

## THE YEARBOOK

By Josh Danz

You know that girl from the Brady Bunch? You know the "Marsha, Marsha, Marsha" one.... Yeah that's me. I mean, it's not that I'm jealous of my sister... It's just that I go out of my way to wake up early for her so I can take her to school and drop her off so she can see her friends... and me well... (Pause) OK! So I'm jealous! But it's cool, it's normal, it's ok to be jealous.... Of your 13 year old sister. (Look up and close the book- embarrassed)

When it comes to my sister, I'm pretty protective of her. And with good reason. She looks older than 13... I would say 16. And... you know, at that age... the boys.... They're horny little bastards. So, if I see some kid approach her, I do what any big brother would do.... I beat the shit out of each one of them. Black eyes, bloody nose, broken knee caps... the whole nine yards. I don't really mind doing it. Maggie on the other hand... (Shake hand in so-so motion). She hates it... but she's my sister, you know? So I gotta protect her.

You know, it's funny. I remember the day she got caught skipping school. I did that once, and my ass was on lockdown for a good 3 months. And Maggie never gets in trouble. She's always looked at as the princess and me... I'm not. Not that I'd want to be a Princess or anything. Anyway, she ended up getting off easy at school. An afternoon of detention. But the hard part was telling our parents. They would look at you and just stare. Silence. I mean, I would rather be bombarded with screaming. Do you know what the silent stare is like? (Stare at someone for a few seconds with big eyes and odd expression). It's awkward yes? ... Yeah, and Maggie didn't want to go through that. So I get this call from Maggie on the way to basketball practice saying that she's a whole lot of trouble and she really, really needs my help.

Maggie never needs my help, so here I am thinking "Oh crap.... Oh crap.... she's in prison..... Then she tells me she got caught skipping. So I picked her up.

When I got there, she started to cry. It wasn't often that my sister cried in front of me, because she always puts up that tough guy act, but when she did, it made me realize that she was still a little girl, you know? "Ben, I'm so sorry, I won't do it again... Please don't tell mom and dad. Please Ben."

Phew.... Good thing I didn't over react! (Embarrassed smile)

Now here it is, weeks before graduation and I'm pumped. A few weeks back we were told that there would be an assembly for all seniors. One final time to be together before we left. The assembly was at 4:00, and Maggie needed to be picked up at 4:45. Clearly that wasn't going to happen. So on the day of the assembly, Maggie reminded me that Sarah's mom was taking her home... And begged me, not to check up on her. And though I didn't like the idea, I thought, hey, what the hell?

So after the assembly I got in my car, but it seemed like out of nowhere, I started to feel sick. I figured the pain was either the tacos I ate for lunch in the cafeteria, which (Nod)... pretty likely, or nerves about graduating! I sat there a minute and just waited until the pain went away. When I left, I drove by Maggie's school which was on the way home. When I looked over in the parking lot, I saw a couple ambulances with a crowd of people gathered around them there, and I thought "Damn, I bet they served those tacos at Maggie's school too! (Laugh)" Let me tell you something. If there is one thing that I'm looking forward to about college, it's not having to eat that crap they serve to you in the cafeteria. Three weeks ago, the Chess Team had an "End of the year banquet, catered by the lunch ladies." The chess team is like the pride and joy of our school. And that's mainly because our football team sucks, and... well the rest of our teams are practically non-existent. But that's beside the point. The lunch ladies managed to practically poison the entire chess team just before Nationals. The culprit... bad lettuce. Lettuce! Seriously, who gets sick from lettuce? And you know what, based on that story, I knew whatever happened over at Maggie's school couldn't be that bad.

When I got home I heard my parents in the kitchen. By the way things sounded, it seemed that they had gotten into yet another argument. I could hear my mother "Crelling and Sitching," as I liked to call it. Which is umm... a combo of crying, yelling screaming and bitching... mainly bitching. Now, usually I'd leave em' alone, but uh, well I'm nosey. When I walked in I knew something was going on, and then, I see the blood just drain out of my mother's face. She looked at me, then looked at my father, then tears were pouring out of her eyes. (Pause) "What the hell is going on here? (Pause) What's the Problem?" Then my father started to cry. (Long Pause)

They said my sister died about 25 minutes after the accident. Apparently the father of some girl lost control of his car and ummm... (Turn to the side). I mean, here I am joking about the cafeteria food and she can't even breathe. (Pause) And I couldn't do anything. (Said whispering).

I went back to school a week later. When I walked to lunch that day, a man who I thought was Maggie's Principal came up to me. He introduced himself and told me he was sorry to hear about what happened. He said something about this Grief Group meeting for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade the next day. He told me that over the past four days, all of Maggie's friends and teachers had signed her yearbook, and that he wanted me to read a few of the things from it. I mean do I do it, do I not do it... And then he said, "Look Ben, I know it's short notice, but we'd really like you there."  
(Pause... put book under arm... warm up hands and say "ok.")

As I walked into the auditorium the next day, I started to reconsider reading Maggie's yearbook, but after being introduced by Mr. McGee, I looked into the crowd of about 200 or so and thought "Here we go". (Open book to first page) (Clear Throat) "Mags, you are my best friend now and always. I will never forget your smile. I miss you so much and I just want to tell you that I love you. Your best friend, Sarah."

(Chuckle) I thought back to when Maggie got stuck in a raft at this water park and even though my parents were right next to her, she called for me.

