

I'm gonna miss that smile

Written by Deb Egenberger
Thursday, 11 February 2010 22:43 -



At least once a week—sometimes more often—I put an extra plate and fork on the table for supper.

Math homework was often better understood when hammered out with a friend on a full stomach.

I came to expect the extra face at mealtime and was often disappointed if he didn't show up.

Over the course of seven years, I watched as he grew along side my son from a scrawny little junior high punk to a handsome, muscle-bound young man.

As his voice became deeper, his hair evolved from unruly curls to short and well-groomed.

His boots—purple and polished—were a fitting symbol of his cowboy way: work hard, play harder.

D.J. Pedersen was the kind of kid who could brighten any room just by walking into it. I don't recall a single time I saw him without a smile. Anyone who ever met him knows it's true.

He was also one of the hardest working young men I've ever known. Whether it was conditioning in the heat of the day before football season, learning to ride a bull in a dusty rodeo arena or figuring algebra problems at a friend's supper table, he gave his all.

He was a gentleman when he should be and a rowdy cowboy when he could be.

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D.J.'s death last fall left a gaping hole in so many hearts, certainly not the least of which belong to his parents. I can't begin to wrap my mind around their continuing pain and I pray for their strength daily.

As I lay in bed last night waiting for sleep, the image of D.J.'s smiling face entered my mind. His birthday is coming up this weekend and I've been thinking about him a lot lately.

With tears dripping into my ears, I recalled all that the vibrant young man meant to me and the simple lesson he left behind: Life is too short to go halfway.

Then, as if precisely orchestrated, a song came on the radio offering me a fitting explanation for my fresh tears.

Country music star Toby Keith wrote it days after his dear friend Wayman Tisdale died of cancer last May at age 44.

I'm gonna miss that smile

I'm gonna miss you my friend

Even though it hurts the way it ended up

I'd do it all again

So play it sweet in heaven

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'Cause that's right where you wanna be

I'm not crying because I feel so sorry for you

I'm crying for me.

Thank you, D.J. See you on the other side!