

WHEN WILL YOU COME BACK?

I remember holding your hand.

When will you come back?

I remember the tears dripping down my cheek in hope.

When will you come back?

I remember telling you "I'm here and don't you forget that."

When will you come back?

Do you remember me sitting at your bedside for forty-eight hours?

When will you come back?

Do you remember when you slipped away from me with the slightest ease?

When will you come back?

Your last words to me were "I love you, now you don't forget that."

I miss you, when will you come back?

by Ann Vukodinovich Grade 6

Looking through old photos of my grandpa inspired me to write this poem.

THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

The phone rang . . . and my mom started to cry. We had known for a while that something was wrong with our dog, Amber, though we never would have thought it life-threatening. My mom hung up and through her tears proclaimed Amber's death sentence: her spleen had ruptured, and she might not make it through the night.

It had all started one Sunday evening a few weeks ago when Amber wouldn't come inside. I had let her out to go to the bathroom, but she just lay down on the frozen cement patio, motionless like a bear hibernating, obviously uncomfortable and maybe even in pain. By the time we found out why, on February 24, 2010, it was too late.

Earlier that day the veterinarian told my dad that Amber could possibly die while we were sleeping, and it would be better to just put her to sleep that afternoon. He refused and brought her home so we could say goodbye. She wasn't even eight yet; the sight of her almost not able to traverse the sidewalk was heartbreaking. Before the fireplace, on the rug, is where she stayed with us until dinner. It was an afternoon full of tears, pictures, and wails of, *Why does Amber have to die on my birthday?* for it was indeed my little sister's birthday. All I remember from the rest of that evening is that we gave her bacon for her last meal, and its glorious fatty smell was the only good thing during that bleak day.

Waking up the next morning I knew I had to face two situations for which I was totally unprepared: first, leaving my dog; and second, a preposition quiz. The soft velvet of her ears, thick fur of her abdomen, and glossy pelt on her back were my last impressions of Amber as I prepared to leave. I can still envision her as the energetic fur ball she once was as a puppy, but that day she was neither lively nor fuzzy. Although, as old and weak as she looked, she was still the same dog I loved. We left for school, and even though it was only across the street, it felt like I was a world away from my best friend.

I hardly remember the rest of that day. Maybe I was in denial or perhaps the grief ground everything into insignificant dust. Being the first time I had irrevocably lost someone, the sensations were startlingly unrecognizable. Frequent pangs of grief and loss accosted me throughout the day, but the worst was when I got home. Dragging my feet, I trudged in the back door and Amber wasn't there to jump up and slobber my face in greeting. Quickly I missed the interminable barking and incessant array of growls and yowls that set my nerves on end. I was now no longer in the possession of a dog. This feeling was exceedingly different than when my dad took her on hunting trips for the weekend, and they were gone only temporarily.

The death of a loved one is important to everyone; the first experience, however, teaches us how to deal with our feelings about such tragedies. Above all else I believe family is what helped me cope. Knowing that others felt my pain gave me strength to continue on with my normal life and to function properly. Next I distracted myself; for example, whereas usually I would read for fun or school, that day I read to get away, to be distracted from my world and transported to a place of fiction and other people's problems. Even though that day I lost something irreplaceable, I also gained my most memorable moment.