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CHILDHOOD BESTIES

We all had one. A childhood best friend. That one person that, no matter what happened, you could go to and tell all your innermost thoughts. They wouldn't judge you. They wouldn't try to change you. They were just always there for you.

My 10-year-old daughter's best friend spent the night last night. Now, that's nothing unusual. The unusual part of it was that I was the only one at home. My wife and oldest child are out of town for a few days. So this time, they were all my responsibility. So I had the duty - no, that's not the right word - the privilege of taking care of them. When there are others in the house, I don't have to pay as close of attention as I did last night. I can go in another room. I can ignore the noise. I can avoid the job.

Last night and this morning, there was no avoiding. And the funny thing is, I'm glad for that. As adults, as parents, we sometimes get lazy in our obligation to our kids. Other things are on our mind. The daily grind grinds us down. We lose our focus. Last night, I found my focus, if only for a day.

Since these two decided to sleep in the living room floor, I snuck in early this morning with my cup of coffee and just watched them sleep. I thought back to my childhood, to my then-best friend. As I watched, I noticed these two girls were holding hands. In their sleep. They had that irrepressible bond that only comes with the innocence of youth. It made my heart swell. Then it made it hurt.

The reason it made my heart hurt was because I started thinking about my childhood best friend. I rarely see him, maybe once or twice a year. Not nearly as much as I should. We drifted apart in middle school, a time when many childhood best friends drift apart. That's when my oldest daughter and her best friend stopped spending time together, and when the same thing happened to me and my buddy.

I recently went to see my oldest friend when I was back home visiting my parents. I would like to tell you that I did so simply because I knew I should, because I missed him and felt the need to see him again. I do miss him, but this time I made the trip because he had been diagnosed, for the second time in five years, with colon cancer. He's receiving chemotherapy, a necessary evil that his wife says will probably be a lifelong need. I can't tell you exactly what his prognosis is. I know that anytime a cancer returns, it's never a good thing. But I keep praying for him, as do many other people.

His attitude is great, as it always has been. He still spends his time making everyone in the room laugh. He's one of the most naturally funny people you'll ever meet - and one of the most selfless. I wish I had been there for him more the past 30+ years. I wish

I had spent more time with he and his family. I wish I had been a better friend. But most of all, right now, I wish I could just do like my daughter did last night. I wish I could hold his hand while he sleeps, and offer him some kind of comfort during this difficult time. I miss having that kind of bond.