

# Community remembers students

## Alexander “Alex” Mullins

BY BRENTLY SNEAD

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“Above all, Alex cared about how other people felt more than himself,” Chris Stilwell said. “If you were one of his friends, you knew it, because he would sacrifice a lot to come through for you or help you out when you needed him.”

Two weeks before classes started, Alex Mullins took his life shortly after returning to Kirksville.

Mullins graduated from North Kansas City High School with an International Baccalaureate Diploma during 2014, and was a junior business major at Truman State University and a member of Alpha Kappa Lambda.

Melissa Bottorff, Mullins’ mother, said Mullins was a sociable, gregarious person who was kind-hearted and cared deeply for those around him.

Bottorff said Mullins danced and sang his way through life. She said he was much like Finn from the hit TV show “Glee” in the sense that he was an athlete, but he wanted everyone to feel included.

“He just walked up to people and talked to them and made friends with them,” Bottorff said.

Though Mullins’ outgoing personality was something everyone knew and loved about him, Bottorff said a lot of people have told her what they will miss most about Mullins was that he gave the best hugs. Bottorff said Mullins’ hugs were genuine and people knew he cared for them.

Bottorff said her realization of how much he cared about others occurred when he was younger.

“He was probably in elementary or middle school and I said, ‘He is one of the best people with one of the biggest hearts,’” Bottorff said. “He just was one of the most genuine-hearted people. And he never lost that piece [of himself].”

Bottorff said Mullins was a joker, who often told one-liners that only half made sense to those around him,

but still made everyone laugh. She said he danced to the beat of his own drum and he would have random outbursts to express his joy and other feelings — that is just who he was.

Despite his crazy times, Bottorff said Mullins had a strong work ethic and was committed to the organizations he was involved with.

Nicolette Popa, Mullins’ close friend, said his dedication, particularly to those around him, was part of what made him so lovable.

“Through all walks of life, he was always there to help out and be there for anyone he knew and would go out of his way to make sure you were happy,” Popa said.

Popa said she met Mullins when they were in seventh grade, and the day they met he was instantly her best friend. She said from then on, she was able to watch him grow as a person and as a friend.

Popa said despite going to separate high schools, their friendship remained strong and intact.

“It doesn’t matter if it was him telling a stupid joke that made you

laugh so hard you cried, or you were crying because he let out a really bad fart that smelled terrible,” Popa said. “Either way, you couldn’t be around him for five minutes without laughing.”

Popa said after graduation, she got married and he went to college, but he was still a great support to her — particularly on her wedding day. She said Mullins was able to keep her nerves down and her spirits up. Mullins was also an escort in Popa’s wedding, she said.

Popa said Mullins loved everyone around him, and everyone around him loved Mullins.

“Alex was, and has always been, the most genuine guy I know,” Popa said. “Alex was genuine, he was intelligent and he was my best friend.”

Junior Chris Stilwell said he met Mullins during high school through annoying their chemistry teacher, and since then they had been friends and attended Truman together.

Stilwell also said he felt that Mullins had a sincere personality, but Mullins also always made people laugh and you never knew what was going to come out of his mouth.



Submitted Photo

Mullins and his dog take a break to snuggle. Melissa Bottorff, Mullins’ mother, said he was a kind-hearted person who cared deeply for others.

Mullins had recently attended a friend’s wedding when he decided to get everyone there out onto the dance floor because he loved to dance, Stilwell said.

“[Mullins] decided he would go out to the middle and dance to get people excited — so, he was out there and he ended up doing the splits and people went crazy,” Stilwell said. “He was telling me this all while he was limping. Then he says, ‘It went so well the first time. I figured I should do it again — I shouldn’t have, I definitely pulled something.’”

Stilwell said after finishing his story, Mullins pulled up his shorts and his thigh was heavily bruised dark purple and black. Stilwell said despite limping, Mullins just smiled and said he was just happy he got everyone up and dancing.

“He made people laugh and feel better,” Stilwell said. “He never showed any sort of sadness himself because he always made sure to make others feel more positive when he was around them.”



Submitted Photo

Junior Tommy Lona, Alex Mullins’ friend, and Mullins eating Mullins’ favorite food — pizza. Melissa Bottorff, Mullins’ mother, said he wanted to include everyone.

# Jacob “Jake” Hughes

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“To people who have met him once, heard stories, or that knew him best, they know that the only way to describe him is to say that he was completely himself — he is Jake,” graduate student Paige Howard said.

Jake Allen Hughes would have celebrated his 20th birthday Sept. 23, but on Aug. 27 Hughes took his own life.

