

“Why”

The sunset I had viewed earlier that unforgettable night was breathtaking, with bright, vibrant colors- burnt orange, goldenrod, indigo, and scarlet, especially the magnificent shades of red caused by the effects of Rayleigh scattering. Now I attempt to divert my eyes, which suddenly can't halt the uncontrollable flow of tears, as I stare as blotches of blood join as one on the sweatshirt of the lifeless crumpled body of my best buddy Bob.

How could this senseless, avoidable, tragedy happen to my closest friend? Both of us had grown up on the same street only seven houses away, separated by a breezeway. We attended the same schools, played on the same baseball and basketball teams, and even dated identical twin sisters. I thought mine was prettier! Bob and I decided to attend the same city university, only because we lacked the financial means to do otherwise. Our college was smackdown in the bullseye of one of the most-seediest sections of the city. Gentrification was only a dream. The reality consisted of dilapidated houses, boarded up stores, and a rancid smell of despair that not only surrounded the area but its inhabitants. Numerous notorious street gangs whose livelihoods depended on dealing hard drugs to a depressed decaying community and weed to trendy co-eds ruthlessly ruled their turf.

As college freshmen we were poor, not penniless. Our fend for ourselves meal plan consisted of Ramen noodles, hot dogs, frozen dinners and an occasional treat from Subway or McDonalds. As a necessary addition to our lack of quality nutrition Bob and I in earnest began visiting every fraternity mixer for incoming freshmen. Our object was not to join a frat and become a brother, who could afford that, but to enjoy the accouterments, the trappings – upscale delicious food, plenty of quality beer and of course pretty girls. Our plan worked to perfection until that fateful Saturday night when Bob laid eyes on Harriett at the Alpha Epsilon Pi house. She was stunning; a redhead with sparkling powder blue eyes, a Victoria's Secret model's figure who was dressed like a daydream. Harriett was intelligent but possessed too much street smarts. Bob was hooked when she started discussing politics and the legalization of marijuana. They soon discovered that both enjoyed getting as high as humanly possible. As a senior in high school, Bob smoked weed and loved having that euphoric feeling. But being of limited means, he was unable to fully satisfy his desire to remain high whenever possible. Bob was tall, slender about six foot three, bright, articulate, with an I am fun smile and an engaging personality. Academics came easy along with the girls. He played varsity basketball and first base on the championship baseball team. He had a steady, not so steady girlfriend throughout high school. I was Goose, his wing man, his shadow, and Bob was Maverick, the charmer. We spent countless hours hanging out, and although I loved his company, I came to

hate his utter enjoyment of pot. Banish the thought from your mind that I was a saint. At parties I smoked weed, got giddy, but could go weeks without lighting up a joint.

Bob and Harriett immediately started dating and instantaneously became a couple. Their intense relationship became way too serious way too quick. A queasy uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach kept repeating like foul-smelling fish. Harriett constantly lied. She lied about school, Harriett paid a brain to take her exams, she lied about her friends to other friend's behind their backs and even to their faces. Harriett even insinuated to Bob that I was behaving "inappropriate". She was desperately trying to sabotage Bob and my extremely close bond, our years of being best buds. These lies so outrageous, so preposterous that when I attempted to point out the truth Bob jumped to Harriet's defense and vigorously defended her integrity. Our friendship, our closeness was crumbling, and it was painful. I was losing Bob, my buddy and a helpless defeated feeling paralyzed me. What terrified me even more was when Bob started wearing trendy tailored clothes and frequenting expensive downtown restaurants basking in an elegant lifestyle. The occasional treat, a Subway hoagie or a Big Mac, fries and soda were a distant memory, far removed from his present status in society.

"What the hell is going on. This is not you. This is pure bull", I screamed at Bob. Bob remained silent for a few moments and you could see the wheels spinning furiously trying to concoct a believable explanation. He inhaled and

then replied, " These were a gift from Harriett, you see she received a money-laden birthday card from her loving, generous parents". Furious I replied, "You expect me to believe this garbage after seeing you hanging out with some unsavory street characters. I am really concerned, tell me the truth". "Believe it or not, I don't give a rat's ass, that's the truth Bob said with a poker face and an inside crammed with lies". In that split-second I made a horrible decision not to get involved in Bob's business. In hindsight I knew I should have immediately jumped in with both feet and stomped on my buddies thick skull to make him see the light, understand the consequences if he continued to sell weed to the hungry college crowd. Unfortunately, my prophecy proved correct.

A few nights later Bob looked terrified as if he had seen a ghost, not the Casper kind, as his body stumbled into our dorm room. His clothes disheveled and ripped, his face bruised and swollen, his aura of invincibility shattered. I had never witnessed Bob; my Maverick appear so vulnerable. My insides shook with fear. When my fallen hero had calmed down and composed himself, he explained that five members of "The Bangers" a vicious neighborhood street gang, after they had roughed him up, told him in no uncertain terms that for his own physical wellbeing he better cease his selling immediately. This would be his only warning. The hoodlums had made their point and Bob in a shaken sincere voice swore to everything holy that he would stop dealing and he kept his word for about a month. But the lure of fast easy money to a poor college

kid was too great. It is like trying to convince an alcoholic never to drink again when they are not ready to relinquish the bottle.

Early the next day, after barely sleeping, preoccupied about my friend's deadly dilemma, I reluctantly paid a call on Harriett, Bob's partner in crime to cajole her to intercede, to halt Bob's downward spiral. "Harriett, please I beg of you, use your considerable influence, your phenomenal persuasive powers to convince Bob to immediately stop selling drugs". My heartfelt emotional appeal to Harriett's heart fell on deaf ears. She looked right through me and replied in a voice void of emotion, lacking any empathy "I love my expensive designer outfits, my fancy center-city eateries with top shelf liquor, invitations to exclusive parties, and wealthy friends with Summer homes". "There's no chance in hell I'm throwing away these goodies", as she violently shook her redheaded no." Do you think I'm an idiot?" "No, you are a selfish, entitled bitch who doesn't give a dam about Bob", instantaneously experiencing a wave of nausea as I slammed the apartment door. I could clearly see Bob's future and the picture looked extremely bleak. His "I am fun" smile ran away from his face and vanished along with his engaging personality which turned sour. School was a distant memory, with failing grades he dropped most of his courses. My last-ditch effort to stop Bob had failed miserably. My buddy was completely out of control and these thugs meant business. This was not a school yard game where you just took your ball, went home, and suffered no repercussion.

Three nights later, after finally closing my eyes, sounds of gun shots followed by squealing tires startled me. My heart stopped. Before I hit the street, I knew what had transpired. "Why" I screamed in an earth-shattering voice, coming from the depths of my soul, to the curious crowd circling Bob's bullet-ridden body. Then I cried.