Shred in Peace

Did you know that there are over 40,000 deaths due to car accidents each year in the United States? Yeah, I didn’t either. It seems like that is such a crazy number. I always used to think, “Oh, nothing like that would happen to me. My friends won’t get in car accidents.” I look at that number, and compare it to how many friends I have and just think, I don’t have enough friends for that to happen. I was wrong. Last summer, something happened that I wish I could change, or take back, July 2011; my friend got in a car accident unfortunately and passed away, along with his cousin. Tanner, he was one of most stubborn and obnoxious little kid I ever met, but for some reason, when I met him I had a special kid of connection. We ended up getting along so well, by putting aside his little attitude; he ended up to be such a nice kid that I looked forward to seeing every time I would go to my mom’s school.

I met Tanner when he was in elementary school at Poly Drive; my mom was a lunch lady at his school in Billings, Montana. No one at my mom’s school could handle him, except for her. Every time he would get in trouble or a teacher couldn’t deal with him they would just call my mom and then they would talk and he would be fine. All they would do is just flip each other crap back and forth and then he would behave, which is what he loved to do with anyone. He always wanted to be right, even when he was in the wrong and he even knew it. When I first saw him I could just tell that he had the “punk” attitude, and oh boy, was I right. He would make smart remarks and he would like to think he was tough. He sure as hell was. While getting to know Tanner, I learned that he loved to ski, BMX, and that he loved the University of Montana, the Griz. He became like a little brother I never had and never wanted, but I started to love it and I loved our relationship. He ended up moving away from Billings and moved to Missoula, where he found his passion for skiing and BMX even more. He had the best of friends and such a good family to get him through life. They all loved him and so did everyone else that met him. He was 14, entering his 8th grade year when a tragic accident happened- a car accident.

His family is by far, the best family I have ever met. They are so family oriented, they act like a family you always wanted, they even act like a family to their children’s friends; always there for each other, large, happy, just having fun all the time. Kathy, his mother, is like a mom to me now, she is the strongest woman I know and that I will ever meet. She is an inspiration to not just me, but everyone. She looks for the good in every situation and it’s good to have someone to look up to that thinks like that. Tanner had a lot of siblings; he was the baby of the family. Allie, one of his sisters, is a grade below me, currently 16. We are good friends, and I know if I ever need anything that I can go to her. She has been through so much and is so strong because of it. Her and Tanner were as close as two best friends would be, maybe even closer. I would look at them and wish that I had that relationship with my sister. For being so young she is so vise and knows how to help in situations, she takes after her mother. She is also another person I look up to and always will.

Tanner died in a car accident when he was driving home from Mt. Hood, OR back to Missoula, MT. He was with his cousin Trevor, one of his close family members, his best friend. They were up at Hood for a week, just having some fun, practicing jumps and flips. They got in a car accident July 2, 2011 right outside Missoula. “At least he got to spend the last week of his life doing the thing he loved most- skiing, with one of his favorite people on earth- his cousin, Trevor.” I remember Allie, his sister, saying this quote. It has stuck in my head ever since the day I saw it. Unfortunately, Trevor went down with him.

July 3, 2012, the day I found out Tanner had died I was driving home from Little Caeser’s with my friend Savanah, we were on 24th and Central. Savanah looked at me and asks, “Who is Tanner Olson? Who is Allie Olson? Allie’s Facebook is getting blown up with ‘R.I.P. TJO, I’m here for you, etc.” I went on and started explaining my relationships I had with them and who they were. She looked at me with sorrow and says, “I need to tell you something.. This is what Allie just posted (something along these lines), ‘R.I.P. Tanner Jay Olson- best brother in the entire world.” By this time we were on 24th and Monad, I stopped my car in the middle of the road and all of my emotions came out without me controlling them, Water running from my eyes, hyperventilating, and blurred eyes. When I made it home I nearly blacked out from crying so hard, I had to call my mom to tell her- so I did. Of course though, she couldn’t understand me. My mom kept saying “this isn’t possible, stop lying to me Nicole”, with some hesitation in her voice. I made Savanah get on the phone and tell my mom so she could understand, when she did I finally got back on the phone, barely talking. When she did understand, she didn’t believe me and had to find out on her own. We were both speechless. When I first heard about his accident I honestly couldn’t believe what I had heard when Savanah had told me that he had passed away. I even had to ask Allie myself to clarify that it was real. My heart sank in sorrow for the entire family because I know how it feels to have a family member and a friend pass away.

Kathy, Tanner’s mom, is trying to raise money to build memorial BMX parks around the state of Montana for him- because that’s what he loved to do. For her to achieve that goal, she throws concerts, rail jams, sets up stands at events downtown, and she sells merchandise for him, with his name on it, I Ride For Tanner, I Shred For Tanner, iRD4T, Shred In Peace, and Ride In Peace. She sells shirts, tank tops, sweatshirts, lanyards, stickers, key chains, yoga pants, hats, wristbands, and cell phone cases. (I have almost all of the above) Every day I wear my Tanner gear, and I wear my wristbands every day. His spirit is still alive because I know that is what he would want and that is what his mom would want- Tanner always did want all of the attention on him, all eyes on him, no matter what the situation was. My mom and I purchase things from Kathy all the time and every time we do, we just sit there and wait for our package, then when it finally comes we get the biggest grin on our faces and rush to open it to see how awesome our merchandise it. Recently I made a trip to Montana to visit and I walked into their house and saw all their merchandise in the old dining room and fell in love. When I saw all of the Tanner gear I instantly wanted everything for Tanner. We know it’s going to a good cause and it’s making his family really happy to know that we are willing to help and that we still cherish him.

This is my story, about a friend to all, a brother to some, and an inspiration to anyone who hears his story. He has affected so many people in just his short 14 years of life- my life wouldn’t be how it is now if I didn’t meet him. His story has showed me to never take things for granted because you never know when you’ll be cut off. When I met him he inspired me to learn how to snowboard, hit my first rail, and damn, even my first box. This reason I Ride for Him, he will inspire me this season to strap on my first pair of skis and shred that pow for my little guy. This season I will do my first run, first box, and first rail while wear my I Ride For Tanner gear for him and it will be up at Mt. Hood, just for him. Thanks to him I know that I will always have a guardian angel looking down on me. Tanner knew that he would make it big someday, even though this might not be how he imagined it, all of his friends and family are making his name go worldwide- which is making him big. I ride for Tanner and I always will, anyone who knows me knows that I will always represent my little guy by wearing his name forever!