “I love you, Dad.” I told him I loved him, too, and to be careful. I walked out front with him, stood on the front porch, and watched him drive away.

It was the last time I saw him alive.

As one would expect, I think about those final moments that I saw him alive. Maybe there was something else I could have said or done that could have changed it all, something that would have caused Kevin to do something different that night—anything. I think about how I don't remember much about the sunset that night—the last sunset he would ever see—and that he would not live to see another sunrise.

I guess we should all appreciate beautiful sunsets and sunrises because we never know when it will be the last one we ever see with the ones we love.

I no longer look at dates the same. When I look at a date on a piece of paper or someone talks about things that have happened in the past, my first thought is, *Was Kevin alive then?*

That night the guys he moved in with decided to have a housewarming party for Kevin. They had a keg of beer and some Southern Comfort. There were somewhere between 15 and 25 kids at this party along with a few adults. The ages ranged from 15 to 28. Some time around midnight, they decided to do some shots. Kevin did several double shots of the Southern Comfort.

A short time later, he passed out. The kids at the party laid him in his bed, on his side, in case he vomited. They then decided to play a joke on him, so they went in to his room and shaved his head and his legs.

Kevin's friend, Craig, was worried about him, so he

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went in to check on him a few times. When he checked on him around 4:00 a.m, he found him blue and not breathing. The first 911 call indicated difficulty breathing. By the next call, he was not breathing. My son was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital while I slept peacefully in my bed.