Hughes was a sophomore psychology major who had an interest in art and was the secretary of his fraternity, Alpha Kappa Lambda.

Karen Hughes, Jake’s mother, said he was an outgoing individual who was comfortable in his own skin, and though he could be impulsive, everyone knew Jake for his kindness and his desire to make everyone feel included.

“It was kind of a gift that he could reach out to people so easily — it didn’t matter if it was adults or kids, he has always been able to speak with people, even when he was younger,” Karen said.

Karen said throughout Jake’s life and since his death, she has heard many stories about his kindness for others and the way he was able to serve people.

Karen said one story she heard was from a mother who had Jake as her server at the Pizza Hut where he worked during the summer. The mother had her children with her, and told Karen that Jake was so delightful, she and her children remained in the restaurant for an extended amount of time, Karen said, long enough that her husband questioned their whereabouts when they arrived home.

Karen said Jake’s giving personality was evident in high school as well.

“At the end of high school, he and another friend did an elaborate event where they handed out lemonade to the students,” Karen said. “There had been some other students who had pulled a rather destructive senior prank that caused some damage, and he didn’t want the senior class to be remembered for something negative, and so they did the lemonade event.”

Although these occurrences were later in Jake’s life, Karen said his kindness was part of him from an early age.

Thomas Bevan, Jake’s best friend since third grade, said if Jake hadn’t been so kind they would not have been as close.

Bevan said the two met in third grade when Bevan was new to the school district. Although he and Jake sat next to each other in class, the two became close after Jake’s ninth birthday party. Bevan said they were all playing at Jake’s house when another kid talked him into stealing \$5 from Jake because Jake had been gloating about how much



Submitted Photo

Thomas Bevan, Jake’s best friend, and Jake hang out. Bevan said he and Jake became friends in third grade after having to give back \$5 Bevan had stolen.

money he had. Later that night, he said his father received a phone call from Jake’s parents about the incident.

“We were over there that night, and I gave Jacob his money back, and I said I was truly sorry and apologized to his parents,” Bevan said. “In that instant, Jacob truly forgave me and then we went upstairs to play Legos. That one act of forgiveness has had so many consequences. I have traveled miles and miles to see Jacob — it’s crazy to think that because I stole \$5 from Jacob, we became inseparable to one another.”

Bevan said Jake’s birthday changed their lives and led to them being more than just friends but instead, brothers.

Bevan said in grade school they would meet at the pencil sharpener just to talk, which is why it was so difficult when Jake moved to St. Louis in fifth grade. Bevan said it was the second worst news he received in his entire life.

“In that instant, I hated [St. Louis] — he wasn’t even gone yet but I hated that place,” Bevan said. “But, even though we didn’t live in the same place, we were still active best friends. We went through countless vacations together.”

Bevan said one memory they reminisced about together happened after Jake’s move. During sixth grade, Bevan’s father surprised him with a trip to St. Louis, where he surprised Jake. Bevan said the second he and Jake got together, they hugged and it was like no time had passed.

Bevan said Jake was one of the happiest people he knew who loved everybody around him, and everybody loved him.

“Ask anybody who knew Jacob, and they’ll say he was kind, he was funny, he always thought of others before himself,” Bevan said. “And I got to see him mold into that person.”

One student at Truman who was directly impacted by Jake’s kindness was graduate student Paige Howard.

Howard said she met Jake when he was a freshman and she was a senior, and though they were in different stages of their lives, they had an understanding of each other that was almost unmatchable.

“I spent most of my hours since I met Jake with him doing everything and nothing at the same time,” Howard said. “I will never be able to put into words how much he meant to me, because no words will do him justice. He made me feel understood, appreciated, supported, respected and loved. It amazes me that someone like Jake could even exist.”

Howard said her favorite memories are not extraordinary, but instead the simple moments spent with Jake. Howard said she cherished lazy days and nights during the past year with Jake, times when they could have complete silence and be perfectly content. Howard said she cherished the nights she would get off work late and he would check on her, or the times she’d be having a bad night and he would show up with a barbecue chicken pizza.

Howard said she sees she is not the only person who Jake impacted with his caring personality, and that since their loss, it is amazing to see everyone band together.

“I know that Jake would want everyone that knew him to live our best lives for him, and that’s enough to keep moving forward,” Howard said. “I, and many others, are going to do our best to continue to spread the love that he shared with us to everyone else in our lives. Jake’s life will forever be a positive influence on everyone he touched, and continues to touch in the future.”



Submitted Photo

Kenna Hughes, Jake Hughes’ older sister, and Paige show their goofy side posing for Snapchat. Karen Hughes, Jake’s mother, said he was outgoing.