

A Proper Goodbye

By: Kaelyn Sohre

Faithful friends are found in the craziest of places. In my case, it was under a table. As Mrs. Behling introduced her, Grace barely gave a smile, and then crawled under the table at the front of the room of Mrs. Behling's fourth grade classroom. Mrs. Behling persisted to teach, but I couldn't help but glance at the isolated girl sobbing in the corner of the room. The crying continued, as daily a tearful Grace battled her mom to allow her to return home, but her mother persisted. Every day, Grace ended up under the front table, weeping. No matter how many times Mrs. Behling tried to console her or attempt to calm Grace down, she wouldn't stop.

One day, after yet another exasperating episode, I confidently thought to myself that maybe I could be her friend. Slowly, I began to invite Grace to sit by me at lunch, participate in my group for projects, and play with me at recess. Slowly, I began to discover her story. Her family moved to Puerto Rico just a year earlier for her dad's business, but they were forced to move back to Wisconsin in the fall due to a disastrous hurricane. They would move back to Puerto Rico after the school year. Slowly, I gained a new best friend, and I hope she did too.

We partnered for projects, played during recess, and sat next to each other during lunch. We were inseparable, the whole time dreading the day when Grace had to move back.

June, the month Grace moved back to Puerto Rico, was approaching quickly. I didn't know how to properly say goodbye, especially if I didn't know when or if I would ever see her again. When she left, who would be my friend? Who would sit by me during lunch? Who would I talk to? Although I couldn't predict what would happen in the future, I knew there was something I could do right now. At that moment, I had a great idea. What if I surprised Grace with a going away party?

After months of planning, and very secretive efforts, it was the day of the party. I couldn't contain my excitement, and I knew the other girls couldn't either.

“I have to knock on the door, because you know, I have to make sure it works,” I spoke the code words to Grace the day of the party, but to the other girls, it meant it was almost time for the surprise. I began to knock on the hard, wooden doors, hearing soft whispers from the other side. As I opened the two grand French doors that lead to my basement, a chorus of voices cheered, “surprise!” A very shocked Grace stood with her hands covering her mouth while a multitude of 10-year-old girls hugged her. Her mouth, still open in shock, and all of our arms intertwined symbolized how connected we all became. Mr. Schaub, the other fourth grade teacher and Mrs. Behling just stood to the side, smiling as bright as sunshine. I led Grace outside to show her the many activities we had built, a volleyball net, basketball hoop, nail polish station, and blazing fire pit. We played around for an hour or so, and then it was time for dinner. We sat in the screen porch on the beautiful, clear-skied night, talked about a million different things, and ate pizza. The night topped off with a beautiful cake with the words, “We’ll miss you Grace!” in orange icing. Amidst lots of laughter, we devoured the vanilla and chocolate swirl cake as fast as lightning. As it started to get dark, we marched outside to make gooey s’mores. Soon enough, marshmallow faced girls started to say their goodbyes. One by one, they left.

The time I was dreading came. Grace’s mom drove up, and we all exchanged hugs. At that moment, I realized friends come from all different places, and sometimes you just have to reach out to find one. As I watched Grace pull away, it was not only her face with tears rolling down, but mine as well. Even though I don’t talk to Grace as much anymore, I am so thankful for the valuable lesson of friendship she taught me.