



Illustrations for Homeless at 19 created by Damon Kleps



HOMELESS AT 19

Written By Courtney Soder

Looking back on it now, Mychal never had an easy life. He was diagnosed with Type I Diabetes (juvenile diabetes) when he was little. Then, still at a young age, he lost both of his parents. His aunt and uncle were given parental responsibility, then died soon after, leaving him alone again.

I met Mychal in college through a mutual friend, and we grew close soon after meeting. We spent a lot of time together at the dorm, on campus at different school events, and at my house. He loved to play catch with my dogs and would tire them out from all of the running they would do.

Mychal never really talked about his home life or his foster mother. Despite his troubles, he was pretty easy going. He would rap about random things and knew how to make us all laugh. Once, he used my makeup to make a smiley face on his stomach, and walked around talking with his belly. He also taught us a song he learned while attending a camp for children with diabetes.

It was painstakingly hard for him to watch his sugar intake. College life offers you greasy fast food and sugary alternatives. For Mychal's sake, we all tried to avoid sugars when he was around. Every time he came in contact with a doughnut or a candy bar, he would



mow it down and take another only to end up in the hospital, because he wouldn't take his insulin, or watch his sugar intake.

Towards the end of our second semester in school, Mychal's grades had plummeted. His foster mother wouldn't let him return home due to his grades. He was left homeless. His girlfriend's parents had never offered to let him stay with them, and my mother would never let a boy spend the night, let alone live with us. I searched high and low until I found him a place to stay with some friends.

Mychal wore out his welcome when he had no luck finding a job and spent countless hours on the couch watching television. At 19-years-old, Mychal found himself homeless. He spent his nights on park benches during the summer. At night, his girlfriend would call him at the same payphone, so he didn't have to worry about coming up with the change. During the day, Mychal roamed around the city with no money and no place to go.

After several weeks of making the outside elements his home, the police found him and took him to the city mission.

At the mission, Mychal found a warm place to sleep, meals, and made new friends. His best friend was his counselor. This man took Mychal under his wing and laid out some options for his life. Through counseling, intervention, and caring, Mychal turned his life around.

Approximately a year after living at the mission and with the help of his counselor, he found a job close to campus. They helped him save for a deposit on an apartment and assisted with registering for the fall semester. The day he moved into his own apartment after being homeless for a year was a real turning point in his life. He had a job and could get back into school.

Each night Mychal talked with his girlfriend, Melody. They had continued talking on the telephone since those late nights at the payphone over a year ago. One night, Mychal told Melody that he wasn't feeling well. He told her that if he still felt ill in the morning, he was going to the hospital.

One balmy June night just a couple days later, I got a horrible phone call. Melody called me in hysterics. Mychal never made it to the next morning. He died in his sleep due to diabetic shock. Mychal was unable to get to his insulin and was found days later.

I thought I was having a bad dream; she just kept screaming and crying and saying it over and over. I just froze and dropped the phone.

After losing his life, Mychal's ashes were spread around the earth at the city mission where I still visit him from time to time. Mychal may be gone, but he will never be forgotten. He lives on through me.