About an hour had passed and there were only a few more signings for me to read. After I finished reading the last one, I sat there for a minute and just looked out at these people. I thought about to say something, but I got choked up. When I regained my composure, I looked back up and said "Thank you all for coming here today. It means a lot to me, and I'm sure it means a lot to Maggie. Thank you for writing these amazing things in my sister's yearbook. But most of all, thank you... Thank you, for making me feel like Maggie's brother again (Smile)."

## **NO LONGER THE FIRST**

By Josh Danz

To this day I can remember my very first girlfriend. Probably because she was the only girlfriend I've ever had. People have asked me how... over the course of 20 years have I only had one girlfriend? And to be honest, I don't know. I'm shy, I guess. Talking to girls isn't something that comes naturally to me. I either say something really stupid, or I can't even work up enough nerve to say anything at all. And yeah, it's embarrassing- to say that the only girlfriend I've ever had was back in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

So I'm sitting in my Anatomy for Bio Majors class, when this girl walks in. And you can tell from the moment you saw her that she was just one of those girls who you knew you couldn't have. The girl with that perfect smile and personality. Well, after about 20 seconds of praying to God that she sat next to me, take a guess where she ended up. So here I am trying to think of something to say to her when she beats me to the punch and says "Hi I'm Alison." So trying to play it cool, I say (Cracked voice) "Hey... Hey, I'm Ben." And as I can feel the blood rushing out of my face she laughs... and says "Nice to meet you."

Over the next couple of weeks, we started to get pretty friendly. She'd come to class and sit down next to me and we would talk for a while until class started. I'd generally try to say something funny, which usually came out wrong... and like always, she would just laugh. You know one day I made some sort of joke that her and I should go out and the next thing I know she's actually giving me her number. So after practicing what I was gonna say around 65 times, I finally worked up enough nerve to ask her out. And she said yes.

The first few dates were awesome. After we went out we would go back to my apartment and talk until we fell asleep or well, usually until I fell asleep. Anyways, one night, we got back to my place after going to see some little chick flick and Alison said she wanted to thank me for putting up with her crying throughout the movie... Remember that Anatomy class? Well, let's just say I got a head start on that homework!

It was hard to believe that three months had already passed since we started dating. It's been a great three months, but over the past few days Alison had seemed kind of distant. As we walked to class that Monday, she stopped me. She said "Ben, I need to talk to you. (Pause) I'm pregnant Ben."

“What? You’re telling me that after all- Well, I hope you and whoever the hell the father is are, really happy!” And she laughed and said “Me too. I’m sorry to spring this on you, but I need to know that you’re here for us Ben... if not” “No! I am. I love you Alison. And I’m gonna love that baby too.”

How is this possible? How am I supposed to take care of a baby? Shit, I’m still a baby. I used to laugh at the people who were in my situation. Used to wonder how someone could be so stupid. Well I’m not laughing anymore.

So I found out today that it’s a girl (Laugh then stop)- Kind of disappointed. Girls are great if you love little pink bows and barbies- I hate that shit. Alison’s at that point now where she is sick, like, every morning. It’s funny cuz, after she threw up the other day she asked me if I still thought she was beautiful. And I said “Yes, you are still beautiful... right in here.” (Pointing to my heart). That wasn’t the answer she wanted to hear. And then she proceeded to throw up on my feet... Again.

We went in the other day for a little check up and the doctor told us that everything is going great, but right now, Alison’s a wreck. Over the past week or so I’ve stayed up with her almost all night just playing with her hair until she fell asleep on me. Look, I know she’s pregnant and sick and everything... but it’s getting really tough for me too. It’s just getting really tough...

So, I wake up the other night only to find that my leg is covered in water breakage. So I start to freak out and hurry to clean myself off, and then we rush off to the hospital. At this point I’m starting to get really nervous... because I’m about to be a father. But at the same time I’m really excited... because I’m about to be a father. But, pretty nervous (Pee running down leg)... oh boy, yeah that’s water breakage running down my leg right now.

After what seemed like forever, Alison finally went in to labor... and for that matter, I felt like I did too. She kept yelling at me and telling me that this whole thing was my fault. She started to scream “You bastard, you bastard, you did this to me,” then the nurse epiduralized her ass!

When the doctor finally came in he started to mess around... down there and he asked me if I wanted to see what was going on. So I- “Oh my God, that is disgusting!” And then she started to scream again. So the doctor asked me to leave.

I'm having a hard time sitting still. Every few seconds I keep looking up, waiting for the good news... When the doctor finally came out, I ran up to him and say "Hey! How's my baby? How's my baby girl?" (Pause) He just stood there for a minute. "Ben, during the child birth, there were some complications. Things that you just can't foresee. I'm sorry Ben. Your baby-"

Is gone! Right? Yeah look, I need to go see Alison." "Ben, your baby is fine. But during child birth, Alison"

"No... you shut-up! Just shut up and stop lying to me. Just shut up and tell me you're lying."  
(Long pause)

It's called Eclampsia. I don't really know what it is... I didn't even ask. I just know that she had it. (Sad smile) We didn't even get the chance to talk about names. Doctors told me I get to see her tomorrow, my little girl. I'm looking forward to that.

As I walked to the nursery the next day, I thought about all the things I wanted to tell my little girl. Things I wanted to tell her about myself, and her mother. But when I saw her- (Short of breath). She's beautiful. She's has her mother's eyes, and her nose and her chin. She looks just like her. She's got my ears... which, is kind of unfortunate (slight laugh). But she's beautiful.

(Whispering) "Hey little girl... I'm your dad. Your mom, she's not here now, but, she loves you. And so do I. So right now, It's just gonna be you and me now little girl." (Pause and smile)